

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E W T T E R

Volume 32, Number 03

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

November, 2007

– FROM THE EDITOR –

This month's *Writing Lab Newsletter* is an excellent illustration of the global reach of writing centers. And those of us in writing centers need to keep in touch across oceans and around the globe because we can share, and there is so much we can learn from each other. The internationalization of writing centers can be seen in this issue which includes Arlene Archer's discussion of how a writing center in a South African country meets its unique challenges. There are also two announcements, one to inform us of an Asian group forming and another to invite proposals for an Indaba to be held at another South African writing center. (To get the full flavor of what an indaba is, try searching a dictionary or Wikipedia.) And the Conference Calendar includes listings of the Athens International Writing Centers Conference and the European Writing Centers Conference. And we can come together at the 2008 International Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing conference.

You'll also find Julia Pond's reflection on the importance of seeking moments of objectivity in a tutorial and Rusty Carpenter's research that led to re-structuring the training of tutors for online interaction with students. Finally, in his article, Joseph Mangino probes the implications of the subjective term "help" when we work with students, once again, taking us back to a basic question in tutoring.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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CRITICAL ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND GOALS FOR SOUTH AFRICAN WRITING CENTRES

◆ Arlene Archer

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INTRODUCTION

One of the main challenges involved in developing and running writing centres in tertiary contexts in South Africa is the recognition of the role that writing centres need to play in the redress of basic academic literacy competencies. Related to this is the complexity of providing access to academic and disciplinary discourses through making explicit how texts work in a critical manner. This paper examines these key challenges, focusing in particular on the Writing Centre at the University of Cape Town.

THE CONTEXT OF WRITING CENTRES IN SOUTH AFRICAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

In most tertiary institutions in South Africa, the links with Academic Development have often given writing centres their unique character. Academic Development initiatives are a locus for change which attempt to transform teaching and learning processes, and to encourage academic excellence, whilst democratizing and extending access to education. Systematic African educational deprivation has led to "a persisting heritage of educational underpreparedness" (Moore 7) which includes linguistic, numerate, and conceptual an-

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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.

alytical competencies. From the 1980's South African tertiary institutions developed units for Academic Development, or "Academic Support" as they were known then, in an effort to address the realities of educational transformation. Initially this was done in the form of separating out students who needed additional assistance. These programs were soon criticized as a stigmatization of 'historically disadvantaged' students and as separating the learning of "skills" from the learning of content. This led to Academic Development becoming more integrated into the mainstream over the last years, although the debate between integration of language and content is ongoing, and the degree of integration varies across departments, faculties, as well as institutions.

The support model of earlier Academic Development programmes impacted on writing centre identity in South Africa. The walk-in centres functioned as an extension of the remedial, separate concept of Academic Development, often with funding coming from outside the institution. The form these interventions took were mostly "add-on" measures where the weaker students were siphoned off from the mainstream. Writing centres were seen as remediation centres to rectify language "deficiencies" in students. Of course, this situation is not unique to South Africa; Grimm talks about the "sticky history of remediation that haunts writing centre work" in the United States (84). The "quick fix" model and deferment of responsibility for writing is difficult to combat for most writing centres in South Africa.

Recently, writing centres in South Africa have begun to collaborate more both regionally and nationally, through meetings, conference attendances, special interest groups, and training of consultants. This has been extremely beneficial as we have much in common in terms of histories, practices and aspirations. In general, writing centres in South Africa have to take the following factors into consideration. Firstly, the fact that most students need to write in English, a language other than their mother tongue. Secondly, the academic underpreparedness of all students, but particularly those from previously disadvantaged communities. Thirdly, the fact that all students need to learn the academic discourses of different disciplines. And finally, the fact that students come to tertiary institutions with different literacies and cultural conventions.

THE WRITING CENTRE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

The Writing Centre at the University of Cape Town (UCT) is one of the older writing centres in South Africa and has been operating since 1994. Although it has been located in different institutional places at different times in its history, it is currently conceived as a project based within a larger structure, the Language Development Group (LDG). The LDG focuses on teaching academic literacy practices within curricula and courses (see Thesen and Van Pletzen), whereas the Writing Centre tends to operate more on a voluntary, ad hoc basis. However, as part of the larger Language Development Group, we do focus on developmental work, particularly through curriculum involvement. This means working in partnership with faculties to develop language and writing in the curriculum.

The Writing Centre also has a 'drop-in' one-to-one service. The cognitive as well as the affective value of the one-to-one consultation is well-documented (Harris, Oye, Flynn) and the walk-in centre is seen as important in meeting students' immediate needs which may not be met in individual departments. Of our clientele 64% are women; more than half speak English as a second language (although it is difficult to get exact data on this); 30% are postgraduate students; 45% hail from the Humanities faculty. The philosophy of the UCT student consultancy is that all students can improve their writing, whether they are highly experienced academic writers or complete novices. The service is thus offered to students at any level of study and across all disciplines. The premise underlying the consultant-student relation is Lave and Wenger's argument that learning is not located in the acquisition of structure, but in the increased access of learners to participating roles in expert performances (17).

The Writing Centre employs two fulltime members of staff (the coordinator and the administrator) and 11 part-time student consultants that are Masters or PhD students. There is a strong emphasis on equity and multidisciplinary in the selection process of the consultants. The group is diverse in terms of gender (4 males, 7 females), age (from mid 20's to mid 40's), languages spoken and nationality (currently including people from South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, England, Lesotho, and Tanzania).

INTEGRATING WRITING INTO DISCIPLINARY CONTEXTS

The Writing Centre at the University of Cape Town has attempted to set up coherent links with departments and course curricula in order to integrate writing and other academic literacy practices within content subjects. Given that writing provides access to and a way of learning the structure of disciplinary thought such as ways of thinking, reasoning, interpreting, and explaining that is typical to a discipline, integration of writing and disciplinary context is vital. We attempt to achieve this integration by embedding writing workshops into particular courses, working in tandem with the Language Development Group, working with lecturers to integrate writing into the curriculum, teaching credit-bearing stand-alone courses, employing consultants from a range of disciplines, developing efficient systems of feedback to the institution, and conducting interdisciplinary writer's circles for postgraduate students. I will briefly look at the last three of these strategies.

In an attempt to address some of the disciplinary context, we appoint consultants from a range of disciplines. In this way, we are able to access consultants' knowledge, as well as establish strong links to their departments. The consultants are all post-graduate students at Masters and PhD level and are fairly deeply immersed in the practices of their disciplines, which currently include property studies, sociology, linguistics, environmental sciences, library science, microbiology and ethnomusicology. This cross-disciplinarity enables us to give our clients fairly specialised advice on writing in the discipline, but also creates an interesting and vibrant space for discussion of academic conventions. The consultants attend a five-day initial training programme at the beginning of the year and ongoing training sessions throughout the year which aim to combine the generic and the discipline-specific. This includes topics such as multilingualism, English as a second language, disciplinary discourses, postgraduate issues, multimodality, creative writing, referencing and academic voice. Through this training we attempt to gain insight into the ways we mediate students' acquisition of disciplinary discourses.

The Writing Centre also has to look for opportunities to use its sites of practice as sites of institutional learning. The one-to-one consultancy has provided feedback to departments on the ways their students are grappling with particular tasks and, to a lesser extent, to feed into research on student writing. Through these feedback loops, the "relatively expensive model of one-to-one tutoring for students can be justified in terms of a data-gathering exercise to inform institutional development more broadly" (Moore, Paxton, Scott, Thesen 16). To this end, we maintain a comprehensive database on student consultations which includes demographic information as well as details on specific consultations. This database also enables us to track the developmental paths of individual students, sometimes from first year through to their doctoral studies.

The tension between generic and disciplinary-specific practices can be used to create generative interdisciplinary environments, such as our writer's circles designed for postgraduate students. These circles comprise students from a range of disciplines who meet voluntarily and on a regular basis to discuss their writing and research, as well as the "postgraduate condition" (Chihota and Thesen). Circles focus on sharing experienc-

“ Writing centres have the capacity to bridge disciplines in a common search for the most effective methods to instruct students. ”

ANNOUNCEMENTS

APPLICATIONS SOUGHT FOR WLN ASSOCIATE EDITOR

If you are interested in applying for the position of Associate Editor of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, please see the complete application form on the WLN Web site: <http://writinglabnewsletter.org>.



NATIONAL PUNCTUATION DAY

To celebrate National Punctuation Day, my clever staff of consultants developed a Punctuation Personality Profile handout. I thought you might like to see what they came up with. It includes such gems as:

“Comma (,) Your personality shows you are the glue that holds most relationships together, even though you feel you are often forgotten and misunderstood by your peers. Friends tend to turn to you too much (or not enough), causing you to feel used or underappreciated at times. In order to cope with this, you always seem to be adding more, more, more and more, to your life.”

It's a lighthearted attempt to gain some publicity on campus—we submitted it to our student newspaper and made a handout to distribute in our Center (along with cupcakes featuring various punctuation marks). Here's the link: <http://www.salisbury.edu/uwc/PunctuationPersonalityProfile.htm> >.

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es, peer reviewing, confidence-building, socializing and networking. The activities in writer's circles include critiques of research agendas and methodologies, and peer reviews of extracts of writing (such as research proposals, abstracts, extracts from chapters). Seminars on aspects such as cohesion, voice, use of sources also form part of the activities. These circles are important arenas for interdisciplinary debate and dialogue as they bring together students from various academic backgrounds. Chihota and Thesen claim that the mix of disciplines in writer's circles is generative. Regardless of their disciplines, students at postgraduate level are all engaged in problem solving of some kind. The discussions in the circles provide “fascinating insights into postgraduate processes of knowledge making. . . . Many students are moving between disciplines or are choosing to work in interdisciplinary ways, but these trends are not acknowledged by university structures and bureaucracies” (Chihota and Thesen 15).

I have outlined some of the ways the UCT Writing Centre has attempted to integrate writing in the disciplines. It is clear that there is no “quick fix” where writing is concerned—institutions need multiple sites in and out of the curriculum for raising awareness of writing. I will now explore another key challenge in our work, namely the degree to which we need to provide students access to dominant practices whilst at the same time enabling them to critique these practices.

ENGAGING CRITICAL DISCOURSES

Writing centres in South Africa and elsewhere are to some extent in a double-bind. On the one hand, it would be in our learners' interests if we could help them to conform to the expectations of the institution. On the other hand, by doing so, we may be reproducing the ideologies and inequities of the institution and society at large, and uncritically perpetuating the status quo. Particularly, the notion underlying some strains of process writing, namely allowing students to find a “voice,” is an assumption which is shown to be flawed in certain South African contexts. In “progressivist” pedagogy, “voice” is a critical term for formulating an alternative pedagogy. However, the way this concept is applied at times does not take cognisance of our particular contexts. So, for instance, a proponent of “process writing” would argue that “it is the responsibility of the student to explore his [sic] own world with his own language, to discover his own meaning. The teacher supports but does not direct this expedition to the students' own truth” (Murray qtd. in Cope and Kalantzis 53). It is clear that this version of the process approach concentrates only on internal processes of individual minds, without relating writers to the social context in which they are writing. White middle-class students from print-immersed environments already have an inkling of how a text works. The reliance on rote learning taught by schools and the weak conceptual development of first and second year students could militate against them finding a voice, as they may not have internalized the material sufficiently, and may as a result battle to explain their thinking in conversational language.

Writing can produce an “identity crisis” which can be a major stumbling block. Many students in South Africa have to write in a language that is not their own and have to adopt specific discourses or genres. This may mean sacrificing aspects of their identity. Many students approach academic writing without a sense that they have anything worth saying. Feeling the right to exert a presence in the text is related to personal autobiography, and therefore is often associated with the gender, class, and ethnicity of the writer. Students need to think of themselves as people who have the power and authority to be authors; that what they write will be valued for what they have to say and will not just be treated as an opportunity to practice grammar and spelling. They also need to be made aware of hidden cultural assumptions in socially powerful discourses and to be taught the “rules” of what is appropriate in a way that highlights their social constructedness (Kress, Delpit, Lea and Street). The role of writing centre consultants in this process is to talk to students about academic expectations in ways that acknowledge whose values are at stake. According to one consultant,

I have also realised that purely transmitting and illuminating the invisible literacy practices of disciplines do not allow for a critical understanding of the discourses that shape the literacy

practices of the various disciplines. In my development as a consultant and literacy practitioner I am now beginning to work towards including critical discussions around the ideological nature of texts in Writing Centre consultations with students.

Writing centres can work effectively with students if that work is situated within a desire to understand and negotiate difference rather than the institutional need to manage or eliminate it (Grimm 1999).

DEVELOPING NEW ACADEMICS

Some of the UCT Writing Centre consultants are selected to be part of an internationally funded mentoring and bursary programme, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Programme (MMUF). The long-term objective of MMUF is to address the serious under-representation of black faculty members in higher education in the United States and, more recently, in South Africa. MMUF aims to do this by identifying and supporting students of promise and helping them to become academics of the highest distinction. Consequently, MMUF writing centre internships were formulated to enable MMUF graduates to advance to postgraduate study through a mentored work-study programme. The MMUF programme fits in with the developmental and equity focus of the UCT Writing Centre, where we aim to develop future academics who are attuned to the academic literacy practices of their disciplines.

I have argued that writing centres need to be grounded in critical discourses in order to understand individual cases and institutional practices. It is also important for writing centres in South Africa to engage with our history of remediation and to redefine our practice theoretically. Hence, it is important to develop a common theoretical basis through the training of consultants. Wenger argues that if a community of practice lacks the ability to reflect, it becomes “hostage to its own history” (230). As a community at UCT Writing Centre, we are working on developing a common language to talk about teaching, learning and writing processes. This “shared repertoire” (Wenger 229) is actively encouraged through regular meetings, common theoretical readings which are used to theorize our practice, and our routines of operating and reporting. Reflections from the consultants attest to how our community of practice has led to the transformation of their academic identities as postgraduate students and educators, the development of their academic research and writing practices, as well as the development of their pedagogy (Lewanika and Archer). This rehearsal of “life as an academic” in our Writing Centre has, since 2000, produced 9 academic appointments in a range of departments at various tertiary institutions. We hope that the ‘rehearsal space’ of our Writing Centre primed these individuals for academia and that we have had some, even if minor, impact on the teaching practices in the realms in which these former consultants now operate. In this way, writing centres could facilitate equity appointments in institutions of higher education in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

In most South African tertiary institutions, there is increasing diversity in terms of language, culture and educational preparedness within the student population. Finding ways of designing interventions to accommodate and harness this diversity is becoming critical. Effective teaching of writing involves a dialogue between the culture and discourses of academia and those of students, offering students from disadvantaged backgrounds an empowering and critical experience, not just bridges to established norms. Writing centres can play a central role in this endeavour through their unique positioning in the institution, their demonstrated ability to create coherent communities of researchers and writers, and their interdisciplinary nature. The latter needs to be reconstructed as a strength rather than a weakness as writing centres have the capacity to bridge disciplines in a common search for the most effective methods to instruct students. ♦

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ASIAN GROUP MEETS

At the 2007 Symposium on Second Language Writing in Nagoya, Japan, between September 15-17, 2007, there were several presentations on writing centers in Asia and a special meeting to consider forming an Asian Writing/Learning Center group. Around 16 people came to the special meeting. Many were people interested in creating a writing/learning center. In addition, there were instructors (administrators?) from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan with writing/learning centers that are operating. We have formed a listserv to exchange ideas, and we will see what our next steps are! If anyone is connected with a writing/learning center in Asia please contact Scott Johnston, johnston@wilmina.ac.jp. Also, if anyone is interested in the current state of writing centers in East Asia, please contact Scott Johnston, Osaka Jogakuin College, 2-26-54 Tamatsukuri, Chuo-ku, Osaka, Japan 540-0004 <<http://www.wilmina.ac.jp>>.



LIST OF TUTOR TRAINING COURSES AVAILABLE

In the fall of 2007, over 40 faculty and administrators responded to a query posted on both the WCenter and WPA-L (Writing Program Administrator) listservs for information on tutor-training courses and alternatives. Respondents were asked simply to name their institution, any courses or alternatives where their tutors were trained, the number of contact hours, and the estimated enrollment. The results are compiled in a Microsoft Word document available at <<http://tinyurl.com/yp4sl2>> or by request from J. Paul Johnson, Professor of English, Winona (MN) State University, at pjohnson@winona.edu.

TAKE NOTE

MID-ATLANTIC WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals
April 12, 2008
Philadelphia, PA
"Liberty and Literacy"

Proposals for individual presentations (15 minutes), panel presentations (45 minutes), roundtable discussions (45 minutes), and poster presentations are welcome. Proposals are due by Friday, Jan. 4. To submit a proposal, please download a copy of the proposal form and e-mail the completed proposal to MAWCA2008@temple.edu. Conference Web site: < <http://faculty.mc3.edu/hhalbert/MAWCA/2008/CFP.html>>. For further information, contact Lori Salem: 215-204-0709; e-mail: lori.salem@temple.edu or Dan Gallagher: 215-204-0705; e-mail: dagallag@temple.edu.

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A MOMENT OF OBJECTIVITY IN THE WRITING TUTORIAL

◆ *Julia Pond*

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As a graduate student in a university writing studio located in a city center, I sit down everyday with students of all ages, from all disciplines, and of all ethnicities. However different these writers may seem, though, I have often observed a distinct personality type repeatedly emerge among them. This writer approaches the table timidly and often grimaces when asked to share her paper. Although it can be difficult to draw this type of student into animated conversation about her writing, she often embodies a deep desire to improve and to learn the weaknesses that disable her. With each student, however, the tutor's job remains the same. We provide the student with a pair of fresh eyes and a novel approach to expressing an idea or reworking a difficult sentence; we offer a more experienced audience that can engage and respond to the writer's process and thoughts. My frequent struggle during these tutorials is in guiding students to a place where they can recognize their own problem areas no matter what personality barriers we must overcome. A truly successful moment for me occurs when these students achieve even fleeting objectivity in considering their texts. This moment, however brief, embodies the first step the student takes toward becoming a stronger writer.

I consider the moment of objectivity to be the first time a student writer independently realizes the nature of her writing weakness. In this moment, a student has genuine insight into viewing the present text objectively and in relation to other writers' texts. Briefly, a student gains distance from the product and achieves clarity in his or her purpose. At this point, the student writer and tutor have the same vision: at last, the student sees what I see as a critical reader. A tutor might recognize the crucial moment in her student's wry smile or sudden silence; at times, the moment of objectivity can appear as the writer's eyes widen when she re-reads with renewed understanding. A particular student writer that experienced this awakening before me was working on a basic expository essay for her freshman composition course. I recognized a significant disconnect between her thesis and her body paragraphs; she had left the reader to make connections between the paper's ideas without explicitly crafting those connections herself. The first time I questioned how one of her ideas related to her thesis, the writer sat quietly for a moment, thinking, then admitted her missing transitions and explained that she lacked connections throughout her paper. The student then gathered her belongings and told me that she knew now what her paper needed. She left having glimpsed her product anew, and this objectivity allowed her to proceed in her revision process independently. This experience raises the question, how exactly can writing tutors kindle the self-discovery and facilitate the awakening that results from a moment of objectivity in more students more often?

In order to assist students in achieving this beneficial goal, tutors must strive to create autonomous student writers. At Georgia State, our writing studio employs a conversational method, modeled on the theories of Anne Ruggles Gere and Kenneth Bruffee, to impart to students their own personal responsibility for their texts and to engage their active participation in our dialogue. Through conversation, we spend time discussing students' writing processes rather than the specific papers at hand. This departure from the physical text helps students consider their larger bodies of work rather than limiting themselves to the inspection of a single paper. Ideally, as a tutor and a student form a long-term relationship and find the time to dwell more closely on individual papers, the student learns to see her work through the eyes of her tutor. By repeatedly pointing out the same weak habits in text after text, tutors hope to implant their voices into the writer's head so that she hears our criticisms and suggestions in our absence. During my first semester as a writing tutor, I formed a relationship with an ESL student who scheduled weekly appointments with me. This student was working toward a Master's

degree in Music Education, and her weaknesses dealt largely with clarity, as she already displayed strength in organization and development. Although it took a few appointments for us to become familiar with each other, she quickly became capable of anticipating my criticisms and suggestions as we read through her essays. Half way through the semester, I would only have to pause in reading or point to a sentence for her to find the problem that I had noticed. By the end of the semester, she rarely came to the writing studio anymore because she had learned to read her paper objectively, on her own, with confidence.

Personally, I find success in leading students to objectivity with careful questioning. By asking questions, I position myself as an interested yet uninformed audience, creating audience awareness and allowing the student to realize the essay's own ambiguities. For example, with the freshman student that I mentioned above, rather than directly state, "this paragraph's idea does not connect to your thesis. You need a stronger topic sentence, and you need to explain to your reader how this paragraph supports your argument," I questioned her as to how the paragraph related to her larger topic and where the essay stated that relation. By questioning instead of stating, a tutor leaves the thinking and the responsibility in the student's hands; when the student finds that she can not answer a question, she realizes what her paper lacks. Although tutors often employ conversation and questions in their tutoring sessions, the goal behind the questions changes when working toward student objectivity. With this purpose in mind, tutors can question larger issues, subtly driving student writers toward objectivity in all their writing instead of simply the paper at hand. Therefore, working toward objectivity involves a mental shift for tutors instead of a change in tutoring strategy. Of course, every tutoring session differs so that no set of questions or conversational pattern will magically bring about objectivity, but with this intent, tutors can shape their questions depending on the student and her personal writing difficulties. I wanted to draw my freshman writer to a place where she could not answer my questions from within her essay because only then was she able to perceive the essay's missing elements. Tutors can ask such questions as, "I understand your verbal explanation, but can you show me where you make that connection in the paper?" or "So how does this idea connect to the thesis?" The questioning must depend on the particular student's problem areas, but by revealing these areas through inquisition and then following up with, "Can you find any other examples of this problem in your paper?" tutors allow students to feel that they have helped locate the weakness themselves and can further identify reoccurrences independently. By leading students to the exact places their papers lose coherence or where they fault in logic, tutors reveal to writers where the argument breaks down.

Instead of developing objectivity for themselves, some student writers come to depend on the tutor's objectivity, leaving themselves with a feeling of desperation when they are unable to work with the tutor. As the tutor helps the student recognize her errors, the student can come to believe that this recognition is not possible without the tutor's presence. Only a careful and honest approach to conversation with the student can help boost the student writer's confidence and launch her toward autonomy. This situation developed with my Music Education student as she believed that she could not recognize her confusing sentences and lack of clarity without my presence. Although it took most of a semester to convince her of her strengthening ability, I slowly asked less pointed questions and more often asked, "what do you think?" so that she grew to depend on her own intuition. Once writers are faced with their weaknesses, it often takes time to rebuild their confidence in their writing, but dependency can be avoided by patient tutor guidance.

Although I hope to help students begin to see their writing objectively, sustained objectivity remains difficult to obtain for even the most experienced writers. Successful authors still face extensive revision processes by editors because of the continual improvement necessary in achieving objectivity. As a freshman undergraduate English major at the University of Georgia, I received grades on papers that I could not understand—why could I not earn A's on everything I wrote? What was wrong with

TAKE NOTE

NORTHEAST WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals
April 12-13, 2008
Burlington, VT
"CTRL/ALT/DEL"

Keynote Speakers: Anne Ellen Geller,
Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg
Carroll, and Elizabeth Boquet

Ctrl/Alt/Del is a combination of computer keystrokes used to restart an operating system. NEWCA is using Ctrl/Alt/Del and its distinct components control, alternative, and delete as rhetorical frames for examining writing center research and practices.

Proposal Guidelines

Please prepare a 250- to 500-word proposal and a 75-word abstract for either a 20-minute individual presentation or a 75-minute panel/roundtable.

Proposal Deadline: December 31, 2007, either electronically or by mail to the chair of the NEWCA Proposal Reading Committee, Pat Morelli, at pmorelli@hartford.edu. Mailed submissions should be sent to: Pat Morelli, Director, Center for Reading and Writing, University of Hartford, 200 Bloomfield Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06117.

If you need more information about submitting proposals, please contact Pat Morelli at pmorelli@hartford.edu or (860) 768-4139. For more information about the conference, registration, or scholarship opportunities, visit the NEWCA Web site at <http://www.newca-conference.com/>. For more information about the conference site, visit the University of Vermont Web site at www.uvm.edu.

my writing? It was not until my sophomore year that a Teaching Assistant suggested that I spend some time at the university's Writing Center. Here, I worked with him first, to identify my own weaknesses, second, to learn how to recognize them in each paper I wrote, and third, to spend time specifically strengthening my weak areas. Through regular appointments with him during which we addressed rhetorical issues, through workshops offered by the department on grammatical topics, and through hard work on my own, I brought my writing in line with the grades I desired. It was this TA who introduced me to my own writing style, helping me to move toward greater objectivity. Since that year, I have sought out external opinions on my texts because each new paper forces me to start the process of gaining objectivity all over again. But most importantly, I am now aware of the process and am familiar with my personal difficulties in writing. Tutors must help students begin this process while explaining that objectivity will probably remain a life-long writing goal.

Achieving a single moment of objectivity during a tutoring session leaves the student proud, hopeful, motivated, and enlightened, while the tutor feels useful. This tutoring goal, therefore, proves mutually helpful. Objective revision remains the most important tool in creating clear products and practicing good editing of both rhetorical gaps and surface errors; once a basic writer experiences the triumphant emotions associated with distanced evaluation, she increases her chances for creating clear, concise, understandable products while improving her writing process and enhancing her understanding of audience. The difficulty in our job arises when we attempt to teach students the objectivity that we, as experienced writers, still struggle for ourselves. How do we remain objective in the presence of our own writing, and how do we teach students objectivity when we do not always achieve it ourselves? I think that by aligning our tutoring strategies of questioning and conversation with a mental goal of objectivity, tutors will guide their students to weak places within the texts, revealing to the students the problems within their writing. With this revelation, student writers have a better chance of remaining within this awareness to create clearer, more audience-sensitive prose while becoming acquainted with themselves as writers. Simultaneously, tutors reinforce this process while practicing it with their students so that they may more successfully apply it to their own writing. In this way, tutoring in objectivity can prove to be a mutually beneficial process. ♦

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TAKE NOTE

INDABA

Call for Contributions
University of the Western Cape
Feb. 14, 2008
Capetown, South Africa
*"Writing Centre Praxis:
Conversations about Pragmatics,
Diversity, and Inclusiveness."*

Participants are invited to join an Indaba celebrating International Writing Centres Week 2008. The Writing Centres' Indaba will be in the Library Auditorium, Central Campus, University of the Western Cape. Contributions on the theme are invited and may be 30-minute presentations, role-plays, or demonstrations or 60-minute workshops. If you wish to participate in the conversations, please submit an abstract of approximately 150 words to the organizers, e-mail: writingcentre@uwc.ac.za by Friday, Nov. 30, 2007. Please include the word "Abstract" in the subject line of your e-mail. For more information, contact Fatima Slemming (fslemming@uwc.ac.za) or Margaret Robyn (mrobyn@uwc.ac.za); tel.: 021-959-2390/2404.

USING ROCS TO INFORM NEW TRAINING METHODS FOR A "GROWING" OWL

◆ *Rusty Carpenter*
University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL

The UCF University Writing Center (UWC) is a "full-service" writing center where graduate and undergraduate students come for help with all types of writing, both personal and academic, from all disciplines. During the fall 2005 semester, we began a pilot program—KnightOWL (named for our school's mascot, the Knight)—for online consultations. Graduate consultants worked with a variety of graduate students from a variety of disciplines on their theses and dissertations via the online environment throughout the fall semester. In piloting KnightOWL, our goal was for consultants to continue to focus on "global" issues during the online chats, although we knew that many other successful OWLs use asynchronous methods for reviewing papers and that the online environment would pose unique challenges for writing consultants.

As the fall semester progressed, we were able to collect data that would help us draw conclusions about training consultants to work online via KnightOWL. Although KnightOWL is in its infancy, we have successfully expanded our online services to all of UCF's 47,000 students, including those on regional and specialty campuses. Like KnightOWL itself, this study is in its infancy; however, we plan to use the figures presented here to provide direction as we help writing consultants embrace synchronous online consultations.

KNIGHTOWL'S DEVELOPMENT AND RECORD KEEPING

The UWC began its KnightOWL program with a customized WebCT platform, which provided chat space within four consultation "rooms." Consultants and writers met at a scheduled appointment time in a pre-determined room. As we began to offer more online consultations, we moved to LivePerson, a corporate platform designed for more secure synchronous online chats. LivePerson offers more advanced data collection and technical features (LivePerson). Although LivePerson records all synchronous chats, consultants write their feedback on the online Record of Consultation (RoC). The online RoC is still a paper form and serves as the primary record of the consultation. KnightOWL online RoCs, similar to those used in face-to-face (f2f) consultations, are the primary record of written communication between consultant and writer. Consultants write substantial feedback on the RoC so students can refer to it while revising.

DISCOURSE IN THE UWC

I conducted an informal discourse analysis, which looked at the feedback that consultants note on their online RoCs and f2f RoCs. I began the study by asking if the discourse between consultant and writer shifts from a more supportive, peer-to-peer discourse to a more directive, instructive discourse when providing feedback on online RoCs compared to f2f RoCs. My aim in pursuing this question is to learn how to effectively train consultants to provide global peer-to-peer feedback in their new online environment. In conducting this study, I tested the assumption that the feedback offered by consultants on online RoCs will naturally be more directive, rather than supportive, because of the lack of face-to-face interaction that consultants are accustomed to. In analyzing the feedback offered by consultants on RoCs, especially online RoCs, we can learn a great deal about consulting

tendencies in the online medium and how these tendencies either support or contradict UWC practices for f2f consultations. Through documenting the differences in face-to-face discourse versus online discourse in online RoCs, we hope to develop more extensive training methods for online consultations.

I collected feedback samples from RoCs completed by consultants during face-to-face consultations and online consultations during the initial two months of piloting our program. I gathered thirty f2f RoCs and thirty online RoCs at random and tallied discourse markers (adapted from a previous study on gender and discourse in the UWC) in several categories, including advice language, excitability, nonessentials, numerals, factuality, and second-person address (Hubbard and Rubin and Greene).

DISCOURSE MARKERS AND FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE IN F2F ROCS

Consultants provide global feedback about students' papers on the f2f RoC, a two-ply form with fields for student information, signatures, and most importantly, the consultant's feedback. The consultant completes the RoC during the consultation, while discussing the paper with the student. At the end of the consultation, the consultant gives the student a copy of the form, and the consultant retains the other half for UWC files. I tallied six recurring discourse markers in f2f RoCs:

- Advice language
- Excitability
- Nonessentials
- Numerals
- Factuality
- Second-person address

Each discourse marker reveals a little bit about the consultant's feedback. Although some markers tell us more than others, each marker is significant. Advice language typically came in the form of a recommendation, like "Consider . . ." and "Try. . . ." The consultant would use advice language to suggest a possible solution to an issue that was discussed in the paper. Consultants used excitability in the form of exclamation points, underlines, and circles. For example, a consultant might circle an important suggestion or underline an important idea. This way, when the student goes back to revise, he or she will consider the most critical feedback first. Excitability could prove important if the paper was due soon and the student had little time to revise. When consultants used excitability in the form of exclamation points, they typically wanted to connect to the student as a friend or peer. Nonessentials were used frequently in the form of parentheses and dashes. These forms of punctuation are commonly used to include extraneous information, as in "formatting (see page 1)" or "formatting (bulleted list)." Consultants used numerals to show points of interest, similar to a visual cue, or to show process (step 1, step 2, etc.). On several occasions, consultants used factuality on their f2f RoCs. Factuality typically came in the form of a reference to a style manual, an example of a citation entry, or a grammatical rule, although this occurred much less frequently in f2f RoCs than online RoCs. Consultants also used second-person address to refer to the student, as in "explain further how you used. . . ."

ANALYSIS OF MARKERS FROM FACE-TO-FACE ROCS

Consultants logged more excitability, nonessentials, numerals, and second-person addresses on f2f RoCs. Interestingly, f2f RoCs showed only two instances of factuality and four instances of advice language. Defined informally, factuality is the use of a "black-and-white" rule during a consultation, a rule that the consultant looks up in a handbook. Advice language encourages the student to pursue the consultant's advice. Consultants have

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DIRECTOR OF WRITING CENTER EXCELLENCE MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

The English Department at Montclair State University invites applications to fill an associate or full professor position to develop and direct the University's new Center for Writing Excellence. Expertise in composition/rhetoric and writing center theory and practice, and/or related field. With primary responsibility for developing and implementing a new university-wide Center for Writing Excellence at an institution committed to changing the culture of writing on campus, the successful candidate will maintain an active research agenda and teach 1/1, with opportunity to join colleagues in comp/rhetoric and teacher education to teach graduate courses in Writing Studies and undergraduate courses in teacher education and first year writing.

QUALIFICATIONS: PhD and strong record of scholarship and an active and evolving research agenda in composition/rhetoric or related field; administrative success in writing centers, and first year writing and/or WAC/WID; grant seeking/writing experience; record of excellence in teaching composition/rhetoric.

Salary dependent on qualifications. Starting date: 09/01/08. Send letter of application, CV, and three letters of recommendation to Professor Dan Bronson, Chair, English Department, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, V-F19, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ 07043.

Initial interviews will be held at the December MLA meeting or via phone. Montclair State University is an AA/EOE institution <<http://www.montclair.edu>>.

APPLY BY November 16, 2007.

a great deal of practice in the face-to-face mode and are familiar with the resources at their disposal, like handouts and manuals, and consultants readily incorporate these in-house resources into their consultations. Most importantly, though, consultants go through several days of extensive training for face-to-face consultations before they work with their first writer. However, during f2f consultations, much of the communication is verbal—consultants and students express ideas in informal (but professional) conversations.

DISCOURSE MARKERS AND FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE IN KNIGHTOWL ROCS

Each consultant also uses an online RoC for KnightOWL online consultations, which offers fields for writer information, demographic information, and ample space for the consultant to write feedback. The online RoC, like the f2f RoC, is a paper form, although it is intended for use in online consultations. Consultants have different preferences for using the online RoC, but most prefer to include important suggestions as they are discussed during the session, similar to f2f sessions. Upon request, the consultant either faxes or e-mails a copy of the online RoC to the student at the conclusion of the consultation. I tallied five recurring discourse markers in online RoCs.

Looking at online RoCs, consultants logged high numbers of numerals, as in face-to-face RoCs, which typically indicated some sort of process or simply served as a visual cue. Consultants also used excitability and nonessentials. Finally, and most importantly, consultants used factuality more frequently in online RoCs (fifteen instances) than in f2f RoCs (two instances), and they used advice language more frequently in online RoCs (twenty instances) than f2f RoCs (four instances). It is also interesting to note that consultants logged only one instance of second-person address in online RoCs. Consultants typically use a second-person address to appeal to the student as a peer. It is surprising that consultants tallied quite high numbers of second-person address in f2f RoCs and only one instance in online RoCs. Perhaps this is because consultants felt that they needed to direct the student to information as opposed to encouraging the student to explore ideas by noting them on the RoC using the informal second-person.

ANALYSIS OF MARKERS FROM ONLINE ROCS

I have defined and discussed the discourse markers analyzed for this study. It is important to note that advice language and factuality were much more prevalent in online RoCs than f2f RoCs. Perhaps this is because consultants are accounting for the lack of physical space where they can use non-verbal cues and body language. The online environment relies on textual elements, and the physical body is absent from the consultation. The consultant may feel compelled to use more directive discourse in order to convey ideas about the student's work. It's not surprising that the consultant may try to account for a lack of physical presence by using advice language and factuality on the RoC. In a sense, the consultant creates identity (and meaning) "solely through text," as Cameron Bailey claims (336). The RoC serves as the primary record of the consultation; therefore, the consultant may feel compelled to provide feedback that will direct the student as opposed to more open-ended feedback, like posing a question.

FACTUALITY AND ADVICE LANGUAGE IN ONLINE ROCS

The frequency of factuality apparent in online RoCs and the infrequency of second-person address could mean many different things. The drastic increase of factuality instances could be attributed to the consultant's insecurity in the new online environment; hence, the consultant relies on facts. It could also be attributed to the online medium. In face-to-face consultations, consultants are able to communicate through both verbal and non-verbal (body) language. Online, non-verbal cues are nonexistent. The consultant must depend on the power of the text—the written word in the chat box. Consultants, therefore, may feel obligated to tell the student what he or she "should do" because they feel that the chat offers limited options for expression. While working in this online environment, perhaps the consultant

is more focused on delivering information than on fostering a true peer-to-peer relationship with the student, which might explain the lack of second-person address in the online RoCs.

Providing “global” peer feedback in this new online environment will no doubt be a challenge, at least until consultants are more formally trained. Based on this analysis of RoCs, feedback in online consultations appears more directive than the global peer-to-peer feedback that we discuss so often for f2f consultations. We cannot blame the consultant for offering more directive feedback online, although this situation presents potential challenges. In order to understand consultant feedback in online consultations, we must explore options for training consultants to provide global, supportive feedback in the online environment. For us, this begins with analyzing feedback through RoCs. The feedback on RoCs will allow us to develop new innovative training practices for online consultations in order to adapt to the purely text-based world of online consultations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING CONSULTANTS TO WORK ONLINE

Without a doubt, the online environment will continue to offer challenges. To help consultants adapt to their new environment, we will consider formal training and workshopping. In order to prepare consultants to work effectively online, we have taken several measures:

- Consultants schedule an online appointment and have an online consultation in KnightOWL as part of a professional development project to practice developing a friendly, honest, and productive online dialogue, similar to the approach that Kastman Breuch and Racine advocate (250).
- Consultants engage in readings about peer review in virtual environments.
- Consultants engage in online discussions via WTalk (the UWC’s online chat forum) about their KnightOWL experiences, addressing points of confusion in the process and concerns.
- Consultants engage in two one-hour focus group sessions to discuss their online consulting experiences and the tools, technologies, and resources that will help streamline online consultations.
- Consultants watch a synchronous online chat between two experienced consultants during training and discuss online personae.

As we expand our online consultations in future semesters, we plan to implement several new training measures, including:

- developing a peer mentoring program for consultants who work online.
- exploring standard practices for beginning and ending online consultations, similar to those described by Barbara Monroe (3).
- considering the implications of “initial dialogue prompts” (Kastman Breuch and Racine 250).

The online environment inherently provides a more individualized space than the f2f environment. In f2f sessions, consultants work with students one-on-one in a large room. Consultants often learn from hearing other consultations and trying new strategies that other consultants use. In the online environment, consultants are forced to apply their training without the luxury of listening to their peers. It may be a good idea for consultants working online to re-visit their chat transcript or online RoC once the consultation is over—like listening to a recording of a f2f consultation. This may be a way for consultants to provide constructive criticism to each other and for administrators to assess the consultant’s progress.

KNIGHTOWL’S PROMISING FUTURE AT UCF

Our efforts to expand KnightOWL have been greatly rewarded. After piloting KnightOWL for ten months, the UWC caught the attention of administrators, including the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) team. The UWC became an integral part of the QEP’s “Information Fluency” initiative, which bolstered KnightOWL funding. Administrators embraced KnightOWL and have given us great hope for its future. As

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WRITING CENTER DIRECTOR EARLHAM COLLEGE

Earlham College seeks a motivated, independent individual for a part-time administrative faculty position of Writing Center Director. This job is a 10-month job for approx. 20 hours/week, starting in early August and continuing through late May. Earlham is re-creating its Writing Center as a larger center that reaches more students. We plan to open the new Center in January 2008. The Writing Center Director will be responsible for developing and running the center, for hiring and training tutors, and for leading some faculty development around teaching writing. The successful candidate will work closely with the Director of the Center for Academic Enrichment and will report to the Associate Academic Dean. The Writing Center has funding for three years and then will be re-evaluated; therefore, the job will include planning and carrying out assessment.

A Master’s degree in Rhetoric or Composition is required for this position; PhD or progress toward the PhD is optimal. Previous related experience is highly desired. This job requires good organizational skills, excellent interpersonal and communication skills. The starting date is as soon as possible. To apply, please send a CV, personal interest statement, and three letters of reference to:

Kari Kalve
Associate Academic Dean
Earlham College, Drawer 112
801 National Road West
Richmond, IN 47374

Review of applications will begin immediately and the search will remain open until the position is filled.

we train consultants to hold consultations in this new space, we also hope to create an appreciation for the online consultation. Our goal in expanding KnightOWL is not to replace the face-to-face consultation, but more to explore and expand the capabilities of virtual writing spaces. Kastman Breuch and Racine claim that if we “continuously compare online writing centers to face-to-face centers, online writing centers will always come up short. When we appreciate the capabilities of online spaces, we are most likely to thrive there” (258). We cannot simply transfer f2f training methods to online consultations. It is likely that our f2f training methods will, in fact, come up short in text-based online environments. However, a brief analysis of RoCs shows us that perhaps we need to develop online consulting strategies by integrating innovative training techniques into our existing programs that will help consultants provide global feedback online as they do in f2f consultations. By exploring the possibilities of online consultations and focusing our efforts on training as a way to realize KnightOWL’s potential, we hope to learn to “appreciate” our new online writing space, and we hope that our students also appreciate this new resource. ♦

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COLLABORATIVE CONUNDRUMS

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dent actually sits down next to a tutor and they must work together to improve a piece of writing. In a sense, those questions cannot ultimately lead a tutor to a formulaic, provable path to “helping” a student with his or her paper, nor can a tutor telepathically learn what is important to that student. The purpose of the writing center, although it seems unnecessary to say, is to help students. The often invisible blockade to helping, though, is the overlooked step by the tutor to find out from the student what he or she thinks “help” is. If a tutor tries to treat a paper simply like words on a page and has a predetermined concept of what that paper should be like, the student does not benefit. However, if that variable of subjective “help” is found by working together, students will be more eager to improve their writing, will better understand academic writing, and will be more confident about their skills. ♦

TUTOR'S COLUMN

COLLABORATIVE CONUNDRUMS

◆ *Joseph Mangino*
Marist College
Poughkeepsie, NY

“No introduction? That’s what he said? You’re sure?”

“Absolutely sure. He told us to just jump right into the material. Sorry.”

I looked away, speechless, from the student sitting next to me, a senior, majoring in business administration. My eyes drifted down to the table surface where his ten-page rough draft sat, my face distorted with confusion and discomfort. The piece was abundant with solid sentence structure, organized paragraphs, and timely citations. It wasn’t even due for another two weeks. It was April, so by this time, as a student intern in the Marist College Writing Center, I had already been meeting with concerned, diligent students for months. Until this day, at least one of two things always happened before the student I tutored walked out the door. Sometimes the student and I worked on specific passages or paragraphs together, yielding a clearer thesis or support system, for example. Other times, the student and I reviewed the professor’s instructions together and constructed an outline on the best way to achieve the stated requirements with regard to the student’s topic. Whether we tried to improve their writing in a broader, theoretical fashion or a specific, concrete one, the basics of college-level writing were clearer in the students’ heads when they left. In other words, something was always improved—nothing was compromised (except maybe their free time). The feeling I had when the business major told me his professor specifically wanted no introduction was alarming. Admittedly, I hadn’t a clue as to how to handle his situation. The only thing I knew was that something about the writing center process, in some way, was going to be compromised.

With this realization came the contemplation of what my exact goal was, as a tutor. It goes without saying that every tutor reads a paper differently and that, ultimately, no two people will have the exact same recommendation for any student. Indeed, as they say, the more eyes one can have look at one’s paper, the better. With this said, I instantly support the idea that a tutor should make judgments and suggestions based on his or her understanding of what makes a strong piece. But certainly, as I gained experience as a tutor, I quickly realized that a center should not be a place where students bring their papers to see what I, one tutor, think of it. The student and tutor should work together with the professor’s guidelines and hopefully yield not only a stronger writing effort, but also a better and clearer understanding, on the student’s part, of good writing. This is all quite basic. Simply put: As I sat with the business student and his paper, I no longer knew what my role was as a tutor. Was I supposed to tell him to add an introduction because that is how academic writing works? Or was I supposed to overlook this gaping hole in his paper simply because the professor claimed to have wanted it that way, blatantly ignoring everything I had been taught in my years of schooling? In other words, was I expected to resign my subjectivity to his paper or give my honest opinion?

As I contemplated this, I realized I was opening up Pandora’s Box. New questions starting swirling about in my head: Am I supposed to be helping the student get a better grade, straightaway, or helping him or her become what I think is a better writer? Furthermore, what does the student want? Why is the student there, in the Writing Center, as opposed to a basic proofreading service (also offered on campus)? At some point, I had to say something to this student. And so, I have to admit, I suggested that he amend a small introduction at the beginning of his paper to orient his readers with his subject. He and I worked together to form an opening paragraph that, while free of statistics and obscure terms, was not too broad or theoretical in structure. I explained the importance of framing the subject for his readers and pointing out his thesis or objective. He agreed, but was understandably cautious about waiting too long to get to the bulk of his research. We jotted and tweaked three or four sentences needed to end up with what we knew was a winning paper. He was genuinely excited with the finished product and understood why I suggested the introduction, and I couldn’t have been happier to help someone in such a collaborative way.

As the student left, I realized that all the questions I had been asking myself, while important, were secondary to one thing: that collaborative act of exchanging input and ideas about the student’s paper. Questions can only take a tutor so far. The entire situation changes when a stu-

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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

Nov. 9-10, 2007: Athens International Writing Centers, in Athens, Greece

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

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

Contact: Deborah H. Reese: reesedeb@mail.armstrong.edu; 912-921-2329. Conference Web site: <<http://www.llp.armstrong.edu/swca/swca2008cfp.html>>.

Feb. 14, 2008: University of the Western Cape, in Capetown, SA

Contact: Fatima Slemming at fslemming@uwc.ac.za or Margaret Robyn at mrobyn@uwc.ac.za.

March 6-8, 2007: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Norman OK

Contact: Michele Eodice at meodice@ou.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://www.ou.edu/writingcenter/scwca08>>.

April 11-12, 2008: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Columbus, OH

Contact: Doug Dangler: dangler.6@osu.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://www.ecwca.org>>.

April 12, 2008: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Philadelphia, PA

Contact: Lori Salem: lori.salem@temple.edu or Dan Gallagher: dagallag@temple.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://faculty.mc3.edu/hhalbert/MAWCA/2008/CFP.html>>.

April 12-13, 2008: NorthEast Writing Centers Association, in Burlington, VT

Contact: Michelle Cox: michelle.cox@bridgew.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://www.newca-conference.com/>>.

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

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

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

Contact: Charlene Hirschi: chirschi@english.usu.edu or Claire Hughes: clairehughes@weber.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://departments.weber.edu/writingcenter/IWCA.htm>>.



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