

– FROM THE EDITOR –

As the academic year draws closer to the end for many of us, we may be thinking about the quiet time ahead. But more realistically we may also be contemplating how we will be using some of that leisure to plan for next year. If so, this issue has articles that are particularly relevant. Heather Camp discusses her desire to professionalize her tutors by incorporating tutor development into their writing center. And where do we begin next fall when we introduce new tutors to tutoring theory and pedagogy? Pamela Childers notes that the HOW and WHY questions are the ones to start with.

For those looking for free ESL materials, Rebecca Adell, Scott Johnston, and Leslie Olsen review the Ohana materials available on the Web. Their article also reminds us of our international reach and variety of students as Rebecca Adell works in a bi-lingual writing center in Canada, Scott Johnston is in Japan where all his students are EFL learners, and Leslie Olsen coordinates two writing centers in an online university in the U.S. that serves adult learners.

At the beginning of a recent new academic year, Katherine Schmidt tried a novel way to get students to listen to her description of their writing center, and Monica Rentfrow reflects on what she learned from observing another tutor. Indeed, an array of topics for us to read and contemplate.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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CONTEXT MATTERS: INCORPORATING TUTOR DEVELOPMENT INTO THE WRITING CENTER

◆ Heather Camp

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE

In "Pedagogies of Belonging: Listening to Students and Peers," Julie Bokser poses the question "[H]ow can we better train tutors to tutor imaginatively and effectively?" (44). She responds to this question with a description of how she has used her course on writing center work to foster a pedagogy of belonging in her writing center. In this piece, Bokser joins a number of writing center scholars who are currently calling for and/or working to develop new, imaginative approaches to tutor training. Elizabeth Boquet makes a similar move when she voices her interest in cultivating "a different model of staff education" in *Noise from the Writing Center* (80). Boquet pursues this interest in chapter three, working out a model of staff education based on the tutor training course she teaches each spring. Likewise, in *Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation*, Kathleen Blake Yancey shows readers a model of tutor training developed around reflection. She discusses the semester-long reflective coursework that she had writing center tutors engage in, including writing letters, e-mails and logs and completing in-class exercises and formal writing projects that facilitated reflection.

As a Writing Center Coordinator who is invested in the ongoing development of her tutors, I find these

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The *Writing Lab Newsletter*, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by The RiCH Company, is a publication of the International Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779. All Rights and Title reserved unless permission is granted by The RiCH Company. Material can not be reproduced in any form without express written permission. However, up to 50 copies of an article may be reproduced under fair use policy for educational, non-commercial use in classes or course packets. As always, proper acknowledgement of title, author, and original publication date in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* should be included.

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Managed and Produced by
The RiCH Company, LLC
Richard C. Hay, Founder and CEO
3238 S. 92nd Street
Milwaukee, WI 53227
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Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures but can issue invoices through the Web site. Yearly payments of \$20 (U.S. \$25 in Canada) by credit card are accepted through the Web site or sent by check, made payable to the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, to The RiCH Company, Attn: *WLN*. Prepayment is requested for all subscriptions. For international *WLN* subscriptions, please contact support@writinglabnewsletter.org. For IWCA membership and *WCJ* and *WLN* subscriptions, see writing-centers.org.

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.

scholars' work compelling. Like these scholars, I want to find effective ways to foster tutor development and to facilitate thoughtful, engaged tutoring. However, even as I share these scholars' goals and benefit from reading their work, I struggle to translate their approaches to tutor development into my own writing center. Why? One clear factor is the disparity between the contexts in which we're working. Whereas the scholars cited above work in writing centers that offer credit-bearing courses around tutor development, I work in a center that, for a number of reasons, can't provide the same. This disjunction significantly impacts the kinds of professional development opportunities that each of us can provide for our staff.

While a growing number of doctoral-granting institutions are now able to offer courses that address writing center-related topics (Jackson, Leverenz, and Law), many writing center directors work in contexts like my own, in which institutionalized tutor development is minimal, generally encompassing an initial tutor training and periodic staff meetings. In such institutions, tutoring itself often consumes most or all of tutors' time in the writing center. Despite the limited institutional support that is provided in such contexts, writing center directors like myself want to help tutors become more deliberate, reflective, and knowledgeable, and we look, among other places, to writing center scholarship to help us do this work. Unfortunately, many of the rich depictions of tutor development that are showcased in writing center scholarship don't reflect the conditions under which we work, emerging, as they so often do, from semester-long courses centered on tutor pedagogy. Such courses provide tutors with ongoing, structured opportunities to read, write, reflect, explore and discuss the work of tutoring—curricular opportunities that aren't available for my tutors.

In this essay, then, I will work to depict a tutor development program attuned to the possibilities and limitations of my institutional context and contexts similar to my own. It utilizes our regular center routines to sponsor tutor growth and draws on the advantages of not having tutor development tied to the classroom or to course assignments. One advantage to this situation is that the tutor development opportunities that are provided aren't associated with grades; as a result, opportunities for development can be more authentic and self-directed. Also, discussion and reflection aren't associated with enrollment in a course; instead, these practices are presented and enacted as natural components of the tutoring process. Thus, tutors are encouraged to view development as an integral part of tutoring rather than as work that is separate from and additional to their weekly tutoring hours. I choose to remember these advantages, and try to avoid viewing the context in which I work as second best to those with greater curricular support. A more productive approach, I would argue, is to simply view these contexts as different. Assuming this view means recognizing that while tutors in both contexts need creative and engaging opportunities for growth, disparate contexts need individualized, site-specific approaches to tutor development.

Orientation: Cultivating Habits of Mind

Integrating tutor development into the UNL Writing Center requires routines that are already a part of the tutors' repertoire of responsibilities. At my institution, one such routine is the beginning-of-the-semester orientation. Typically, such orientations serve a number of purposes, including introducing tutors to the philosophy and mission of the writing center; familiarizing them with the center's policies and procedures; helping tutors get to know and become comfortable with each other; and exposing them to a sampling of writing center scholarship. This past fall, I realized that tutor orientation could be a key site in which a climate of inquiry and learning could be promoted. I wanted tutors to see themselves as and act as a necessary part of a community of learners whose work as tutors *included* making sense of the work of tutoring.

Additionally, I wanted the orientation to help staff members *place* their Writing Center work within a broader context, to locate their work in the Center within the personal histories, experiences, beliefs,

and skills that they had already developed. The students who work in the UNL Writing Center—M.A. and Ph.D. students in English—come to their work with varied backgrounds as teachers, tutors, students, and writers. I wanted tutors to see their backgrounds as relevant and vital to their tutoring practice and to use these experiences to make sense of their tutoring responsibilities.

Fall orientation. With these ends in mind, I contacted each of my tutors before fall orientation and asked them to bring an informal response to a specific tutoring-related question to the orientation. In assigning questions, I considered the backgrounds of each of my staff members and what they might contribute to our initial orientation. Jason had several semesters of experience tutoring in UNL's writing center and had also taught for 5 years in the composition program. Maureen had no prior teaching experience but had been a Spanish tutor at a previous institution. Leslie had taught for a year in our composition program and had tutored at another institution. And Julie was new to both teaching and tutoring. With each of the tutors' prior experiences in mind, I assigned the following questions:

Julie: What qualities or abilities do you think tutors need to develop or work on in order to be successful?

Maureen: What central challenges did you encounter as a Spanish tutor? How did you tackle those challenges?

Leslie: How have you enacted a process approach to teaching writing in your classroom? How might you translate "process pedagogy" into your tutoring?

Jason: How do you "teach writing as a process" as a tutor? What difficulties have you encountered to trying to tutor writing as a process?

During our orientation, each tutor shared his thoughts about his/her topic. The tutors' informal presentations were used to sponsor discussions related to specific tutoring topics, such as goal-setting, tutoring difficulty, process pedagogy, etc.

While these questions helped establish that past experience could inform one's tutoring and that the writing center would be a scholarly community in which reflection and collaboration were the norm, assigning particular questions to specific tutors was not the most effective route to achieving these goals. Doing so limited the body of knowledge from which tutors could draw in thinking about their future work in the writing center. This format also encouraged tutors to construct mini-presentations rather than invite others to join a conversation about a particular topic.

Spring orientation. By the time spring semester began, my orientation goals had changed. I had come to realize that applying one's previous experiences to one's tutoring is an intuitive move, and not always a productive one at that. Tutors may bring fruitful experiences to the Center that enrich their work as tutors, but it's just as likely that their past experiences will complicate their work or conflict with the philosophy of the writing center. Thus, it seemed a more prudent tutor development goal to help tutors articulate the beliefs and experiences that would likely shape the work they were about to undertake.

For spring orientation, then, I restructured tutor development to better promote my revised orientation goals. Together, we all free wrote on three sequenced groupings of questions concerning our beliefs about and experiences with writing, teaching, and tutoring. These questions were as follows:

1. What do you believe about how people grow as writers? What has facilitated your writing development?
2. Tutoring is a particular kind of teaching, just like classroom teaching is a kind of teaching. What similarities or differences might you imagine/have you noticed between tutoring and

“ [T]utors are encouraged to view development as an integral part of tutoring rather than as work that is separate from and additional to their weekly tutoring hours. ”



WRITING AT THE CENTER (CD ROM)

The IWCA Press announces the availability of a new CD ROM: the proceedings from the 2004 Watson Conference, titled *Writing at the Center*, edited by Jo Ann Griffin, Carol Mattingly, and Michele Eodice. This CD, like the *OWL Guide*, will be made available for \$15 each, plus \$2 for shipping. After initial expenses are met, \$5 of each sale will be returned to the Writing Centers Research Project.

Available from:

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classroom teaching? Why are these similarities/differences important?

3. What do you think every tutoring session should accomplish, regardless of the tutee? What can you do to try to make these things happen? What role(s) might you play?

This writing was the jumping off point for a fuller discussion of each of these topics. In responding to these questions, tutors were able to bring multiple identities into play as they thought about tutoring from the perspective of a writer, a teacher and a tutor. They were able to draw from various experiences to deliberate about tutoring. Further, because they were responding to a common set of questions, tutors were better able to engage in discussion rather than deliver presentations to each other on tutoring-related topics. Finally, the revised questions helped tutors articulate the assumptions and beliefs they held about teaching, learning, and tutoring, assumptions that could then be set next to and viewed in light of the philosophy and mission of the Writing Center. Bringing these spoken and unspoken principles together helped alert tutors to the differences between their beliefs and the ideas that informed the context in which they were about to work. This knowledge, in turn, helped them better understand the tensions they experienced as they tutored in the Center.

FOCUSED OBSERVATIONS: INQUIRING INTO ONE'S TUTORING

In many ways, the question-responding exercise that we completed during tutor orientation set tutors up for another tutor development opportunity that we integrated into our writing center routines: focused observations. Both practices asked tutors to study their experiences (with teaching/tutoring/learning etc.) and then to dialogue about these experiences with other tutors. The observations were "focused" in that they were not intended to provide tutors with an overall assessment of their tutoring (this is what you did "good" and this is what you did "bad"). Rather, they were intended to provide insight into a narrowly defined area that a tutor wanted to explore in his/her tutoring.

The focused observation grew out of UNL's routinely practiced tutor observations, which have historically been used to document, on a limited basis, the work that occurs in the center. In recent years, tutor observations haven't been very useful to tutors, who have responded to them with indifference, annoyance, or dread. Some tutors saw them as a policing mechanism or as a mandatory documentation practice. In contrast, the purpose of the observation model I envisioned would be to help tutors learn about tutoring through inquiry into their practices. The aim would be educational, not evaluative.

Focused observations worked toward this goal by positioning tutors in active, authoritative roles. The Coordinator participated in the observations, but not as the sole Observer (active) of all of the other tutors' tutoring (passive). Instead, the Coordinator and the tutors filled identical roles: each was an Observer, and each was the Observed.

Even when a tutor was being observed, he/she was instructed to play an active role. It was as much his/her responsibility to analyze and provide insights into the tutoring area under investigation (active) as it was the Observer's (active).

Procedure. The basic procedure of a focused observation is as follows:

1. Tutor A selects an area in her tutoring that she would like to explore.
2. She then arranges to have another tutor (Tutor B) sit in on one of tutoring sessions in order to study this particular area and report back to her on what he observes.
3. Prior to the observation, Tutor A and Tutor B meet and discuss the area being explored. Tutor B considers what will be important for him to watch for in order to learn more about the area that Tutor A has selected.
4. The tutee arrives. The tutors obtain consent to carry out the observation. The tutors then carry out the observation, with Tutor B taking notes on what he observes during the session.

5. After the observation, both tutors write about what they noticed during the session in relation to the area under examination. They reflect on what seemed to go well, what didn't seem to go as well, what questions they had, what moments stood out, and any other observations they made—all in relation to the designated area. They then discuss their observations.
6. At that point, the tutors reverse roles and follow the same procedure, with Tutor B selecting an area in his tutoring he is curious to learn more about. When both tutors have had an opportunity to observe and be observed, they report back to the group on what they learned from the experience.

In the fall, we completed two rounds of focused observations. For each observation, tutors worked with a new partner (or group of three). Tutors picked partners based on the proximity of a tutor's observation interest to their own and on scheduling convenience. In many cases, tutors carried out observations of other tutors when they were both scheduled to work in the Center. Importantly, the time that tutors invested in carrying out their focused observations *took the place of* an equal share of their regular tutoring hours for the week. Thus, the observations did not increase the week's workload but were integrated into the work they already had to do.

Outcomes. The focused observation model that we employed provided for tutor-directed inquiry into questions and issues that are relevant and important to the tutors. Tutors explored a range of topics in their tutoring, including working on higher order concerns; writing on tutees' papers; fostering effective communication; question-posing; working with teachers of writing in the writing center; using affect to guide the tutoring session; listening; and addressing ELL issues. Leslie used the focused observation to assess how much the tutoring practices she had picked up at a previous institution had transferred to her work at UNL, where the center's philosophy was significantly different. She relates,

The writing center that I previously worked at promoted a model where tutors read student texts silently to themselves, made corrections and suggestions on the paper, and handed it back to the student. As a result, when I came to the WAC at UNL I was worried that I had internalized this model and was writing excessively on student texts rather than allowing them to have control over their own texts and put our discussion into writing in a way that made sense to them.

She goes on to explain that the observation “quiet[ed] some of [her] fears” about the ways she wrote on student texts and helped her better understand why/in what circumstances she did so.

Jason, a tutor who was interested in seeing the writing center assist teachers across the disciplines in teaching writing, used his focused observation to assess his interactions with a TA from Business that he worked with regularly. Jason wanted to know what his response practices were implicitly communicating to the TA about responding to student writing. As Jason's partner, I was able to delineate some of the messages that I saw him sending, including the idea that “responding to writing” doesn't merely mean correcting grammar and that asking questions can be a productive approach to offering response.

Overall, what I've hoped to illustrate are ways in which I've worked to attune our writing center's tutor development practices to the institutional context in which we're working. Integrating tutor development into our regular writing center routines has been the means through which I've worked to promote tutor growth apart from a classroom and credit hours dedicated to Writing Center work. This approach has allowed me to capitalize on the benefits of my situation and to respect the long hours and incredible energy that my tutors put into their tutoring. Because of the setting in which I'm working, I have the opportunity to help tutors see learning as a natural, integrated part of the tutoring process. There is the potential for a fluidity between intellectual development and tutoring practice that is difficult to achieve in a classroom setting. Working toward this fluidity seem like a worthwhile tutor development goal for my writing center.

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TAKE NOTE

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PEER TUTORING IN WRITING

Call for Proposals

October 19-21, 2007

University Park, PA

“Celebrating History: Dancing Forward,
Backward, and All Around”

The conference will be held at The Pennsylvania State University’s University Park campus and has a particularly appropriate and reflective theme considering that 2007 marks the 25th anniversary of peer tutoring at Penn State, University Park.

We would like to invite directors and especially tutors to submit proposals. The deadline for proposals will be May 11, 2007. Please visit the link below for more information about submitting your proposal and the upcoming conference.

<http://www.outreach.psu.edu/conference/peer-tutoring/proposals.html>

THE *HOW* AND *WHY* OF WRITING CENTERS: A LUNCHEON SPEECH

◆ Pamela B. Childers
The McCallie School
Chattanooga, TN

As I look around this room, I wonder **how** you all ended up here today and **why** you would want to listen to this short talk. Some of you are tutors wondering **how** writing centers fit into your present and future lives, and others are writing center directors considering **why** you traveled to this conference. Briefly, I could tell you **how** I got here by describing my first encounters with the idea of a writing center in grad school back in 1981 when I decided to fulfill my vision of starting a writing center at the school where I worked. Or I might explain **why** I chose to make a career of writing center work rather than just teaching English by documenting my years of research, writing, presenting and becoming involved in NWCA, now IWCA, starting back in 1986. But that would not be interesting to most of you. So, instead I want to tell you about something I heard.

I live on a mountain with three hairpin curves at the top of the W Road I drive each day. On the afternoon of November 1, 2006, I was driving up the W Road, listening to NPR’s “All Things Considered.” The host introduced storyteller and commentator Kevin Kling. I didn’t pay much attention to the title of his essay, but I became fascinated as he described the following:

Several years ago I was in a motorcycle accident that made typing difficult. So I invested in voice activated software for my computer. The voiceware has to get to know my vocal patterns and inflections, so there’s this series of sentences I read into the computer and then it learns my vocal nuances. . .
So I’m reading away when my dog and cat get into this fight. It’s like bow, bow, meow, meow.

And I look at the computer and it’s written – **how, how, why, why, why, how, how**. And that explains a lot about cats and dogs. I think when it comes to the underworld, most people are either dogs or they’re cats. It’s either **how** or **why** (Kling).

I laughed over and over again as I was flying to Phoenix the next day for a conference of former IWCA presidents, thinking, *That’s what we are as writing center directors, answering the how and why questions each day*. Although Kling’s essay was entitled “The **How** and **Why** of Life and Death,” we are also dealing with the “life and death” situations of our students to whom we must ask **how** and **why** as we listen and respond to their writing. And, in most of our daily lives, we have to justify to administrators and often colleagues the **how** and **why** of the very existence of our writing centers. Even more ironic is that stylistically we are also dogs and cats—some of us prefer to concentrate on helping writers discover **how** to make a piece of writing better, while others choose to focus on the **why** questions. That is, we are deciding whether the form or the content of the piece is fulfilling its purpose for the correct audience.

The more I thought about these metaphors, the more I realized that all the metaphors for writing centers have seldom included dogs and cats; yet, the dog’s “**how**” describes what we often have to do in our centers to please others—we wag our tails to make clients happy with our work or to please administrators with the results of our efforts on their behalf and to assist our colleagues in discovering “**how**” to create or assess an effective writing assignment. And sometimes at the end of the day we have worked like dogs and wondered **how** we could possibly get everything done. And, like dogs, we seldom care **how** we got where we are as long as our basic needs are fulfilled.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

But then the cat's "**why**" opens one eye and reminds us of **why** we do what we do. We're in this profession because we want our students, colleagues, and administrators to ask those **why** questions of their writing as well as our own. Yet we remain as curious as cats about improving our writing centers and question the motives of others and ourselves to find answers. At the end of the day, we want to believe that **why** we are here is based on our wholehearted belief in the value of writing centers.

As I say these words, I feel as if the dear Donald Murray is looking down from the heavens and laughing. After all, he's the one who asked those **how** and **why** questions of his students and introduced us to so many ideas that are the foundation of writing center theory. In *A Writer Teaches Writing*, Murray says, "**Why** write? To be surprised." And he ends the book with the following:

I read [my students'] papers and share their surprise in their own diversity with them, and I know that I will never burn out, that I will never lose my excitement at my own and my students' explorations of our world with the writing process (247).

And, if we keep asking those **how** and **why** questions, then we will go beyond working in a writing center because we need to do it for a grade, a paycheck, or promotion and tenure. We will continue to have an impact on our own students and on other writing centers through the work we do to mentor others, to volunteer in regional, national and international writing center organizations at conferences like this one, as well as through research and publication. And always, we need to bow and meow our own and one another's **hows** and **whys** of writing centers. ♦

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DIRECTOR OF WRITING CENTER AND PEER TUTORING SERVICES NEWMAN UNIVERSITY

Newman University is seeking candidates for a full time (10-month), non-ranked faculty position: Director of Writing Center and Peer Tutoring Services to begin August 1, 2007.

Required qualifications: Earned Masters in English, Composition & Rhetoric, TESOL, or related field; Familiarity with writing center theory and practice; An active interest in the life of a diverse, value-based campus community; Ability to work harmoniously with other university programs.

Desirable qualifications: Experience in individualized instruction; Training and experience in ESL instruction; Experience supervising and training student tutors; Effective teaching skills; Strong commitment to student mentoring; Experience working with ADA Services and/or learning disabled students; Experience with nontraditional adult student populations.

Letter of application, vita, transcripts, three letters of recommendation, and the names and telephone numbers of five references to: Director of Writing Center and Peer Tutoring Services Search, Newman University, 3100 McCormick Avenue, Wichita, Kansas 67213. Review of applications will begin immediately and will continue until position is filled. Salary will be based upon credentials and experience. EOE/AA.

For more information, see <<http://www.newmanu.edu/hr>> and <<http://www.newmanu.edu/writingcenter>>.

REVIEW OF OHANA FOUNDATION *LEARNING PORTAL* WEB SITE

- ◆ *Rebecca Adell, University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada*
- ◆ *Scott Johnston Osaka Jogakuin College, Chuo-ku, Osaka, Japan*
- ◆ *Leslie Olsen, Capella University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A.*

The Ohana Foundation, an international, non-profit organization, began in 1998 by developing and distributing educational video software in order to fulfill its mission: bringing education to children around the world through technology. With their mission and vision posted in multiple places and in multiple ways on their web site, <<http://www.ohanalearning.org/>>, it's easy to believe that the Ohana Foundation is committed to "making a better world through learning." And the foundation hasn't stopped with its commitment to children. Its latest *Learning Portal*, <www.ohanalearning.org/lp.html>, has expanded to provide software aimed at the college-level for adults interested in learning the English language for both personal and business use, the focus of this review. In the future, Ohana will also produce hard copy books as well as DVDs of the material.

The online materials reviewed are freely available on the Ohana foundation's Web site as part of the *Learning Portal*. To access the *Portal*, on the Ohana Foundation home page (<<http://www.ohanalearning.org/>>) click on "Products," then on the Products page click on "Portal." The *Portal* is divided into "Ohana EFL," "English Basics," "Ohana Business English," "Power Presentations," and "Ohana News."

From the perspectives of three writing center professionals, aspects of the Ohana Foundation's college- or adult-level software can be beneficial when used as supplemental material or with a tutor in a tutoring session. While the three reviewers are involved with writing centers and ESL/EFL students, their educational institutions and students' needs differ. Thus, for this review, each provides his/her perspectives on the different features of the site and how they might be beneficial for ESL/EFL students.

Rebecca Adell is the coordinator of the Academic Writing Help Center at the University of Ottawa, a bilingual (French-English) university in Ottawa, Canada; Scott Johnston teaches at Osaka Jogakuin College in Japan and coordinates the writing center where all the students are EFL learners; and Leslie Olsen coordinates two writing centers at Capella University, an online university that serves adult learners seeking undergraduate and graduate degrees in the United States and worldwide.

OHANA FOUNDATION *LEARNING PORTAL* MATERIALS

The *Ohana Foundation Learning Portal* consists of several sites through which the Foundation seeks to provide "multiple facets of education." These facets include skills in basic English usage ("Ohana EFL") and writing ("Ohana English Language Basics"), business conversation and vocabulary ("Ohana Business English") and creating presentations ("Ohana PowerPreso").

1) "**Ohana EFL**" covers English basics from the beginner level, starting with the alphabet, to the senior level, with lessons in vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Olsen: Intended for high school students interested in learning English, the "EFL Senior 1,2,3" software has also been used by adults. Using multimedia, it emphasizes grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. A student can watch and listen to a video while reading the supporting text. At the end of each scenario, the student must answer a series of questions, and a printable worksheet facilitates the exercise. These exercises provide a great opportunity for adult learners to practice pronunciation, and the multimedia technique used will appeal to many different types of learners. The scenarios themselves are basic, and although they do increase in difficulty as students progress, the fundamental level might detract from their appeal to students at more advanced levels.

Jobnston: While the senior level materials would not really be useful for improving writing, they are organized so students can work on their own to improve listening, increase passive vocabulary and gain some content knowledge. The PDF files allow easy downloading of the material and the video is a great support for the audio. The format of having the questions appear first without answers, then followed with the answers allows students to work independently. In addition, the topics are good for helping students develop knowledge in content areas. For example, topics in “EFL Senior 3” such as “Feed the World” and “Body Language” could be used to support content courses in my college, as students could read for more background.

Adell: The goal of our tutoring approach is to empower students to become stronger and more autonomous writers. However, we regularly face the problem of a developing sense of dependency among ESL students on the writing appointments. To alleviate students’ sense of dependency, we integrate into our writing appointments training on how to use language resources available to them outside of appointments. A body of practice material like “EFL Senior” would be a valuable resource for ESL students wishing to practice their language skills more generally on their own.

In addition, “EFL Senior” contains reading comprehension material. We continually advise ESL students to read as much as possible to help them recognize strong English writing, but we do not have the opportunity to work on reading comprehension on an individual basis. It would be useful to have reading comprehension materials like these available for students to work on individually yet with tutors available to provide support.

2) “Ohana English Language Basics” uses a step-by-step approach that teaches how to write effective sentences, paragraphs, and essays as well as letters. Exercises are provided to help students analyze and evaluate sentences and paragraphs.

Olsen: True to its title, “Language Basics” provides a foundation for understanding the basics of sentence, paragraph, and essay structure. Sentences are explained in terms of subject and predicate, and could benefit by including more in-depth, less complicated, explanations and examples. For instance, the section titled “Unusual Sentences” confuses rather than explains by grouping together two very different sentence constructions and warning against using them instead of explaining how they do or don’t work. Adding a section that reviews the clause and phrase structures of sentences would be particularly helpful in this section.

The paragraph section, the strongest section of “Language Basics,” describes different rhetorical choices for paragraph structure, and it provides good examples followed by exercises, allowing students to practice identifying the different structures. The section on topic sentences is particularly helpful, and would benefit students more if placed before the descriptions of rhetorical structures of paragraphs, since topic sentences play a major part in the paragraph structure examples.

The essay section breaks the essay down into three parts: introduction, body and conclusion. Each part is then explained according to purpose, content, and structure. This basic description of essay structure is juxtaposed with more advanced terms for developing essays: assertion, critical discussion, references, quotations, and evidential support. However, the terms are not explained. With more development and explanations, this section could be helpful to students exploring the subject on their own; as is, it lays a foundation for a great discussion between student and tutor in a writing center conference.

Jobnston: This section would probably not be very helpful for EFL students in our Japanese college.

TAKE NOTE

INTERNATIONAL WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM (IWAC) CONFERENCE

Call for Proposals
May 28-May 31, 2008
Austin, TX

We invite proposals that investigate how border crossings have affected the shape of writing instruction, disciplinary tutoring, our institutions, and our global WAC conversations. For example, proposals might focus on how working with other disciplines and their media in class, outside of class, and in writing centers have influenced our theories of composing and communicating; how communicating across local (e.g.K-16), national and international borders is changing our definitions of disciplinary writing as well as our teaching and collaborative practices; how we translate what we do so that students, academic staff, administration, and those outside our institutions support the scholarship and curricular reform we promote. For more detailed information, please visit <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/progs/wac/conferences/iwacc/index/>.

Proposal deadline is Friday, September 28, 2007.

IWAC 2008 will be held in the Radisson Hotel and Suites on the banks of the Colorado River in downtown Austin. History, nature, scholarship, fine arts, warm weather, the world’s largest urban bat colony, and any kind of music you can think of are all within a short walk or bus ride.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WRITING CENTER DIRECTOR MICHIGAN STATE U.

This is an annual year appointment in the Academic Specialist system (fixed term with annual renewals contingent on performance reviews, program need and availability of funding; possibility of moving from fixed-term to a continuing track).

Qualifications:

M.A. (Ph.D. strongly preferred) in Rhetoric/Writing, English, or English education; knowledge of current writing/writing center theory and practice; experience working in a writing center (administrative experience preferred); experience teaching English and/or writing (experience teaching on-line or hybrid courses preferred), and experience with digital and multi-media writing.

Review of applications will begin March 30, 2007, and will continue until the position is filled. The anticipated start date is August 1, 2007. Interested candidates should submit (1) a cover letter explaining their interest in and qualifications for the position, (2) a vita, (3) a writing sample, and (4) a list of names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers of not fewer than 3 references. **These materials should be sent to Janet A. Swenson, Associate Dean, Michigan State University, 200 Linton Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824,** faxed to 517-355-0159, or e-mailed to jswenson@msu.edu. Michigan State University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution. MSU is committed to achieving excellence through cultural diversity. The university actively encourages applications and/or nominations of women, persons of color, veterans, and person with disabilities.

One reason is that the diagrams depicting parts of speech and organization are not very clear. Our students need more examples and easier explanations. Some of the explanations would be too difficult for our students. For example, one definition of a sentence states: "Every complete **sentence** contains two parts: a **subject** and a **predicate**. The subject is what (or whom) the sentence is about, while the predicate tells something about the subject. In the following sentences, the predicate is enclosed in braces ({ }), while the subject is **highlighted**." Students in my college would have difficulty understanding the meaning of this explanation.

On the other hand, the section titled "Your Turn Analyzing" for sentences and paragraphs could be helpful because it provides students with examples and explanations. In this section, students can come up with an answer and check its accuracy immediately.

Adell: In our center, ESL students often face the well-documented problem of lacking understanding of the nature and purpose of North American academic writing.¹ The lesson on essay writing provides a good basic introduction to writing and emphasizes the rhetorical and analytical qualities that are so vital to academic writing, while those on writing sentences and paragraph show students how precisely they must express themselves in their essays. Lack of specificity is one of the most serious problems we see in ESL writing. The lesson on paragraphs in particular highlights the importance of specificity in academic writing. The explanation and exercises clearly show how each sentence in a paragraph must work toward articulating a point of discussion or of argument. Despite a lack of explanation in some of the answers, these sections would be useful for students to work with on their own or in a writing center, ideally with a tutor on hand to answer questions.

3) "Ohana Business English" offers elementary, intermediate and advanced lessons in English conversation for business purposes, with a special focus on comprehension, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

Olsen: "Ohana Business English" offers a great resource for practicing pronunciation, and the online materials come with downloadable texts, worksheets, and answer guides, allowing students to read along, take notes, and test themselves at the end of each module. However, some of the vocabulary used is informal, some too informal for business conversation, including phrases like "wet noodle," "long time no see," and the sentence "I feel like vomiting," which is located in the module of language needed for arranging business travel. In addition, the lists of vocabulary words include each word used in a sentence, but no definitions of the words are given, so students wanting to expand their vocabulary would need a dictionary when using these modules. So, while the pronunciation practice would be beneficial, some of the content comes into question. The material would need to be facilitated by a tutor for the student to comprehend some of the idiomatic vocabulary and for understanding the implications of using informal and slang language in business conversations.

Johnston: Our college is small, so our writing center has multiple functions including helping students to expand their vocabulary and preparing students for classroom discussions. With this in mind, the "Ohana Business English" site is well organized with audio, text, and worksheets for students who want to improve their speaking and listening in the area of business.

Adell: This would be the hardest material to use in our writing center because of its purpose and scope. In particular, the informality of the language does not reflect the formal academic writing styles

we teach to ESL students. Moreover, its heavy focus on conversational English makes it hard to draw upon as a tool for teaching writing.

4) The “Ohana Power Presentations” course provides an introduction to business presentations. Tips are given on how to plan and deliver different kinds of presentations.

Olsen: “PowerPreso” is one of strongest sections offered on this site. The course teaches students how to build a presentation speech from the opening salutations to the closing remarks. In between are suggestions for how to talk about visuals during a presentation, and at the end are several options for responding to questions. The list of words and phrases, again, simply use the words or phrases in sentences, so students would need dictionaries when using this site. However, the presentation examples are good, and include examples of smooth transitions between visual slides, which are not covered elsewhere on this site. The section ends with more tips for giving presentations, as well as for creating the visuals to be used in the presentation. “PowerPreso” would be beneficial to anyone assigned to give a presentation, including native speakers of English.

Johnston: This could be very useful for our students since we have a specialization in International Management. For EFL students in business, it provides the necessary vocabulary for giving presentations and answering questions. The presentations also offer a good example of linking visuals with the oral presentation.

CONCLUSION

If we consider the *Ohana Foundation Learning Portal* from a wide perspective in supporting student learning in writing, content-area, and presentations, the site provides materials for students to independently review some English-language basics through a varied multimedia approach. “EFL Senior” offers explanation and exercises in pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. “Language Basics” provides similar support in writing, and the “Business English” and “Power Presentations” sites offer instruction beyond reading and writing for students seeking to work in English. All of these would be very useful for students who are self-motivated and can learn on their own.

However, the *Ohana Foundation Learning Portal* suffers at times from overly complicated explanations and diagrams or a lack of explanations, definitions, and examples. In addition, the materials are not interactive and thus cannot provide the multiple layers of assessment and support that are unique to individualized writing tutorials.

That being said, the more supplemental material a writing center can provide, the deeper ESL students will be able to delve into the English language. Despite their limitations, the extent and variety of the Ohana Foundation’s online English language materials offer a valuable addition to the resources of any writing center used by ESL students. Writing Centers interested in incorporating this material into their collection of resources might also consider training their tutors on how to integrate the materials into their one-to-one sessions with students, where there is plenty of room for interaction, explanations, and discussion. ♦

Endnote

¹ For example, see I. Leki, *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers* (Portsmouth, NH, Boynton/Cook, 1992), chapter 6.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

WRITING CENTER DIRECTOR MONTCLAIR STATE U.

We are re-opening our search for the Director of a fully funded Center for Writing Excellence. We invite applications to fill an associate or full professor of English position to develop and direct the university’s new Center for Writing Excellence to start in the fall 2007 semester. Applicants should have expertise in composition/rhetoric and writing center theory and practice, with secondary expertise in such areas as WAC/WID, teacher education, community writing, or ESL. The Director will need to be able to reach across disciplinary boundaries and develop programs with college as well as university-wide programs. Initial interviews to be held by phone. Search open until filled. Applications are accepted immediately and will be reviewed as they come in.

Qualifications: Ph.D. and strong record of scholarship and an active and evolving research agenda in composition/rhetoric or related field; administrative success in writing centers, first-year writing and/or WAC/WID; grant seeking/writing experience; record of excellence in teaching composition/rhetoric at various levels.

Send letters of application, a CV, and three letters of recommendation to Professor Emily Isaacs, Chair, Writing Center Director Search, Box VF13, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ 07043. Montclair State University is an AA/EOE institution. For more information about MSU’s recent work in envisioning the Center for Writing Excellence, please review the Task Force Proposal that led to this search at <<http://english.montclair.edu/isaacs/WCTFproposal.htm>>.

TAKE NOTE

IWCA AWARDS

Clint Gardner, IWCA President, announces the following:

IWCA “Muriel Harris
Outstanding Service Award”:

Al DeCiccio

In recognition of outstanding service to the writing center community



“*Outstanding Article(s) Award*”:

This year’s pool of scholarship proved so strong that, of the nine articles nominated, eight received at least one top three vote. And so, here are the two most compelling articles and thus, this year’s winners:

Jo Ann Griffin, Daniel Keller, Iswari P. Pandey, Anne-Marie Pedersen, and Carolyn Skinner for “Local Practices, National Consequences: Surveying and (Re)Constructing Writing Center Identities” published in *The Writing Center Journal*.

and

Bonnie Devet, Susan Orr, Margo Blythman, and Cecilia Bishop “Peering Across the Pond: The Role of Students in Developing Other Students’ Writing in the US and UK.” Published in *Teaching Academic Writing in UK Higher Education: Theories, Practices and Models*, Ed. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams. ♦

WRITING LOVE LETTERS: A PROMOTIONAL TOOL

♦ Katherine M. Schmidt
Western Oregon University
Monmouth, OR

It is a September afternoon, and the campus has come alive: 800 freshmen have recently moved into the residential living halls and are participating in New Student Week activities. Along with other academic support services directors, I am scheduled to serve on a panel to provide an overview of my unit’s services. My dilemmas, however, are three: the large group will be experiencing the typical post-lunch lethargy, I am the last speaker on the panel’s agenda, and the majority of the new students possess a vague understanding of the work loads that await them, as the term has not yet commenced.

I take my place at the long table which resides on a stage in a theatre-style auditorium. As students filter in and take their seats, some begin to chatter, others open their orientation folders and flip through paperwork, and a few close their eyes as they sink into their seats. The group has spent the day listening, waiting, and taking in much too much information. With four speakers on the agenda and a room full of 800 seemingly spent students, I quickly realize that successfully sending out a message that matters will require more rhetorical savvy on my part than usual.

The panel begins. One by one, my colleagues speak about their units’ services from their seats: academic advising, library resources, and the learning center. As each director lectures, the audience grows patiently disengaged. Even my own attention is diverted by two students seated in the first row who appear to be quite taken with one another. Their playful whispering soon evolves into note writing, and both beam as they write and read each segment in what has become a lengthy exchange.

I look over my presentation materials which rest on the table before me: my routine presentation will do little to inject interest into this audience. I silently scramble for a new place to begin—some hook, something unexpected. As the director who is seated next to me concludes her segment and the panel chairperson introduces me, I shove my notes into my satchel, stand up empty handed, and move to the front of the stage. My risky and impromptu goal is to imagine a delivery route that commands the attention of the most engaged members in the audience: the two lovers in the front row.

I begin: “We’ve all undoubtedly been involved in a relationship or two.” Several students nod but appear confused by the statement. “Now, some of us may have experience with a boyfriend or girlfriend who’s been growing increasingly frustrated by the fact that the relationship isn’t working in the manner he or she thinks it should be.”

A few students laugh and lean forward. The female student in the front row stops her pen and nudges the student with whom she’s been silently conversing. I can easily read her lips from the stage: “What’d she just say?” she asks him. Her writing partner continues to look my way and quietly replies, “I don’t know—just listen.”

“Well, let’s say that one day your partner says to you, ‘In case you haven’t noticed, the romance is gone from our relationship. I’ve decided I want you to write me a poem, and I want it by Friday.’” The female student sets her pen down and begins to listen with apparent interest. “*That’s no easy task*, you’re thinking—but you go ahead and say, ‘Fine, I’ll do it.’ So, you have exactly four days to write a poem, and—let’s face it—you’re simply not a poet (not to mention the fact that the demand itself is enough to stifle any potential poet that may reside within you). As each day goes by, you agonize, write, throw away, and begin again—I mean, there are only so many words that rhyme with LOVE: dove, shove, five-fingered glove.”

No one laughs at my short list of words choices; however, I have the attention of every individual in the auditorium. “Amazingly, however, you are able to produce something by the deadline. On Friday morning, you slip the poem in an envelope, place it under the windshield wiper of his car, and observe him as he comes out to the parking lot after class. From a distance, you see him open the envelope. As he reads, however, he appears to become physically upset . . . why?”

A student seated in the center of the group replies, “Because he made you do it.”

“And it’s not really romantic at all, no matter how good the poem is,” another student continues. “I mean, ideally, we don’t want to have to tell our partner to write a poem or give us flowers—”

“—or buy us new speakers for our car,” the male student in the first row adds. The audience erupts into laughter, and the girl next to him blushes, as the room’s attention has been directed their way.

“Yes, exactly. We shouldn’t have to ask for our partner to be thoughtful.” I turn my focus directly on the male student in the first row: “Now, the car speakers might be a pricy expectation, but, I do have to admit, they would be nice.” He smiles and nods, while his writing partner mouths, “I’m not buying speakers.”

I return my focus to the entire group: “But, let’s go back in time, for a moment. You observe your partner’s frustration, and you’re aware that the magic has taken a dive. So, you decide to sit down and write a poem for him—and it doesn’t even turn out to be a good poem . . . it might even be the exact same poem you produced in the first scenario. But you go ahead and slip it into an envelope and place it on his car anyway. You watch, and when he finds and reads the poem, his response doesn’t look anything like the first time around. Tell me why.”

“Well, he probably reads it totally differently than he did in the first situation,” says a student who is seated peripherally.

I urge him to continue, “Why does he read it differently?”

“Well, because, he didn’t make you do it.”

Another student adds, “Yeah, he’d probably actually love it, even if the poem sucked. It’s the thought that counts in the end because that’s what we remember—not the lines or the title or the words—it’s the gesture of caring enough to do something.”

“Exactly. So, let’s build a bridge between love letters and the Writing Center—”

“—you’ll help us write love letters?” the same student asks, and the audience giggles.

“Absolutely, we’ll help with your love letters. But let’s think about this in a different way: let’s imagine you’re in a history class, and you’ve got a paper due in one week. You’ve never liked writing, so you do what you did in high school: you delay writing until the night before it’s due, which means you sit down, read the assignment directions, frantically compose, double check for misspellings and missing words, print, and submit the paper the following morning.” A number of students smile, as if to acknowledge their familiarity with last-minute paper-writing routines.

“Unfortunately, however, when your paper is returned to you the following week, you have not only earned a low grade, but you also find a directive in large print on the last page: ‘GO TO THE WRITING CENTER FOR PAPER #2! PROVIDE PROOF OF YOUR APPOINTMENT.’” There is not one student who does not have their eyes on me.

“So, you’re bothered: you shove the paper into your backpack as you begin to detect a new-found distaste for history as well as for the professor.” The majority of the audience physically responds to this comment: it appears that each of them have “been there,” at some point or another, during their high school careers.

“As the due date for paper #2 approaches, you know that it’s too late to drop the class. So, you quickly write a draft, go to the Writing Center, and announce to the tutor, ‘I’m only here because I need to get one of those confirmation slips.’ And when you discover that you will actually have to sit down and work with a tutor, you fold your arms and let her do all the work. The tutor’s actually nice, she says some good things, but you only want the slip—and, after thirty minutes, you have it. So, how are you feeling at this point?”

An individual immediately responds, “Well, I did what the professor told me to do. So, I would be feeling okay about turning in the assignment.”

“So, you’re feeling ‘okay’ as you walk into class the next morning. As the entering students hand their papers to the professor, you stand up and do the same. As you present your work with its bright gold confirmation slip attached, you are surprised by your professor’s response: she appears to be unmoved by the fact that you’ve done exactly what she directed you to do. So, what’s the problem? Why the ambivalence?”

“Well, it’s probably because she made you go for help,” a student replies.

“Yes—proactive and reactive actions are interpreted very differently by receivers. Let’s think about what the two terms mean: *proactive* and *reactive*. Any ideas?” There is silence.

“Let’s consider the word *reactive* first.” An individual in the back row replies, “It means you’re just reacting.” “Okay, that’s a good but safe answer—can you describe *reactive* without actually using the word *react*?”

She laughs. “Oh, of course,” and she elaborates: “Well, it’s like when someone says ‘write a poem’ and you do it—you’re just doing what someone told you to do. So, proactive would be . . . well . . .” The student next to her continues, “Doing it because you know you should—it’d be like heading off a problem before it happens?”

“Yes. Now, imagine, for a moment, what it’s like for a professor to receive a paper which has an unsolicited Writing Center confirmation slip attached—there was no prompting. As a professor myself, I can testify to the fact that it’s much like finding a surprise . . . I might even compare it to finding an expected poem from my partner on the windshield of my car.” As I continue, the students listen intently.

“The act says something about who you are as a student. And, not surprisingly, your professor will, in fact, read your work a little differently. Although, it might not be the best paper in the world, you’ve shown that you care about your work and you care about the class, and this is what the professor will remember about you.”

I walk to the panelists’ table behind me where my Writing Center bookmarks and various presentation items are stacked, and the room remains silent. I pick up one gold confirmation slip from the pile and turn back to the audience: “Here’s what a love letter for a professor looks like.” I hold up the small card: “Learn to write love letters on your own—it will make a difference in how *you* feel about *you*, how *you* feel about *your possibilities*, and how *you* feel about *your new relationship with your college education*.”

Nearly everyone in the room smiles—even my colleagues on the panel and my targeted audience of two. “So, let me tell you a bit about what the Writing Center can do for you. . . .” ♦

TUTOR'S COLUMN

ICE

◆ *Monica Rentfrow*
Alma College
Alma, MI

"I like your glasses," Laura says. A big smile on her face, Adriane replies, "Thank you!" This was the first thing said at that table, where a soon-to-be session would unfold. Laura did a great job at breaking the first layer of ice. However, I could see layers of uncertainty in Adriane, and I was intrigued to see how Laura would chip them away.

After having figured out Adriane was a first time visitor, Laura explained what would happen and what Adriane should do, such as taking notes herself. Laura started the session off strong by saying, "Do you mind if I read it out loud?" The session continued with Laura stopping multiple times while she read the paper to touch on an aspect of the writing, like grammar or structure. Once, Adriane reflected, "That's kind of wordy," which prompted further discussion. Most of the pauses were to touch on things like sentence length, the words "it" and "things," and to make suggestions. Each time Laura stopped, she was sure to follow through with careful explanation, also asking to make sure Adriane understood the concepts. Each time Adriane stopped, she asked Laura questions, like seeking expert advice. The conversation always wrapped up nicely before resuming the reading. Another thick layer of ice knocked away.

After she finished reading the paper, Laura asked, "What do you think of it?" Adriane replied, "It ends. It just ends." Sensing Adriane's dissatisfaction, Laura carried the conversation. She offered "the hook" trick, which Adriane soaked up like a sponge. Laura asked if Adriane had any questions then pointed out what she saw as the thesis. This was good reflection for Adriane to see how clear she was. The final thing covered before finishing up the history report was name citation. Adriane was asking Laura's upperclassman advice for how to set up her name, date, and class information. Laura simply stated that each professor was different and that she should ask if she ever had a question. The last of the ice had now melted.

As I observed the session, I rapidly took notes. I wrote about anything and everything I could. Reflecting on the session, I decided to break down my notes into categories, and how many "hits" each category received. I did this so that I could better see the session as a whole. The "Adriane's place in the conversation" category received seven hits; the "Laura's great explanations" category received four hits; the "Open-ended questions" category had six hits; the "Too much of Laura/negatives/things I'd do differently" category earned five hits; and the "Laura's positives/suggestions" category had a comfortable seven hits. Looking at the number of "hits" in each category, I could see the well balanced tutoring session. It is important to have many "open-ended questions" and writers' "places in the conversation," and equally important to have a smaller amount of "negatives." It wouldn't hurt all tutors to reflect on sessions in this manner because it's easy to see who controlled the session. That is the ultimate question each tutor should reflect upon: Who was in control of this situation? The answer should be both writer and tutor controlled equally, or, if the scale must favor one side, the writer controlled more.

Although the session went well, there were two specific things I would have done differently. The first was how Laura didn't just read through the paper, to come back later and work on concerns. I learned in class—and it makes more sense—to read the paper first, making small marks for discussion on the paper and then to open up discussion afterwards. The second thing I noticed and try to steer away from is suggesting your own words to the writer. I caught Laura a few times giving too much of herself. She once stated, "If I were you, I'd..." Tutors need to remember that the paper is the writer's, so the words need to be those of the writer. It is good to give suggestions, but I find it a better tool to use an example unrelated to the topic of discussion; for example, I once used my pen to describe the difference between the articles "a" and "the."

I think Laura did a top notch job with this session. If I could rate her, I'd give four out of five stars. I went to the Writing Center hoping to observe Laura in action, thinking she'd do a great job. Turns out, I was right on the money. I have realized that you can't enter a tutoring session thinking the ice will melt immediately. Both tutor and writer need to work together and slowly chip away at that block, using of the chisel of knowledge and understanding. When all is cleared up and knocked away, a well written paper, and a more confident, skilled writer, will remain. My observing experience was like earning my chisel. I'm ready to start hacking the ice now. ◆

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>>.

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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