

— FROM THE EDITOR —

Most of this month's *WLN* articles move the focus away from the customary tutoring tables and into using journals for tutor training, maintaining our tutoring perspective in the classroom, and meeting with writers online. Then the Tutors' Column article brings us back to the tutoring table to remind us of one of the major tasks of the tutor.

John Hall and Ashley Kennedy report on their experience with using entries in tutors' journals as the springboard for discussions on tutoring. Elizabeth E. Parfitt reflects on how she retains her tutoring approaches in the classroom, and Carol Mohrbacher reports software she's tried for online tutoring. Jessica Millis notes the need for tutors to offer support as well as writing assistance.

Also in this issue you'll find news of a writing center conference in Greece (plus the one in Germany in 2008, listed in the conference calendar, page 16), the International Writing Centers' Summer Institute, several institutions' announcements seeking applicants for writing center administrators, the calendar of writing center association conferences, and, for your amusement, a cartoon drawn by a graduate student at Butler University.

And a brief reminder to regionals beginning to plan your conferences for next year, please send me the notices so that I can include them in the May or June issues of *WLN*, before we close shop for the summer months.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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TUTOR JOURNALS: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO TRAINING

◆ John Hall and Ashley Kennedy
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With the late autumn onslaught of midterms and lengthy papers, dozens of stressed-out students—especially novice freshman writers—flooded our writing center. Ashley was working with a freshman Chinese student who had come in for help on a research paper about the global influences of American Westernization—her first-ever major assignment in English. Ashley described the beginning of their session in her journal as follows:

I read the paper to myself. It was pretty well written, especially for a first attempt at a paper in another language. Mostly, she needed to work on organizing her paragraphs under clear topic sentences. As it was now, her ideas were sound, but a bit scattered within each paragraph.

"Let's take this section on education," I said. "What is this paragraph about?"

"Distance learning and the Internet," she said.

"OK, good. Let's look at each sentence in the paragraph and make sure that each matches up with that topic. Here, this one—what about this sentence about calculators?"

"Oh, right," she said softly. "Well, I was trying to say that both learning over the Internet and calcu-

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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.

lators are invaluable resources that people lived without at one point.”

“OK, that’s fine. But the topic of *this* paragraph doesn’t really address that specific area, does it? Let’s take it out for now and just see if there’s another paragraph that we can either add it to instead, or if we can address it later in a new paragraph.”

I drew a box around the two sentences about calculators so that it would remind us to come back to it. After my pen had finished forming the outline, however, she began to cry.

“What is it?” I tried to comfort her, but the sudden shift in tone threw me off.

“There’s something like this in every one of my paragraphs,” she sobbed quietly. “I know that every paragraph has something wrong with it. Nothing flows.”

This emotional session, which Ashley recorded in more depth in her journal, raises a host of cultural and affective issues, which we began to explore in a staff meeting later that fall. Ashley’s and other tutors’ journals have begun to form an important part of our training in Boston University’s College of Communication (COM) Writing Center.

TUTORS AND JOURNAL WRITING—EXTENDING THE CONVERSATION

Our tutors started keeping journals in 2005, as part of their training. We began journaling in response to Sue Dinitz and Jean Kiedaisch’s *Writing Center Journal* article “Creating Theory: Moving Tutors to the Center.” Their article describes how the University of Vermont’s tutors used journals to examine the intersection of practice and theory in their writing center. As Dinitz and Kiedaisch comment, “We encourage our tutors to engage with writing center theory as a way to invite them to become part of the scholarly conversation about writing centers” (64).

At BU’s COM Writing Center, we have pursued journaling with similar goals, though we asked our tutors to reflect on particular sessions, with less emphasis on responding to writing center theory. The results have been quite gratifying. Our tutors, all graduate students pursuing their Master’s degrees in communications, have found that journaling provides an opportunity to reflect in depth on their tutoring practices, as well as to celebrate or vent. But, just as importantly, these journals have created new forms of dialogue between the tutors and the directors.

Journaling has opened up new ways to reflect on our work beyond the conversations at our biweekly staff meetings. With some shaping, we have taken several of our veterans’ journal entries and used them as scenarios for further training in staff meetings. In this way, our tutors have begun to counsel and train each other through their own experiences. By collaborating with the tutors as we examine their sessions with the rest of the staff, we have been able to comment on overarching themes in writing center tutoring.

Affective issues and ethical issues arose repeatedly in tutors’ journals. We want to share some examples of each and how we used them in our tutor training, incorporating the points of view of the assistant director (John) and the tutor (Ashley).

AFFECTIVE ISSUES

Ashley’s entry

Ashley: With the freshman Chinese student introduced earlier, I realized that the issue at hand was not solely the writing, but clearly also the student’s fragile emotional state. Although the student was a relatively strong writer, she lacked confidence and was confused about the merits of a thesis-driven research paper. I put the paper aside for a moment—thereby temporarily separating the student from this “threat”—and

instead focused on trying to rebuild her confidence by reassuring her that she was a good writer and that simple organizational issues were both normal and correctable. The rest of my journal entry follows:

“Oh, it’s OK,” I said. “This sort of stuff is easy to fix. We just need to group your ideas so that they make sense together. Now, for example, look at your paragraph on distance learning now that we’ve taken the calculator part out. What sentence tells us what the rest of the paragraph is about? Which one is the topic sentence?”

“Um, I guess this one,” she said pointing to the fourth or fifth sentence.

“Good,” I said. “What do you think about moving it up to the top of this paragraph so we know what’s going on right away?”

“Well, I just thought that this was a creative way to set up this section,” she said, referring to the first three sentences that addressed teacher’s changing teaching methods.

“Well, sort of. But really, these sentences could be better used to *support* your material on distance learning—not particularly to *introduce* the entire topic.”

Anyway, we continued to go through her paragraphs on education in this manner, and then I let her lead the way on the section on globalization. It was great to see her putting boxes around sentences and moving topic sentences around. Essentially, I guided her in cutting through the fat to form a tighter and more focused piece. Her tears at the beginning of the session eventually disappeared and were replaced by a newfound sense of confidence in organizing writing (I hope).

Ashley: After turning in my journal, I read this entry aloud to my fellow tutors and stopped at the point where the student began to cry. I asked the other tutors what they thought of the situation, and how they would handle a similar scenario. After some discussion, I continued and read about how I tried to comfort the student before returning to the paper. I asked them whether they thought I had done the right thing in taking a middle course—rather than focusing on *just* the writing, or *just* the student’s fragile emotional state. An interesting dialogue followed, culminating in questions about our roles in various situations. When, for example, do we become more of a counselor than a tutor? When is it appropriate to put the paper aside during a session? How much should we allow emotions to enter into our discourse?

In addition to this debate, my fellow tutors formed various theories about why the student broke down in the first place. Some suggested that when I held the pen and marked the paper, I may have unintentionally made the student feel more vulnerable. Others proposed that there may have been cultural factors—such as differing organizational patterns between Asian and American writing styles—that made the student uneasy about restructuring her paper, or that the student felt that she was not reaching the high standards that she had set for herself in China.

John: This collaborative approach in analyzing this session gave all the tutors a better idea about how vulnerable some students are during sessions, and reminded them that they might each handle difficult emotional situations differently. We see many inexperienced writers and in some cases, as here, ESL issues complicate the session’s dynamic. Ashley’s session and her journal entry allowed us to consider

“ Our tutors . . . have found that journaling provides an opportunity to reflect in depth on their tutoring practices, as well as to celebrate and vent. But, just as importantly, these journals have created new forms of dialogue between the tutors and the directors. ”

her choices, language and actions in an engaging way that let Ashley and her fellow tutors guide us through their responses.

Rachel's entry

Rachel's experience tutoring a combative student also clearly involved affective issues, but it encompassed ethical dilemmas as well. The student came in for help on a news story, but forgot to check his attitude at the door. An excerpt from Rachel's journal follows:

This is normally an assignment I enjoy working on because I understand the basic news story well and can usually help them find other ways to think about the story in terms of fixing the most common mistakes.

However, this particular student had a lot of things working against him to begin with. He didn't like the "news item" he had chosen to cover: a hall meeting in a dorm. He was confused about the difference between writing an "entertainment" piece and writing a story that was interesting. Also, he didn't want to listen to—let alone take—any of my suggestions.

He was combative during most of the session, and I tried several different approaches—including trying to joke with him—in order to reach some sort of common ground during the session. However, at the end of the half hour, he told me he had to hand it in that afternoon and that he had no means to make any of the changes anyway—but he didn't want to change anything regardless; whether or not he had time to make the changes was irrelevant. He told me he just had to prove to his professor that he had come down to the center.

Hurt by the student's behavior, Rachel followed the session by turning to John, the Assistant Director, to relay her frustrations. He suggested that she talk to the student's professor about his attitude. Bringing in the professor is not a typical practice at our Writing Center, but, in this situation, both Rachel and John felt it was appropriate. Therefore, Rachel spoke to the professor, who then told Rachel she later spoke to the student and said they were probably going to do some one-to-one work. Rachel's conclusion about her difficult session follows:

Ultimately, the session probably ended up helping the student if it put him in touch with some extra assistance from the professor. I know the writing center does not have a policy of "tattling" or anything along those lines, and I don't think that's what happened in this situation at all. But it did leave me wondering just what our role is in the center as far as monitoring students' attitudes and willingness to become better writers. At the time, I was upset and wouldn't have felt too bad asking him to leave without continuing the session, but after taking some more time to think about it, I know that wouldn't have really helped either one of us.

Ashley: When Rachel read her journal entry to the rest of the tutors, I believe we gave her helpful but mixed feedback on how she handled the situation. While most of us sympathized with her frustration, some suggested that she might have been more direct with the student about his dismissive attitude. We also debated about whether it was right to involve the professor; some of us felt that it was not their responsibility to "tattle" on a client's poor behavior.

John: The discussion of this case led to an important breakthrough with this same troublesome client. The next time he came to the writing center, he worked with another tutor, Mary. She took a more aggressive approach with him based on what she knew from Rachel's session and what she observed in her session with him. After he once again began to deflect her suggestions, she challenged him to put aside his defensiveness. She told him that he was smart enough to write well, but that everyone can benefit from experienced advice—that he stood to grow as a writer if he let down his shield and participated in the dialogue. For whatever reason, her approach struck home. In a later conversation with his professor, Mary discovered that not only was he revising his work on a deeper level, but that he had become a much more

genial participant in class discussions. While we may not be able to attribute this shift in his attitude to Mary's methods, he eventually became a regular client of hers.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Jeff's entry

Another tutor, Jeff, raised an unusual ethical dilemma in one of his entries that made him reflect on his own prejudices. His session and the subsequent entry have allowed us to discuss ways in which our biases can come into play and what boundaries exist when collaborating with a client on a creative (and possibly offensive) project. Here is how Jeff described his session in his journal:

I had a very interesting session with a student who had written a short film script. The script was about a group of straight, white comedians who collectively decided to co-opt the jokes of minorities, performing routines that, if performed by certain minorities might be considered perfectly normal, but as performed by this particular group of comedians were considered racist, sexist, anti-Semitic and anti-gay.

One of the student's goals for the dialogue in the script was to be as far from politically correct as possible, and I found myself brainstorming racist and sexist jokes with the student, a truly strange tutoring experience. Toward the end of the session, the student asked me if I thought the script was too offensive, and we had an interesting discussion about poetic license and political correctness. We discussed how the script was a commentary on prejudice and political correctness, not an attack on any individual or group. The student then told me that the professor for whom he was writing the script is black.

It was an interesting moral dilemma. I was telling the student how if his use of offensive material served a purpose, and derived from a moral position of his, it was okay, but once I found out that his professor was a minority I thought to myself, "Was that the right thing to tell him?" It was a revealing look into my own prejudice. Why would I give a student different advice for a black professor than I would for a white professor?

John: In a subsequent staff meeting, we read Jeff's journal entry up to this point. We then stopped and asked the tutors how they thought they would have reacted, as tutors. A lively discussion ensued of how to gauge if it was "safe" to take this kind of risk as a writer (some tutors wondered if the student had a sense of how the teacher would react to such risk-taking, based on class discussions), as well as what the tutor's role should be. Unique situations like this force tutors to examine sticky ethical situations, such as when a writer may intentionally use "offensive" language or attitudes for a political or rhetorical purpose. These kinds of ethical dilemmas can also make tutors, as Jeff did, reflect on their own prejudices and how these prejudices can affect their advice. Jeff concluded his entry by summarizing the rest of their conversation and its aftermath:

The student asked me, "Do you think [my professor] will be offended by this?" I told him I didn't know, but that altering the script because of his professor's race contradicted the very point he was making in the script. However, I also emphasized to the student that he should have a point—that the script shouldn't be offensive just to be offensive, unless that *was* the point. He said he was going to think long and hard about his reasons for writing the script so that if confronted by a fellow student or his professor he would be able to articulate the meaning behind the dialogue.

I saw the student several weeks later and asked him how he had done on the script, and he said the professor loved it.

Reading this last part reminded us that there is an audience (and sometimes multiple audiences) to consider when advising a writer, and that the tutor can help writers think through their intentions and the possible ramifications of potentially offensive language.



IWCA SUMMER INSTITUTE

The 2007 IWCA Summer Institute will be held at Oregon State University from August 5-10. We have a great line up of leaders, and co-coordinators are Lisa Ede and Clyde Moneyhun. The Institute fee will be \$600. This covers all materials, all breakfasts and lunches, and two dinners. The conference hotel is a Hilton Garden Inn adjacent to the OSU campus—very nice and quite reasonable at \$89 plus tax for a single or double.

For more information, go to the SI Web site: <<http://cwl.oregonstate.edu/iwcasi2007/>>. If you have any questions feel free to e-mail me.

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NEWS

A COMIC TO ENJOY

One of my tutors, a graduate student named Elmar Hashimov, is also a talented artist. He's created a comic I thought others would enjoy. So, with Elmar's permission, I've posted the comic (as a .pdf file) to my Web site for you to check out if you'd like: <<http://blue.butler.edu/~pclauss/fixmypaper.pdf>>.

Hope you enjoy it,

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Ashley: Jeff's dilemma was an interesting one. I felt myself questioning tutors' responsibilities to strictly identify audience when working with clients—and even when writing on our own. At first, I thought the professor's ethnicity should not have factored into the student's decision whether to alter the script; after all, when we send controversial material to be judged by a scholarship committee or other outside agencies, we have no way of knowing the judges' backgrounds. On the other hand, should we perhaps make exceptions when we personally know who will evaluate the work, with the chance that the person might get offended? It's a tough call, but after talking it over with the rest of the tutors, I've decided it's probably best to make a case-by-case assessment on the matter.

John: We have also seen our tutors address a variety of other ethical issues in their journals. One such entry, which we may use in our future training, described a session where the tutor struggled to keep her own moral values in check when helping a client who held an opposing view on abortion. In our writing center, we often see students who are writing opinion columns; these sessions can be tense if the subject strikes a nerve. In this case, the tutor wrote about her struggles to be objective (she is "pro-choice") as she helped a client revise a column that promoted "pro-life" Christian-based pregnancy crisis centers. We may develop a scenario from this session to address how tutors can separate their biases from their tutoring, as well as help writers build persuasive arguments that address alternative viewpoints.

JOURNALING: THE BROADER IMPACT

Ashley: The other tutors and I think that using journaling in our training allows us to realize that although every session is unique and individualistic, each belongs to a larger family of cases that can relate to and comment on one another. It further demonstrates how we can apply individual case studies to address a cross-section of higher-level concerns, and it also lets us wholly participate in this training process. In fact, it is evident that consciously or not, we not only can contribute to the training process, but we can guide research on a larger level.

Another important note about our practice is that by the time the aforementioned cases reached this paper, they had been quadruply analyzed and cast through a number of different lenses:

1. The tutoring session itself
2. The tutor's reflection upon and writing about the session
3. The collaborative discussion among tutors and writing center directors about the issues raised in both the session and in the journaling
4. The translation of all of this material to both a regional writing center presentation and to this article

John: After passing through this process of reflection and scrutiny, the sessions have become richer, more carefully considered examples of what can happen when tutor and tutee sit down together to address matters of writing. As iconic examples, these sessions and the dialogue that followed reminded our tutors and directors of the myriad considerations and factors that arise in each situation—some related to writing and some not. Tutors, given a chance to reflect on their sessions in journals and to talk about their choices, can play a pivotal part in their own training. In this way, we once again reinforce that writing centers should, fundamentally, be collaborative. ♦

Work Cited

Dinitz, Sue, and Jean Kiedaisch. "Creating Theory: Moving Tutors to the Center." *Writing Center Journal* 23.2 (2003): 63-76.



HOW TO BE A TUTOR IN THE CLASSROOM

◆ Elizabeth E. Parfitt

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I began my educational career as a peer tutor in my university's undergraduate writing center. By the time I graduated with a bachelor degree in English and two years of tutoring under my belt, I thought that I'd seen every type of paper imaginable. Consequently, in graduate school when I acquired an instructor position teaching freshman writing, I was convinced that I'd be ready for whatever students the college threw my way: overachievers, ESL students, and "I'm just here because I have to be" students. I was versed in thesis statements and paragraph structure. Not to mention that I knew MLA like I'd written it myself. During that first semester in front of the class, I didn't worry much about knowing the right answers, because as a tutor I'd been answering those questions for years. But what I wasn't prepared for was the realization that this was not going to be anything like tutoring. Ironically, the hardest part of teaching that first year was learning how to turn off "the tutor" and turn on "the instructor."

As tutors, we're taught to ask questions, to inquire about the assignment, to offer encouragement, and to work according to the writer's needs, all while attempting to emphasize the importance of higher-order concerns. We're there to listen objectively and to create better writers through a nonjudgmental process. Many of these tutoring tactics are similar to those discussed in my graduate teaching workshop, a class meant to prepare us for careers as young writing instructors. However, the crucial difference between the tutor and the teacher is that the tutor refrains from judging the tutee's skills, and with one letter grade an instructor undoubtedly does. This additional layer of authority is what makes the transition from tutor to teacher more complicated. But when so many beneficial aspects of tutoring are inherent to being a successful teacher, how does an inexperienced instructor distinguish which techniques to accentuate and which ones to play down?

It has taken time, along with significant trial and error, but after several years of teaching I've developed a method to showcase those tutor traits while still maintaining the authority that is necessary to be a successful instructor. The list below details my top four rules on how to be a tutor in the classroom.

RULE #1: ADMIT THAT YOUR CLASSROOM IS DIVERSE AND LEARN TO ADAPT TO THE DIFFERENCES.

When working in a writing center, tutors get to know the various majors, skill levels, and personalities that accompany the identity of the student body. At my first tutoring job, many tutees were engineering majors or non-native speakers, who didn't have strong identities as writers. They would say things like, "writing just isn't my thing" or "I've never been a good writer." But those were the students whom I often felt were the ones I helped the most—especially when they returned to the center the next week, with a new paper in hand.

With the freedom I had as a tutor, not a grader, I had no agenda to cover. Each session was purely supplementary to the already existing classroom experience. Thus, I learned to adapt my tutoring methods to meet the learning styles and needs of each individual tutee. If a student needed to talk ideas through before writing them out, we'd sit down and talk. If a student grasped grammar rules better when she had a few sentences to correct, we'd do grammar drills. And if a student simply didn't understand where he went wrong on his last paper, we'd go over his teacher's comments until he did. We had the option to work on a computer, at a desk, or to simply discuss the paper until the student felt more confident about his or her work.

For me, applying this tutoring idea to the techniques used in my first section of Expository Writing meant that I needed to give my students an opportunity to tell me about themselves. From the pre-class conversations I overheard, I could already tell that the students had many of the same interests; however, after the first papers came in, it was very clear that those seventeen students had very different writing styles, skill-levels, and classroom needs. Consequently, instead of telling me who they were as writers, I had the students tell me who they were as learners. What worked well in the past? How did they best perform in high school? Were they visual, oral, or auditory learners? This *anonymous* survey that I collected allowed the students to answer my questions without guilt or embarrassment, mimicking the tutor's judgment-free attitude.

Once I found out that the majority of the class were visual learners, and that most tended to understand better when they were provided with examples from which to model their work, I altered my techniques. I began using the giant whiteboards to supplement lectures, and I brought in samples, good and bad, to clearly explain different parts of the essay. Knowing which learning styles worked for this particular group, was just one way in which I was able to customize the course for the students.

RULE #2: MAKE TIME FOR ONE-TO-ONE TUTORIALS IN THE CLASSROOM.

That first semester in the classroom, I realized why the one-to-one tutoring I'd been used to had been so effective: the students weren't afraid to ask questions and clarify answers when their peers weren't there to judge or observe them.

However, getting that one-to-one time is the hardest part of being an instructor. There are only so many times you can cancel class to hold individual conferences, and there are only so many hours in a day. But what I realized from tutoring is that you don't have to be a formal instructor to teach. As a peer tutor, I helped students at my skill level, at more advanced levels, and at lower skill levels. At times, all it took was another pair of eyes reading over the paper for the student to understand why it's so important to proofread and read aloud. To leverage my one-to-one time, I incorporate controlled peer tutoring. Pairing students and allowing them to peer review papers is a great method to initiate this personalized instruction.

Another tutor trick that I employ with small groups of students is teaching a small lesson, and then tailoring the follow-up exercise to each student group. For example, each small group gets a designated topic (example: the topic sentence group, the transition group, the thesis statement group), then each group also gets a designated assignment (example: create three possible theses as a group, rewrite your draft paying attention to sentence-level transitions, etc.). This frees the instructor to participate in a more personal discourse with each small group while the other students are busy at work. As a tutor, I was familiar with multiple-student sessions, and thus became well versed in this multi-tasking technique. While simultaneous assignments seem like a lot for one instructor to monitor efficiently, with a little practice, you can also master this process.

Lastly, holding class in the library for a day is a great resource for one-to-one tutor time. Whether you give the students a short research assignment, or simply designate the day as a study and work period for the assignment at hand, you can also assign the students the task of checking in with you before the class period is over. This situation puts teacher and student on neutral ground and allows the student to ask any questions he or she may have about the course thus far. Small checkpoints like this throughout the semester can make a huge difference in the flow of communication in the classroom.

RULE #3: REMEMBER THAT YOURS IS NOT THE ONLY COURSE THAT YOUR STUDENTS ARE TAKING.

As a tutor, you often get treated as an impromptu therapist whom students feel comfortable spouting off to during a once-a-week rant. "My teacher hates me," "I have so much work to do," "My roommate is crazy

and I can't get anything done," are all comments that I was never surprised to hear floating in the air over a tutoring appointment. The writing center is a place where students feel comfortable letting their guards down, and laying their problems, literally, on the table for you. At times, the complaints can be too much to handle and a working boundary needs to be drawn. But at other times, the worst is a passing comment which reminds the tutor that it's never easy being a student. These are the behind-the-scenes conversations that instructors are often not privy to, but would most likely benefit from hearing.

When you are instructor, it's easy to forget the idea that your students have additional work besides the work you assign. We tend to become egocentric when it comes to our classes, always thinking that because *we* believe the content is important, then it should be just as important to the students as well. While that would create a cozy utopian classroom, it's also very unrealistic. Students usually have 3-4 courses in addition to yours, and, for a tutor, this is evident in the stressed out, frustrated, tired faces he or she sees in the writing center at 8:30 p.m. the night before a big paper is due. Tutors maintain a compassionate mentality because they often see the hardest part of college: the struggle that precedes success.

Most tutors I know take a few minutes either prior to the session or at the end of the hour to simply talk to their tutees. Taking a few minutes at the beginning or the end of class to learn a little bit about the students lives—their majors, course-loads, any big assignments they have coming up—will make an instructor appear approachable and human, and will make a student feel like his course schedule actually matters in the culture of the classroom. And whether or not an instructor wants to admit it—those schedules do matter. You can't stop a student from staying up all night to finish an assignment for another course, any more than you can tell another instructor to stop assigning projects the same day that yours are due. Regaining a sense of perspective on the students' lives and work load will make you a well-informed and more compassionate instructor.

RULE #4: RECOGNIZE THAT TOO MUCH CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM CAN BE OVERWHELMING.

When I worked in the writing center, I knew that when a student sat down I had roughly thirty minutes to read a paper, identify problems, give a quick lesson, review key revision strategies, and send the student home with a specific plan of action. As a result, I got very good at time management and thinking on my feet.

However, finding the balance between tutor and teacher turned out to be much more difficult than I imagined once I became an instructor teaching multiple sections and had more than one paper to read every half hour. What I had available to give my class was a collective hour and fifteen minutes, three days a week—and a page of written comments accompanied by margin notes for each of their essays. After the first assignment, I realized that if I wanted to finish graduate school and still get a few hours of sleep each night, I could never keep up the thirty-plus minute periods I was accustomed to dedicating to each student paper. Not only was I overwhelmed by the amount of work I had to complete each time an assignment came in, but my students were no doubt overwhelmed by the amount of revision I was asking them to complete.

That's when the tutor in me took over. While I had been used to dedicating a half hour to each draft of each paper, I'd also become skilled at picking out two to three points that needed work before I sent the student home for the night. This three-step plan of action that I'd been implementing as a tutor soon found its way into the revision reports that I returned to the students after each draft. The clear cut suggestions made it easier for both instructor and student to focus our attention on the most pertinent details, rather than the smaller issues that could be commented on in general terms.

(Continued on page 13.)

TAKE NOTE

HELLENIC AMERICAN UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER CONFERENCE

November 9-10, 2007
Athens, Greece
"Revisioning Tomorrow's Writing Center:
Roles, Practices, Audiences"

The Writing Center at the Hellenic American University, in collaboration with the Center for Applied Linguistics and Language Studies of the Hellenic American Union, is organizing an International Writing Centers Conference.

A detailed Conference Web site is now online at <<http://writing.hau.gr>>.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WRITING CENTER COORDINATOR PACE UNIVERSITY

Full-time administrative staff position. Coordinator will be responsible for hiring, training, and supervising tutors and managing day-to-day operations at the Writing Center on our lower Manhattan campus; overseeing budget and payroll; coordinating Writing Center activities, publicity, and outreach; responding to student and faculty instructional needs; preparing and presenting workshops; developing instructional materials and handouts; maintaining data on Writing Center use and effectiveness; keeping up-to-date on scholarship on writing center pedagogy and composition theory; coordinating Writing Center personnel in externally funded programs; and working with faculty and staff on development, evaluation, and revision of Writing Center materials, resources, methodologies, and procedures. Writing Center Coordinator reports directly to the English Department.

Excellent record of administrative and managerial skills, ideally in a writing center, required; Ph.D. in relevant area (such as rhetoric/comp, ESL, applied linguistics, or writing/literature) desirable, as are Web design skills for our on-line tutoring component. Candidates with Master's and strong experience welcome to apply. Send a cover letter stating how you think a writing center should function theoretically and practically, with a c.v., and your availability for an interview in NYC (though a video-conference interview is also possible), to: Dr. Walter Raubicheck, Chair English Department, Pace University, One Pace Plaza, New York, NY 10038. The search will continue until a suitable candidate is found.

CONSULTING IN CYBERSPACE: ADVENTURES WITH ONLINE CONSULTING PROGRAMS

◆ Carol Mohrbacher
St. Cloud State University
St. Cloud, Minnesota

Like many other writing centers, our writing center is struggling with space needs. At the same time, we feel we are not reaching certain populations, like those registered for distance education courses, physically challenged students, and those who could benefit from our collaboration, but for one reason or another do not take advantage of our services. These are the reasons we decided to go online.

In spring semester of 2006, our writing center began a trial of online consulting for one online composition class on a Desire2Learn (D2L) platform. D2L offers a drop box for paper submission online and a chat room for synchronous communication, a feature. Synchronicity was not an option we wanted to sacrifice as we expanded online. Although tutors liked this program, each experienced a tendency toward directiveness, as they inserted corrective marks and comments within the texts. Students rejected our invitations to contact us synchronously via the chat room, so immediate conversation about such issues as intent, meaning, and assignment criteria was absent from consultations. In other words, the early part of our trial was entirely asynchronous. Students and tutors expressed satisfaction with the service, but tutors complained about the inability to question students as they read the paper.

In fall semester, we broadened our trial to include fifteen online courses on a freeware course tool platform called Nicenet (<http://nicenet.org/>). We supplemented Nicenet with Yahoo Instant Messaging (IM) to add a synchronous component. Like D2L, Nicenet can be effectively used as a course management tool, but too many links and unintuitive navigation paths initially confused students and tutors. Moreover, only two students made use of the IM, so this leg of the trial was mostly asynchronous. Again, the students who used the service were satisfied with the feedback they received, and tutors once again, complained about the lack of synchronicity.

Since student, tutor, and instructor feedback was mostly positive during our limited trial, we decided to open online consulting to the entire university community in November of 2006. However, the trial taught us that we needed an integrated synchronous platform to facilitate dialogic exchange and intuitive navigational cues so that our audience of wide-ranging technical skills could easily access the online service. We had begun using The RiCH Company's online scheduler in February 2006 and found WOnline easy to use for both students and tutors, so when the company offered an online consultation module that would piggyback on the scheduler, I was delighted and ordered the trial version, which can be found at <http://www.therichco.com/wonline/signup.html>. The scheduler costs \$60 per month or \$660 per year. The online consultant module adds another \$20 per month or \$200 per year.

Subscription costs include round-the-clock technical service and the promise to tailor both programs to order. Thus far, The RiCH Company has been very quick to change the program as needed per our suggestions and they have never turned down a suggestion. We have asked them to make textual changes, color and font changes, and changes in the ways that the online scheduler and the consultation module operate. Most technical adjustments take less than two days.

HOW IT WORKS

At present, our clients make an appointment by accessing our online scheduler, selecting a time block, then filling out a short form that allows them to designate the length of the appointment and to describe what they want work on. To make an online appointment, clients check a box next to a statement say-

ing, "I would like an online consultation." Instructions for accessing the online consultation screen are provided on the appointment form.

When the appointment time arrives, the client and tutor access the online screen via a link that says either "Meet consultant online" or "Meet student online." The online screen is split in two. On the left side is a text box in which the student copies and pastes the text. Either the student or the tutor may edit that text. On the right is a "chat" space in which the tutor and student begin by greeting each other and setting an agenda for the consultation. Both the text and the online chat dialogue may be sent to any e-mail address by either the student or the tutor.

TRAINING

The Assistant Director and I have assembled and continue to assemble training material, including instruction for using the online consultant, ethical guidelines, and approaches for facilitating effective consultations. Using these materials, each tutor goes through a short training session, focusing mostly on how to use the program, but also how to establish common ground and remain approachable. We observe and debrief tutors after every online consultation because we are still early in the process. Observations and debriefings help us gather information for future training, also providing ideas to pass on to The RiCH Company, so technicians can further tailor the program to tutors and clients' needs and preferences.

ADVANTAGES

For students, the advantages are obvious; the online service is convenient. Students can meet with tutors from the comfort of their dorm rooms in pajamas, if they wish. Furthermore, students can access the tutor from afar. Since we have a growing online curriculum, we have tutored students from as far away as Taiwan. Online consulting also supports those with hearing loss or physical challenges that make it difficult for them to come to our center or to work in our space. Finally, some students for personal or cultural reasons might not want a consultation in a public space; online consulting gives them the privacy they need.

For tutors, online consulting provides variety, especially during busy times. They can grab something to drink, slouch, put their feet up, doodle and be a bit less formal than normal without losing credibility or affecting the quality of their consultations. Tutors, especially younger tutors, live in an online world. They understand the language of cyberspace; they "text" and they IM, and many are very good at it.

An advantage for all writing center staff is the rich opportunity for research that online consulting offers. Researchers can investigate areas like the differences between online and face-to-face dialogic exchanges, intersections of chat and academic conventions in online dialogue, issues of agency, and challenges in online communication between non-native speakers and tutors.

As the director, I am additionally grateful that demographic data and session information is integrated into the extensive databases already provided by the WOnline program. That database includes information like major, course, first language, and average reservation time. Our former online programs required meticulous and labor intensive monitoring to extract data.

CHALLENGES

The most obvious challenge is the lack of non-verbal cues and the inherent harshness of naked cyber text. However, we are discovering that the harshness can be alleviated somewhat by working to establish a friendly tone at the beginning, continuing to send encouragement to the client throughout

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Appalachian State University is seeking an experienced Writing Center administrator and instructor of composition to serve as Assistant Director of the University Writing Center. Qualifications for this position include: earned M.A. in English or related field, administrative experience in a university writing center, familiarity with recent trends in writing center theory and practice, and experience as instructor of composition. The Assistant Director will oversee the daily management of a full-service writing center and serve as resource for instruction, consulting, and mentoring of writers and writing consultants at ASU.

Additional information about the University Writing Center is located at <<http://www.writingcenter.appstate.edu>>. Initial application review will begin on 04/06/07 and will continue until the position is filled.

Applicants must send a completed application consisting of a letter of application detailing the applicant's qualifications for this position, a current curriculum vitae, a writing sample, a statement of teaching and administrative philosophies, and the names, addresses and phone numbers of at least three professional references. Completed applications should be submitted via e-mail to carrollel@appstate.edu or mailed to:

Dr. Beth Carroll,
Director, University Writing Center
Belk Library and Information
Commons, Room 008
Appalachian State University
Boone, NC 28608.

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the session, and by incorporating chat conventions like emoticons and acronyms like LOL (laughing out loud).

Another major challenge is the temptation to be directive when it is not advantageous. Some documentation, punctuation, and grammar issues tempt the tutor to insert or correct text, rather than to note a pattern and explain a rule. Transmitting rules, especially when faced with idiomatic expressions may be doubly difficult when consulting with non-native speakers, although so far few have signed up for online consulting. Also, longer texts require longer reading times, and some tutors and clients are not quick keyboarders, slowing things down even further. I have posted a list of flexible policies on the home page of our schedule to address the potential for directiveness and the inherent slowness of online consultations, including allowing ½ hour for each 2 pages and disallowing consultations on documentation formats.

Technological problems can also impede a consultation. The most frequent technological challenge arises when clients don't understand how to copy and paste text. In that case, information must be transmitted and understood before the consultation can begin, which can sometimes take up to ten minutes according to tutors. We hope that, as time goes by, clients will become accustomed to the program, just as they have become accustomed to other technology. More seriously, our server has gone down once, and the online consultation system has frozen or refused to publish chat a couple of times. We are currently working with The RiCH Company to correct those problems and generally have found them to be very quick at solving emerging problems with this new program.

Another potentially serious issue is the possibility of ethical missteps, including the transmission of wrong information in a venue where conversation can be easily archived. The program also has a feature that allows clients and tutors to send either the text or the chat to any e-mail. The only defense against potential problems in this area is ongoing training in ethical behavior, a continuous emphasis on getting help when unsure and being very aware that everything said in this venue can be saved. To notify students that we may use the chat archives, I recently asked the WOnline technicians to insert a notice on the consultation screen that says that chat dialogue may be used for research and training purposes.

THE DIRECTOR'S FINAL COMMENTS

It is still too early to see whether our early goal of reaching all new populations of students has been met; however, commuters and those taking online courses are beginning to request online consultations. While face-to-face tutorials still provide a more textured experience for students, synchronous online tutorials are slower, but they surpass asynchronous tutorials in quality because of the potential for a richer collaborative encounter. In addition to being synchronous, The RiCH Company's online consultant module also meets my expectations in terms of intuitive navigational tools; nevertheless, we continue to work with the company to provide our clients the most comfortable venue possible. At this point, two weeks into the online consultant, we are still becoming accustomed to the program and tutor reactions are mixed and tentative. The one thing they all agree on is that a half-hour appointment is not enough. Fortunately, the minimum length of appointment can easily be changed. I asked tutors to e-mail me their comments concerning the online consulting experiences. Below are representative examples of their responses.

TUTORS' COMMENTS

"The student seemed slightly apprehensive about computers and technology. That didn't necessarily make it easy for her. I think Jeff has his doubts about this whole online thing, and to be honest, sitting in with him and watching him (so did Val) made me realize how incredibly limited and impersonal the whole thing is. I thought to pick up on the student's nervousness and lack of confidence, but Jeff didn't. Neither did Val. I think there is a lot of room for misperceptions and guesswork in this scenario of a tutorial. It made me aware of how much we communicate on a non-verbal level. Body posture, facial expression, sarcasm, . . .

... all these things which make a tutorial a personable experience are left out here. Just my two cents" . . .
 . . . Petra

We have already talked, but I have now had two online tutorials, so I thought I would share some random thoughts about the service:

- 1) My second tutorial was a three-page paper for an ED 300 class. It was an hour appointment, and we got through two paragraphs. I discovered quickly that working on grammatical issues is going to be directive. If the student needed a comma, I would try explaining why, but she had a hard time understanding the rule. I ended up recommending to her that she come in to the Writing Center to get a handout.
- 2) My second tutee would often exclaim "I hate computers!" but admitted it was convenient for her since she couldn't find a babysitter for her kids.
- 3) I really miss the face-to-face interaction with the students, and I think more can get done when you are with the student face-to-face. Typing is slower than talking, and I think students quickly get bored waiting to see what the tutor is going to say. Plus, both students I had viewed the online service as a quick editing service.
- 4) I was happy to hear the technical difficulties got taken care of. . . . Jeff

A half hour appointment is not enough when so much time is taken up explaining to some students how to work the program . . . David

"I think, especially at this point, that the appointments must be an hour to allow time for reading and typing.

Looking to the future, and thinking of what kind of student I am (finishing papers late into the night the night before some assignments are due), would there be a place for late-hour online consulting? This tutor could work from home but must be available, say between 9 p.m.-11 p.m., to do consulting. Just an idea.

I agree with the ideas of using emoticons etc. to bring more humanness to the session. The chat can have a face-to-face tone and still be grammatically and mechanically correct" . . . Cindy ♦

HOW TO BE A TUTOR

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

FROM TUTOR TO TEACHER

I went into my first year of teaching as an energetic, young tutor, and I came out a slightly disheveled young instructor, but wasn't without reward. My skills as a tutor no doubt gave me the confidence that I needed to stand up in front of the classroom that first day. Those skills also helped me to see my teaching from the eyes of a student as I remembered past tutoring sessions and all of the frustrations, questions, and ambiguity that often accompany students who are unsure of their writing abilities. Being a tutor gave me the compassion to be an understanding and reasonable instructor. Before stepping up to that chalkboard, I already knew that many of my students didn't think of themselves as writers, many of them didn't want to be there, and I can bet that all of them had lives outside of my classroom. Coming to terms with this idea made my first year easier. For both the teacher and the tutor, understanding the educational identities of one's students is the first step towards understanding one's role as an educator. ♦

TAKE NOTE

NEW WEB SITE FOR SWAP SHOP

The Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association Resources Library has resources such as sample reports, publicity materials, assessment, mission statements, and tutor training, for writing centers and welcomes additions from other writing centers. The Web site that was announced in a previous issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, has changed. We now have a domain name!! The library is now here <<http://www.pnwca.org/>>.

Roberta Kjesrud, PNWCA President
 Roberta.Kjesrud@wwu.edu

TUTOR'S COLUMN

MOMENTS LIKE THIS

*Jessica Millis,
Alma College, MI*

I was working feverishly on an essay when I looked at the clock and realized that it was almost time for my Writing Center tutoring observation. I had quickly scribbled my initials next to one of the scheduled appointments earlier that day, hoping that observing a session would ease my anxieties about tutoring. I trudged down the steps to the Writing Center, wishing that I had signed up for a later time. I wasn't ready to step away from my own paper just yet, let alone try to concentrate on someone else's. As I situated myself at one of the tables, I tried to block out the unfinished paragraphs that awaited me in my room; I rummaged around in my bag for a notebook and pen, preparing to get the most out of the session.

A few minutes crept by before a timid writer inched down the hall; she clutched a binder to her chest as she approached the sign-in table. The tutor and I exchanged glances, wondering how we were going to handle this extremely nervous young woman; we both smiled at her and attempted to look calm and inviting—I don't think we succeeded.

"I get *both* of you?" she asked immediately.

I explained that I was just hoping to observe their session; I told her that I was training to be a tutor and simply wanted to see how the process worked.

"Is that okay with you?" I asked hesitantly.

The writer slowly sat down in one of the chairs, reassuring me that it wouldn't bother her if I sat in on their session. However, I could tell that she wasn't entirely comfortable being observed; I don't think she felt as if she could say no. Thoughts of my own paper began to drift back into my mind—this seemed like the perfect opportunity to get back to it. I was extremely tempted to leave the awkward situation, but I really wanted to get some ideas on how to handle such a worried, tentative writer. I noted the writer's nervous demeanor in my notes and tried my hardest to be invisible.

The tutor was anxious to get started—I think she was hoping that the awkwardness would fade away as the writer grew more comfortable with us. She glanced at the conference record and immediately asked the writer if she would like to read her paper aloud. The girl seemed horrified by this suggestion and was only slightly less frightened when the tutor quickly offered to read it aloud herself. I remember being surprised that the session started so abruptly. It was difficult to remember that I was only there to observe; I had to restrain myself from making polite conversation, though I desperately wanted to try to put the writer at ease. The tutor didn't seem to sense the tension and instantaneously proceeded to race through the writer's essay; rather than reading the entire paper aloud, she paused at every problematic sentence and took the time to mark a few of the grammar errors that she recognized. One of the writer's sentences was particularly awkward; the tutor read it aloud more than once, stumbling over the words and trying to understand its meaning. On the tutor's third attempt, the writer began to turn various shades of red; she rested her head on one of her hands as if she was hoping to partially hide her embarrassment.

“That sounds bad,” the writer blurted out.

“Well . . . yeah, it’s kinda awkward. I’m not sure . . . I guess I’m not sure what you mean here, “ the tutor answered, scrunching up her nose and squinting at the confusing sentence.

“Umm I don’t know. This paper just sucks; I’m not very good at this,” the writer admitted.

The tutor didn’t catch this comment—she was too absorbed in trying to fix the error. I remember being slightly impressed by how dedicated the tutor was to this task; however, I couldn’t help feeling like she was searching for her own words, rather than helping the writer to clarify her meaning. I was desperately trying to think of something positive to say, trying to remember the things I often told myself whenever I was frustrated with my own writing, but my mind went completely blank. I kept hoping the tutor would look up from the paper long enough to see the discouraged look on the writer’s face, but to no avail. Eventually, the tutor came up with an impressive way to re-work the sentence, and though the writer was relieved that they could move on, she was no longer capable of listening to the tutor’s suggestions. At that point I decided that in my own sessions, I would try to spend more time listening and less time trying to simply edit a writer’s work.

They managed to get through the entire paper in a little less than half an hour. Overall, I felt like the tutor was doing everything that she could do to make the paper better. She tried to engage the writer numerous times, asking her where she felt the biggest problems were and what she thought was the best way to fix them; however, the writer mostly stared at her blankly or stuttered through an extremely vague response. The tutor seemed overwhelmed—her task became increasingly difficult with every paragraph as the writer drifted further and further away from the conversation. I would like to think that because I was more aware of the writer’s emotional difficulties, I would have been able to make this session more productive; however, the writer was so embarrassed by her work that I’m not sure any constructive suggestion would’ve made her feel less threatened.

Watching the writer swiftly exit the Writing Center at the end of the session made me feel terrible. For the most part, the tutor had done everything that I would have expected. From my perspective, the tutor had offered the writer a tremendous amount of helpful advice; it was disheartening to realize that sometimes paragraph re-organization just isn’t enough. As I wrapped up my note-taking, it became clear to me that the single most important aspect of tutoring is support. It was frightening, yet important, to realize that no amount of training can teach tutors to recognize the emotional cues that can determine the success or failure of each session. It wasn’t until later, when I was staring blankly at my own words on a computer screen, that I started to feel a deep connection with the struggling writers I would eventually work with; I began to realize that the best way to support them was to remember exactly how I felt in moments like this.

CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

April 12-14, 2007: South Central and International Writing Centers Associations, in Houston, TX

Contact: Dagmar Corrigan at corrigan@uhd.edu.
Conference Web site: <http://ahss.ualr.edu/iwca>.

April 28, 2007: Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association, in Bellingham, WA

Contact: Sherri Winans at Whatcom: <http://faculty.whatcom.ctc.edu/swinans>.
Conference Web site: <http://www.acadweb.wvu.edu/writingcenter/PNWCA.htm>.

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>.

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>.

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

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

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

Contact: Gerd Braeuer at braeuer@ph-freiburg.de.
Conference Web site: <http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/eng/>.



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