

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E E T T E R

Volume 35, Number 2

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

October, 2010

– FROM THE EDITOR –

Now that the first hectic days of the new academic year begin to slow down (a bit), the October issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* offers you articles to read and reflect on, and perhaps there are some ideas that might be adapted to your center. For example, Matthew Klauza describes a tutor training program that pairs new tutors with experienced tutors to serve as their mentors. Then Jackie Grutsch McKinney, in her “Geek in the Center” column introduces us to a website designed to energize us to write 750 words a day. And for a future column, she’ll explain how Twitter works and whether tweeting to and from the writing center can expand the center’s reach.

Teagan Decker advocates for overtly acknowledging and welcoming basic writing students into the writing center. And Ryan Kim reflects on his experiences in overcoming stereotypes and how they influenced his perspective on students he has worked with.

Finally, some news for the future: in order to assure continued publication and no increases in subscription rates, *WLN* will be moving to a bi-monthly publication—a necessary step given everyone’s strained budgets and imminent postal rate increases. We’ll let you know our new calendar shortly.

For those of us who will be convening in Baltimore in a few weeks for the combined International Writing Centers Association Conference and the Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference, travel safely! We’ll see you by the harbor.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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TUTOR TRAINING COMES FULL CIRCLE: FROM E-MAIL TO PRACTICUM AND BACK AGAIN

◆ Matthew D. Klauza
Auburn University
Auburn, AL

The effectiveness of tutor training often depends on timing. Training early in the semester may require an anticipation of—or even conjecture over—what issues may occur. Training late in the semester can result in more reflection and hindsight than preparation. Furthermore, tutor training can easily become a how-to program that overlooks two key facts: one, all tutors are different; each arrives with a range of abilities, and two, tutors are people with emotional concerns about their new roles, especially their worries.¹ At our Writing Center at Auburn University, we have created what we believe to be an effective solution: an e-mail-based mentor program that provides feedback and support throughout the semester. This program not only prepares our tutors with the skills necessary to do their job but also develops the sense of confidence necessary to do their job more effectively.

Critical work on the connections between writing center tutor training and mentor programs is limited. Karen Rowan has recognized the lack of scholarly “focus on the methodology of mentorship” (15) for writing centers. Furthermore, she has argued that despite the personal nature of mentorships, there is a noticeable lack of focus on affective development in the scholarship on mentor programs (17). As Rowan’s empirical data show,

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Editor: Muriel Harris
(harrism@purdue.edu)
Assoc. Editors: Michael Mattison
(mmattison@wittenberg.edu)
Janet Auten
(jauten@american.edu)

Managed and Produced by
The RiCH Company, LLC
Richard C. Hay, Founder and CEO
260 E. Highland Ave. MH700
Milwaukee, WI 53202
www.therichco.com
1-888-348-6182

<www.writinglabnewsletter.org>
support@writinglabnewsletter.org

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Manuscripts: Before sending in submissions, please consult the guidelines on the *WLN* website. Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format. Please send as attached files in an e-mail to submission@writinglabnewsletter.org.

writing center directors and graduate students value “support and encourage[ment]” in mentorships (28); however, as her research demonstrates, the importance of “one-to-one, social interactions” remains under-appreciated (28). Perhaps the most thorough exposition of a tutor training program appears in Elizabeth Boquet’s *Noise from the Writing Center*. Boquet describes the program at Rhode Island College, in which experienced and new tutors undergo a summer training program, then maintain a notebook of reflections throughout the year. While there is certainly merit to such an approach, and while this particular program addresses some of the tougher theoretical questions surrounding writing and tutoring, the training is conducted mainly well in advance of actual tutoring and fails to address more practical concerns of the tutors. *The St. Martin’s Source Book for Writing Tutors*, edited by Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood, while thorough in addressing practical matters for tutors, contains little mention of tutor training or mentor programs. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, too, overlooks what could be a valuable resource: tutor mentoring.

The mentoring program we have developed relies on a close relationship between a well-established mentorship program and a consultant-driven practicum. The information our new tutors share with their mentors is relayed anonymously to the writing center’s assistant coordinator,² who uses the information in our weekly practicum. This training program is circular; it relies on our tutors for input and feedback in order to provide the most relevant training needed, while the tutors’ needs are fulfilled by the training and support the program offers them. We encourage our new tutors to share with their mentors any concerns, issues, or unexpected events that arise, even (and especially) if they are emotional in nature. This approach allows for a custom-made, timely practicum that nurtures the whole person while it maximizes the personal relevance of tutor training.³

ESTABLISHING THE PROGRAM AND MENTOR ASSIGNMENTS

At the beginning of the academic year, we ask our returning tutors to volunteer to mentor incoming tutors. Although the benefits of a mentoring experience itself motivates many tutors to become mentors, we also offer our mentors a paid, one-hour weekly release from their tutoring duties, which makes the role more attractive for some. We select our mentors based on their experience, tutoring skills, and ability to nurture others, matching each with two to four new tutors. We make these appointments according to two criteria: like-status and the schedule. We do our best to match an incoming master’s student with an existing master’s student and likewise for undergraduate and Ph.D. students. We have found that this like-status and shared academic goals provide a common link in the mentor-mentee partnership and thus strengthens the pair’s relationship. In such matchups, tutors often feel comfortable enough to discuss their concerns in person as well as through e-mail. Our end-of-the-semester survey data shows that several new tutors have found comfort in working closely with someone they view as a peer. As one student wrote, “It has been great having a colleague to discuss issues and give me feedback.” We also use scheduling to pair our tutors; we ensure that our new tutors are working with their mentors for at least one hour per week in order to promote discussion and tutor-modeling.

Mentor-Mentee Communication

Before new tutors begin consulting, mentors make contact via e-mail to introduce themselves, discuss the program’s goals, outline what to expect, and explain the program is their own. It is tutor-centered and is designed to develop their skills and make them as comfortable as possible.

Once the semester has begun and consulting is underway, mentors continue to e-mail their mentees once per week, asking mentees to share their concerns and successes. For example, one mentor wrote this note:

Hey All!

How did the English Center go last week? Was it really busy with a lot of World Lit students? That is how mine was, so I finally got to read something different than a personal essay. How was it to work with World Lit students? Do you think it is more challenging or easier [than working with comp students]? How are teachers' assignment sheets? Have you been able to understand them? Any problems this week? How about any successes? Let me know if you have any questions! Have a great week!

By opening with the general and then moving to the specific, the mentor provides several opportunities for her mentees to discuss their concerns—professional or emotional. Such questions simulate a reflective approach to tutoring, forcing tutors to ask themselves, “How am I doing?”, “What am I learning?”, and “What do I need to learn?” Specific questions, such as the ones this mentor uses, provide us with direct feedback for planning topics or activities in our weekly training practicum, while general questions, like the ones she employs, provide the mentee with a safe and comfortable opportunity to express other concerns.

We feel that tutors' awareness of their successes is important for their affective and professional development. Sharing such high points also helps establish a community within our writing center. At their own discretion, the new tutors can share their successes publically in practicum, but we have found that even the act of privately sharing with their mentor proves nurturing.⁴ While the frequency of these e-mails certainly can be adapted for the needs of any individual writing center, we find that once per week is ideal. It balances the need for sustained communication and ongoing practicum-related professional development, allowing us to respond quickly to the tutors' needs.

Mentor-Coordinator Communication

In this program, we establish two lines of communication: contact between mentors and mentees, and correspondence between mentors and the assistant coordinator (see Figure 1 on p. 6). In the first line, the mentees are required to respond to their mentor's weekly email. Then in the second line, once the mentor hears back from his or her mentees, the mentor compiles the information and relays the new tutors' concerns, needs, and successes in a brief report to the assistant coordinator. Sample sections of mentor reports to the assistant coordinator follow:

#1: One [mentee] talked about how he/she liked many of the students, stating, “The students have all been really nice to me. I haven't had a single ‘problem’ kid.” This person also discussed the difficulty of working with an international student: “The hardest session I had was with the international student on Thursday night. It was difficult because I couldn't lead him with questions as I could most students. It seemed like I was having to be more directive than I normally would prefer to be. However, it wasn't that bad.”

Or another:

#2: [One mentee] had a success story that he/she wanted to share: “I have an awesome success story . . . though I felt bad because the conference ended up lasting about 45 minutes. But I kind of justified it to myself because every time I suggested something, the girl was having epiphanies. Literally. She had come in for drafting help, and help with determining her thesis argument. I started helping her with ideas (she was analyzing the movie *Blood Diamond*), and every time I pointed out something with her paper's organization, she had ideas about supporting evidence, thesis revisions, and about

“We tailor our tutor development to meet our tutors' emotional needs and tutoring abilities.”

possible real-world connections. It was pretty amazing to see, and I felt cool for being the facilitator. So, even though it lasted about 45 minutes, I'm sure she left the conference with an amazing beginning for her paper and awesome ideas for elaboration."

Occasionally, we get some humorous points in responses such as this part of a longer response:

#3: Could we get chewy chocolate chip cookies for the breakroom? I like the chunky/crunchy ones, but it would be nice to show our softer side.

The assistant coordinator then uses the information provided by the mentors to prepare our weekly, one-hour practicum sessions. We schedule these sessions at two separate times during the week to best accommodate our tutors' schedules.

Our weekly e-mails between mentees and mentors—and then from mentors to the assistant coordinator—expedite the training process; any concerns or issues that arise are addressed that same week. We set aside practicum time to discuss these issues as a group and brainstorm strategies with which to approach them. In fact, when asked in our survey what they liked best about the practicum, several of our tutors replied with a response similar to this one: "Learning about specific problems tutors were having. It helped me prepare for the same problems I might have." It seems that this approach is not only informational, but comforting to the new tutors by showing them they are not alone in encountering trouble spots. For example, in response to report #1 above, we addressed the tutor's nervousness over (and subsequent relief of) the fear of "mean" students, then shared strategies for working with international students. In addition, we requested that the University's ESL Program Director attend an upcoming practicum session, which we dedicated almost entirely to working with ESL students. (It should be noted that this visit is one that we schedule annually, but in this case we rescheduled the date of the visit to address the tutor's concern more promptly.) We also dedicated a few minutes in practicum to acknowledge that tutors were enjoying working with students.

Semester's End

At semester's end, our mentors send a closing e-mail to their mentees. This e-mail includes a thank you for sharing, a reflection on successes, praise for new consultants' abilities, and a review of what the mentor has learned through the mentorship experience. We find that this e-mail not only marks the mentorship's end—a kind of right-of-passage point at which the mentees are no longer regarded as such—but also provides new tutors with a sense of acceptance, confidence, and accomplishment. These qualities surface in our tutors' end-of-the-semester reflections: "I've enjoyed actually knowing when I've been helpful. This is not always the case in a classroom setting" and "[N]ow I love working in the EC, and I don't really understand why I was so afraid at the beginning of the semester."

We also review the e-mail communication form throughout the semester, and we survey the mentors and the mentees for feedback and suggestions on ways to improve the mentor program. The survey not only allows our tutors a voice in the program but also provides us with valuable data regarding the program. In addition, it forces our own self-reflection on the program and offers insight into the ways we can improve. From here, we identify changes needed for the following year.

Our data shows that this program has been successful in achieving our goals. On a five-point Likert scale, new tutors responded with a 4.27 average to the prompt: "I enjoyed participating in the English (Writing) Center practicum." To the statement, "I feel that I benefitted from participating in the mentoring program" the resulting average was 3.94.⁵ And the average response to "The concerns I mentioned in my e-mails to my mentor were addressed promptly" was 4.68.

Several survey comments evidence a direct connection between our mentor program and tutor confidence:

“I had a really bad first day in the EC and having someone to talk with about it made me feel more comfortable.”

The mentor “made me feel welcome and open to any problems I might have been having without making me feel like I was a bad tutor. They were really supportive and reassuring, which helped my confidence.”

“I liked being able to ask questions and have my worries addressed.”

“[The best part was] talking about many different issues that other tutors were also having.”

The ability of the program to develop over time allows us to adapt not only to our new tutors’ changing needs but also to address new and emerging changes taking place in our writing center, in our composition and world literature programs, in our student body, and in our university as a whole. For example, one change we have identified in the past was the need for closure at the end of the semester. As a result, we added the closing e-mail (as outlined above) to our process.

Also, this past year we found that our new tutors talked with their mentors quite a bit during down time in the writing center, often asking for advice or sharing concerns and successes—and mentors shared too (proof we all are always learning). We were overjoyed that this was taking place; after all, the tutors’ needs were met immediately—even earlier than our practicum could provide. However, because these instances resulted in shorter e-mails with these issues omitted, they were not making their way to the whole group discussion in the practicum. As we started this new academic year, we encouraged these talks to continue but also recommended that our mentors record these issues to share in their e-mails so that the entire group can benefit from these instances.

In our dedication to supporting the whole tutor, we have discovered a flexible and customizable method that helps us address our tutors’ needs, concerns, and successes and to encourage them to voice their thoughts honestly. We tailor our tutor development to meet our tutors’ emotional needs and tutoring abilities. Furthermore, we believe this program can be adapted to any writing center at any institution. ♦

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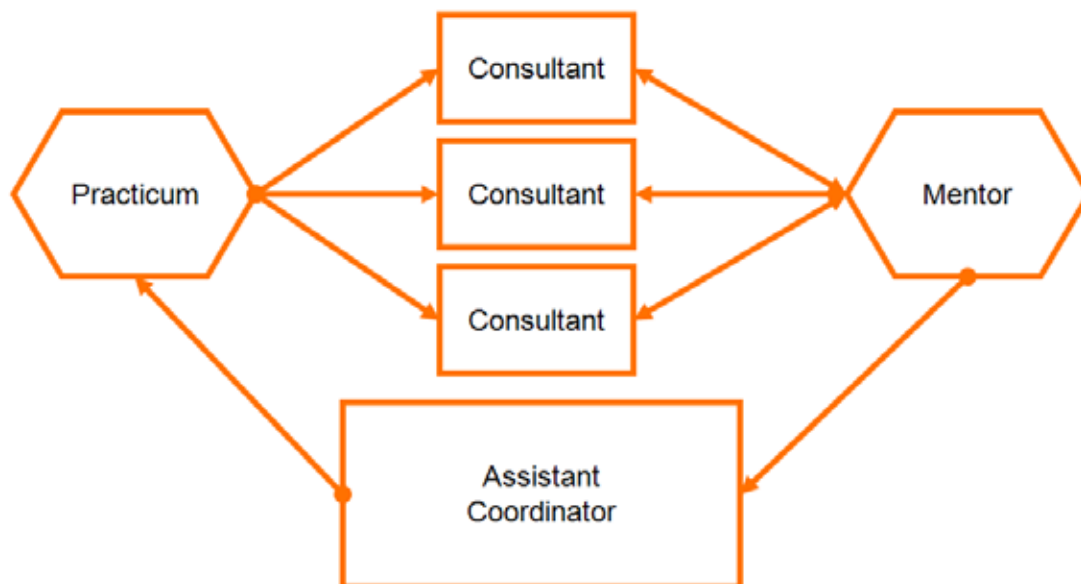


Figure 1: The flowchart here displays the direction of travel of information, beginning with the tutors and moving clockwise to the mentor, then to the assistant coordinator who explores the issues, concerns, and successes in practicum with the tutors.

Endnotes

¹ Lynette Gajtka has illustrated some common fears or insecurities new tutors often have: “I became overwhelmed with doubt about my ability to run a consulting session. I worried I would focus too much on positive aspects of the paper . . . and be scared to criticize or acknowledge faults. . . . [I was] self-conscious about offending someone” (175).

² While our assistant coordinator fills this role, it should be noted that any experienced tutor could take on this position.

³We conduct over 4,000 conferences per year, working with students enrolled in our Composition I & II and World Literature I & II core (required) courses. Because we draw largely on our master’s program for tutors, we add 25-30 new tutors each fall—approximately a 50% turnover rate. With no additional funding for pre-semester training for these tutors, we need to prepare our tutors as efficiently and economically as possible.

⁴Such an approach to tutor’s successes echoes Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood’s approach to “experience informed by insight”: “The ‘know-how’ of good tutors comes from a willingness to reflect on their efforts and to keep learning. Such tutors are eager both to confirm what they do well and to question any practices that impede productive interactions with students” (7).

⁵We attribute this relatively low number to the fact that one of our mentors did not maintain e-mail or verbal contact with his assigned new tutors. His mentees were both disappointed and frustrated with him, thereby lowering the overall average in this category.



GEEK IN THE CENTER

750WORDS.COM

◆ *Jackie Grutsch McKinney*
Ball State University
Muncie, IN

Once, Jerry Seinfeld was asked how to get better as a comic. Easy, he said, you write every day. He suggested getting a year-long wall calendar and a red marker. Each day you write, you put an X on the calendar. And, you “don’t break the chain” (qtd. in Issacs).

Last spring, I came across a web-based application called 750words.com that reminded me of Seinfeld’s approach to writing. The concept is pretty simple: it’s a site that prods you to write three pages (750 words) daily. Why, you may ask, do I need an application to do that when I have Microsoft Word (or a moleskin notebook and pen for that matter)? Well, you don’t need, it of course. However, after using it for several months now, I can vouch that it has made a daily writer out of me when nothing else has.

The site is dead simple to use and actually, well, fun. Really! You sign up and start writing. Like Seinfeld’s calendar, you get an X for each day you write 750 words or more. If you “don’t break the chain,” you get rewarded with badges—little animal icons that show up on your account screen. The site has a semi-social dimension to it, as your name and the number of days in a row that you’ve written show up on the home page after you have written; however, no one can see what you write. Each day after you reach your 750 words, the site produces a graphical, lighthearted summary of your “subconscious” using a couple of textual analysis tools, reporting among other things if you are feeling happy, anxious, or self-important and giving your writing a movie rating (PG, PG-13, etc.).

If you are feeling ambitious—or need a bit of a push to get a writing project finished—you can sign up for a monthly challenge, where you try to write 750 words every day for the entire month to get your name on the Wall of Awesomeness. If you fail, your name appears on the Wall of Shame. All of these features make the site more dynamic than writing in your own notebook or laptop.

Getting your writing out of the application is pretty straightforward, too. In addition to being able to cut and paste or printing directly from the web browser window, the site allows for exporting your month’s writing into a text file. The application does not have all the functionality of a word processing program (you cannot rename files, import files, add images or tables to text, and so forth), but it is not aiming to be a word processing program.

You can also opt for a “daily nudge” by e-mail if you wish, and you’ll get a little note of encouragement from the site’s creator, Buster Benson, which always ends, “P.S. I enjoy feedback. Reply to this e-mail on the slightest whim!” This summer, after I had used the site for a few months and knew I wanted to

TAKE NOTE

NORTHEAST OHIO WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Oct. 16, 2010

Stark State College of Technology

North Canton, Ohio

9 a.m. —4:30 p.m.

“Updating Our Status: The 21st Century Writing Center

Every writing center is a community unique to the populations we serve. However, one thing we have in common is technology. We e-mail, IM, Facebook, and tweet. We develop PowerPoints, webpages, and podcasts. Not only are writing centers jumping onto the technology bandwagon, but students are as well. They’re creating videos, visual arguments, and multimodal compositions, and they’re bringing them to the writing center. Because technology is becoming a more centralized aspect of what we do, it’s important to take a step back and assess the implication of its integration as well as share, explore, and develop new ways to take advantage of this ever-growing element of our work. This year’s NEOWCA conference will provide the opportunity to do just that—share, explore, and develop new ways to update our status and redefine who we are as tutors, writing centers, and advocates of literacy.

For further information and questions, contact Leah Schell-Barber: LSchell@starkstate.edu; 330-494-6170-4863.

highlight it in this column, I took him up on that offer and asked him if he’d be willing to give me an interview. He was. Here is what he had to say.

Jackie Grutsch McKinney: On the site, you say you created 750words as an online space for daily morning pages. For you, what’s the value of daily writing? Do you consider yourself a writer? Is it about the writing or about something else?

Buster Benson: I’m one of those creative writing majors who abandoned the dreams of writing the Great American Novel shortly after graduating. I’ve always had a need to think on paper and have kept an online journal (both public and protected) for the last 10+ years. I found, however, that a lot of the gunk in my head was remaining stuck, and clogging things up, and it wasn’t until I read Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way* a few years ago that I realized that because I was always aware of my “audience.” I never really got a chance to think out the truly sticky things in my head. It was just too much work to both process it and make it interesting to others at the same time. So I started this morning pages habit, and immediately fell in love.

The value of daily writing, in a private space, is that it helps me think. It helps me untangle complicated fears, unfinished ideas, and unborn revelations. Writing is simply a method of therapy. I’m sure if we could all afford a patient and non-judgmental therapist to talk to every day, that might also do the trick.

JGM: The tagline on the bottom of each page of the site reads: “Private, unfiltered, spontaneous, daily.” As I’m a user of the site, the “private” part of that equation has been important to me. Sometimes I don’t want to reread what I wrote, let alone allow anyone else to see it! Do you feel any pressure, though, to allow users to share what they wrote, not just that they wrote?

BB: Yes, I agree with you on this. Some people suggest that I add a way to share what they wrote, but I’m pretty stubborn on that matter. There are hundreds of ways to share writing online. The value that I’m trying to find is what happens in our brains when we don’t share. When we let ourselves talk to ourselves. So, I can pretty much promise that the option to share your writing will never be available on this particular website.

JGM: Part of the genius of 750words is the system of rewards and punishments. What inspired you to add the badges, point system, Wall of Shame, and so forth?

BB: I’m a terminally difficult person to motivate. I’ve had to come up with all kinds of tricks over the years to motivate myself to do very basic things, like eating right, exercising, finishing projects, etc. I feel that as a result I’ve been able to discover some very effective methods of self-motivation. Badges are great because they are pretty much meaningless. It would be completely different if I were giving every monthly challenge winner an iPod. The reward would replace the intrinsic value of private writing. It’s my belief that a meaningless reward like a badge has the potential to become a way to get in touch with the intrinsic reward.

The other self-motivating force in the world is accountability and peer pressure. By making our intentions public, we feel extra pressure to do as we say. That’s what the Wall of Awesomeness and the Wall of Shame are meant to trigger.

JGM: The textual analysis tools are another interesting feature. Can you comment on why you added this feature and particularly why you chose the two systems (Regressive Imagery Dictionary and Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) that you did?

BB: I am a metrics-addict. I love statistics about what I'm doing, especially if they have the ability to possibly tell me something about myself that I was not previously aware of. I chose the Regressive Imagery Dictionary because of its roots in Freudian theory. Even though it's not very accurate, the results are often humorous or dramatic. The Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count system is a much more accurate system, and more detailed in its results, but is a little more boring from an aesthetic perspective.

JGM: What are inventive ways of using 750words, beyond your original intent, that you've heard of?

BB: Some people have claimed to be using it to write fiction, which is not really the intended usage. To be honest though, I'm not entirely clear HOW people are using the site, since it's all private! The large majority of people (at least, from the informal interviews with people who have written 100+ days in a row) seem to be using it to clear their heads, which is how I think it is best used.

JGM: What's the future for 750words? Any features you're considering developing in the near future? Will it always be free?

BB: I'm not sure. I've been tossing the idea around of adding writing prompts for people to use, as some people have trouble making that initial leap into stream-of-consciousness brain dumping. Another thing I'd like to improve is the monthly challenge, and the point system. Right now there are a lot of ties every month for 1st place. . . . I'd like there to be a bit more of a spread.

As for being free, I currently accept donations from people who wish to become "patrons" of the site. This isn't a business for me; it's merely a hobby, and keeping it free for the most part helps me be a little less fanatical about keeping the site up 100% of the time, as people would expect if they were paying for it.



In this age of hyperconnectivity, where we are prompted to share at each click, I have found 750words to be a rare respite from the rest of the web. Its usefulness to me is as a little writing room where I feel the company, yet not the pressure of others, as I work to get some words down. Not unlike a writing center, really. ♦

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TAKE NOTE

EAST CENTRAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals
March 3 – 5
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI
"Centering Assessment: Roles, Relationships, Respect, Resistance"

In the midst of current, often contentious, yet often cooperative debate about educational assessment, the 2011 East Central Writing Centers Association Conference will focus on assessment issues as they relate to writing center work. Those wishing to submit proposals may consider numerous questions listed on the conference website:

As the first regional conference devoted to assessment of our work, we seek to center writing center assessment discussion, in several connotations of the verb. Through quality panel discussions, round tables, workshops, and poster sessions we hope conference participants will focus, equalize, highlight, and pinpoint writing center assessment theory, practices, issues, and ideas. We encourage proposals to support the conference conversation on assessment of and in writing centers; however, we also encourage proposals that do not relate to the conference theme.

Conference Proposal Deadline: Dec. 13, 2010. Acceptance Notification by Jan 10, 2011. E-mail proposals to: eastcentralwritingcenters2011@gmail.com

Questions? Check the ECWCA website: <http://www.ecwca.org/>, e-mail eastcentralwritingcenters2011@gmail.com, or contact the Western Michigan University Writing Center at 269.387.4615.

NEWS

WRITING CENTER, ASST. DIRECTOR
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

This is a 12-month staff position to support the work of a center that includes 50+ tutors, 3 satellite locations, online tutoring, a fellows program, and faculty-as-writers initiatives. The person in this position will collaborate with the director to educate/mentor the staff, engage in ongoing assessment of the center's work, develop new programming, and communicate with faculty, staff, and students about the center's services.

The successful candidate will have an M.A. in composition studies or related field, at least 2 years of post-baccalaureate experience in writing center work, a commitment to supporting diversity, a vision for providing effective writing support to students across the disciplines, and expertise/experience in any of the following areas: support of ESL and international student writers; online tutoring; assessment; faculty writing support; fellows programs. Experience as a writing instructor preferred. Visit www.gvsu.edu/wc to learn more about the work of our center. Salary is commensurate with skills and experience.

Apply online at www.gvsujobs.org. Include a cover letter, CV, and list of three references. The online system will allow you to attach these documents electronically. If you need assistance or have questions, call Human Resources at 616-331-2215. Review of applications will begin on October 1 and continue until the position is filled.

Grand Valley State University is an affirmative action, equal opportunity institution.

WRITING CENTERS AND BASIC WRITING STUDENTS: INSTITUTIONAL ADVOCACY THROUGH PUBLIC TEXTS

◆ Teagan Decker
University of North Carolina at Pembroke
Pembroke, NC

In his 2005 International Writing Centers Association keynote address, Victor Villanueva galvanized the crowd as he challenged writing center tutors to resist the rhetoric of a color-blind society. The address certainly affected the writing center community, provoking an extended and heated discussion on the WCenter listserv. The address was later published in the *Writing Center Journal* in 2006, reaching an even wider audience. In the article's conclusion, Villanueva suggests that "when that next paper comes your way that says that there is no racism, please think of the silence, expose it, looking at the Master's Tropes. Behind it there is a material reality—the reality of racism, still present, and not all that new after all" (18).

Villanueva focuses on student texts and the give and take of one-to-one tutorials, but here I would like to turn the discussion to public texts, to how writing centers describe their services and who they serve. The writing center, as an institution, should also resist the rhetoric of a color blind society that does not choose to admit that racism and educational inequity exist. The first step in this resistance is acknowledging that writing centers are institutions themselves, and as such deploy institutional power.

According to professional lore, writing centers are positioned at the margins of the field of composition and rhetoric and at the margins of the universities which house them. This 'idea' of writing centers as embattled institutions (articulated in 1984 by Stephen North in his "The Idea of a Writing Center") has allowed writing centers to develop independent pedagogical principles, but has also left them somewhat isolated and misunderstood. For many writing centers, though, this 'idea' no longer applies. Writing centers are emerging as hubs of writing on their campuses, places where many things happen in addition to tutoring. Writing centers are involved in writing in the disciplines programs, where they engage in faculty development and train tutors to work directly with faculty and students in courses across disciplines. Writing centers are working with libraries, combining the research assistance offered by librarians and the writing assistance offered by writing tutors. Writing centers are supporting graduate students and advanced undergraduates in their writing. Writing centers are sponsoring readings, workshops, and seminars. Writing centers are engaging with their communities, partnering with high schools, middle schools, and community groups. Many writing centers can no longer claim the position of outsider or outcast; they, and the people within them, are now part of the institution, with institutional power and the responsibility that goes with it.

Along with these developments, however, we have a continuation and even an intensification of another writing center discourse: writing centers are fearful of being labeled as sites of remediation. Many writing centers began as what we now call 'grammar fix-it shops' or places where teachers send their poor writers. The writing center community has spent a great deal of energy resisting that characterization, and with good reason. The programs I listed above have helped to elevate writing centers from that past and helped the university community expand and enhance their idea of what a writing center can be. As writing centers gain power through their centrality and reach, it is perhaps time to examine and question this resistance to remediation. Although "remediation" is a negative term, which is avoided by compositionists generally, what it signifies is the teaching of underprepared writers.

Remediation is often associated with the open admissions policies of the civil rights movement, but as Mary Soliday points out in her work *The Politics of Remediation: Institutional and Student Needs in Higher Education*, basic writing programs have been part of university structure since at least the late 19th century, when most American colleges housed preparatory programs where new students would be remediated. In many colleges, the bulk of the entering class would be enrolled in these programs. This was the result of widely varied high school education during that period as well as the lack of a standard level of knowledge on which to test applicants. The post-WWII GI Bill and the open admissions movement in the 1970s also spurred large remedial programs. Remediation is a part of the educational history of America, but support for it ebbs and flows. We now find ourselves in a prolonged ebb of support, and writing centers have responded to that by emphasizing our non-remedial natures.

If we abandon the project of remediation, underprepared writers themselves may be left out of the sphere of writing center influence, rendered invisible. Invisibility is precisely what Villanueva warned us against in his keynote address. If we do not acknowledge underprepared writers, who are most often in some ways outsiders to the university (students of color, low income students, first-generation college students, first- or second-generation immigrants), we are participating in the perpetuation of educational inequity by rendering them invisible, by excluding them from our idea of who we are. These issues came into focus for me in the fall of 2007 when I began a new position as the director of the writing center at the University of North Carolina, Pembroke. UNCP is a small, regional public university, originally a Native American normal school. Although the university now has sizeable white and African American populations, the Native American population is still relatively large, at 18%. Many students who attend UNCP are first-generation college students, and many are non-traditional students. Students are drawn to UNCP because of the small class sizes, the low tuition, the strong teacher education program, and the proximity to home and community. Given this diverse student population, the writing center must define itself as a vital part of the university community, and my mandate as a new director was (and is) to pursue a growth-oriented vision. Over the course of my first two years I have worked on many projects that have attempted to facilitate this growth. One was an overhaul of the writing center's website.

The original website was developed many years ago. It consisted of a single page, which featured the following four sentences:

The University Writing Center staff works with UNCP students at any stage in the writing process, from brainstorming topics to drafting, revising, and editing. Students are welcome to use Writing Center computers to draft and revise their writing. The Writing Center staff also will assist students with word processing, Internet searching, and other writing and research skills. Writing reference texts are also available. ("University Writing Center")

Certainly this needed to be revised. The first and second sentences are OK, but the third sentence bothered me. Why, in such a short blurb, the focus on computers, and in particular "word processing"? It makes the writing center sound remedial, too basic. Wouldn't this characterization exclude the more advanced writers? What about the exciting intellectual conversations that take place in the writing center? I wanted the university to think of those when they think of the writing center, not of students learning to write from the ground up, literally learning to put words on a page.

I was fortunate to learn an important lesson from a student before cutting this language from the website. She was a student who came in with a handwritten draft, asking for help getting it onto the computer. The tutor on staff was at first confused: what was this student asking of her? As it turned out, the student was a non-traditional student of color, returning to college after a hiatus of 20 years. She had learned to type her papers on a typewriter, and had missed the technological transformations that are now ubiquitous on college campuses. Later, during a staff meeting, the tutor explained that she had helped the student set up her document, save to the student server, and begin typing. The tutor checked up on the student later and was mystified when the student asked why the word processor was capital-

NEWS

WRITING CENTER DIRECTOR STANFORD UNIVERSITY

The Stanford Program in Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) at Stanford University seeks a senior staff member to manage and direct the Hume Writing Center (HWC) and serve as Associate Director of Stanford Introductory Studies.

The Director will have primary responsibility for providing leadership in developing and sustaining the varied mission of the HWC, managing the day-to-day services provided by the HWC, supervising the HWC staff, overseeing an undergraduate peer tutor preparation course, supervising a large corps of undergraduate writing consultants and a smaller corps of graduate writing consultants, and working collaboratively with and providing professional development opportunities for the PWR lecturers who are members of the professional Writing Center consultant staff.

Qualifications include: Ph.D. in rhetoric and writing or a closely-related field, extensive experience teaching and tutoring writing, experience in writing program and/or writing center administration, experience developing and administering Writing in the Disciplines writing support, and a research agenda related to rhetoric and writing studies.

To view the complete job description and to assure your application information is captured in our official files, you must apply to <<http://jobs.stanford.edu>> and in the keyword search box, indicate 37485.

Please send letter of application, CV, at least 3 letters of recommendation, an example of writing related to scholarship or writing program administration, and a statement of philosophy regarding writing center pedagogy to: Nicholas Jenkins, Faculty Director, and Andrea A. Lunsford, Past Faculty Director, Program in Writing and Rhetoric, Sweet Hall, Room 314, 590 Escondido Mall, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-3069. **Deadline for applications: November 1, 2010.**

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NEWS

COORDINATOR, WRITING
CENTER
DREXEL UNIVERSITY

Drexel's Writing Center, is responsible for tutoring all graduate and undergraduate students in Drexel's University City, Center City, and Sacramento campuses, as well as coordinating a burgeoning Writing Across the Curriculum/ePortfolio initiative. As a major face of the Writing Center, the Coordinator requires both administrative and Writing-Center(ed) experience. Coordinator is responsible for all administrative duties (scheduling tutors, scheduling workshops, publicizing events, compiling data results from scheduling systems and surveys) but is also expected to contribute to the Writing life of the Center. Under the guidance of the Director, the admin. coordinator will assist the director in running online and face to face tutoring workshops, represent the Writing Center to various academic constituencies, and plan outreach events. Working with a staff of a Director and three Associate Directors, the coordinator will help to ensure the smooth functioning of all aspects of the Writing Center.

Min. BA/BS. Background in Writing Studies, Writing Centers, or teaching writing preferred, though other experiences will be considered. Prior tutoring experience helpful, but not mandatory.

Applicants should submit a cover letter, resume, and three letters of recommendation to <<http://drexel.jobs.com>>. Open until filled. Women and members of minority groups are encouraged to apply. EEOE/AEE.

izing the first letter of every line of the document. The tutors at the staff meeting were stumped. I thought back to typing papers on my college roommate's electric typewriter, pecking out letters, and understood: the student had been hitting return at the end of every line. After a few intensive days in the writing center, this student leapt across time and was typing away fairly comfortably. She can now turn to those intellectual conversations about writing that we value.

I don't believe that this is the type of work that my writing center should distance itself from. Our work with her may have been the most valuable accomplishment of the writing center that semester, in that it facilitated student learning in fundamental, foundation-building ways. In light of this accomplishment, I reconsidered the revision of the writing center's website blurb. Instead of regarding word processing as so basic an activity as to not even be categorized as remedial writing instruction (and therefore not appropriate for a respectable writing center's website), I left the part about working with students on word processing in (with some revision) as an invitation, an acknowledgement, and as an act of advocacy, however small. Knowledge of the technology of writing is of course necessary for the production of written texts. Erasing this service would erase the real needs of nontraditional students.

Another issue I faced as a new director was my policy on grammar and usage instruction in the writing center. The original website blurb did mention 'editing' as one of our services, but informal conversations with colleagues made it clear that my writing center had a long-standing policy of no grammar instruction—or at least that was the prevalent understanding across campus. Most likely the center has always worked with students on their grammar and usage but at the same time spread the word that these concerns were of low importance. I was not surprised: sentence-level instruction has borne the brunt of the anti-remediation discourse of writing centers. Since remedial writing is often associated with sentence errors, and sentence errors were exactly what the 'fix-it shops' were fixing, they have been relegated to the concern of least importance. This policy has been codified in tutor training manuals with the concept of higher order and lower order concerns—higher order concerns consisting of large-scale organizational and focus-related issues and lower order concerns consisting of sentence-level issues. Although I understand and appreciate the higher order/lower order concern concept, I have come to question these categorizations of writing concerns. For basic writers who are first-generation college students and/or who speak a non-standard dialect, sentence-level issues can be of high importance.

Scholarship on tutoring ESL students treats sentence-level issues as important and encourages us to focus on the sentences, the phrases, and the words in ESL student writing in addition to higher order concerns. As Shanti Bruce advises in *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*, "[W]e can't always dismiss this request [for grammar help] in favor of what we may consider the higher order concerns to be. For many ESL students, grammar may in fact be a higher order concern" (33). This advice brings the sentence-level issues not only out of the 'lower order' category but also out of the 'later order' category. It is good advice for basic writing students as well, and confirms what students have known all along, that sentence style, clarity, and, yes, correctness are as important to successful writing as paragraph development and cohesion of argument. In fact, from a pragmatic and grade-oriented point of view, these aspects of writing become even more important because sentence-level errors can mark students as outsiders to the academy.

When it comes to writing centers and our public texts, the issues around sentence level instruction are admittedly tricky. I want faculty to know that they can count on the writing center to work with students on sentences, but I also don't want the writing center to, in fact, become one of those fix-it shops of yore. I am currently drafting a statement that I will include in my e-mails to faculty. This e-mail informs faculty of our hours of operation for that semester and includes any interesting updates on the writing center. It will also contain a standing paragraph detailing what we do and why. Certainly there must be an emphasis on higher level concerns, but, in order to make the legitimate sentence-level concerns of basic writing (and other) students visible, it must address and explain our policy toward the lower/later order concerns as well. This

type of text, coming from the academic institution of the writing center, can have an effect on faculty who may not have thought of language in these terms before.

Of course the wording of such a text depends on institutional context. Many institutions deny the presence of basic writers in their student body. In these contexts writing centers must carefully maintain their image of academic excellence. Careful thought must be put into public texts in order to indicate that underprepared students, although unacknowledged by the university, do exist and that writing center staff are prepared to address their needs. However, many institutions, such as regional universities like mine, community colleges, and even private and research intensive universities, make it part of their mission to promote educational equity, which in turn means support for remediation through courses and academic services like writing centers. In that case, there is no need for the public texts of the writing center to be circumspect.

Small promotional texts send important signals to students and faculty: these texts describe the students we serve, the student writing we work with, and our services. When Peter Carino analyzed public writing center texts in his essay "Reading Our Own Words," he found that "[t]he rhetoric that directors produce tells much about how centers, individually and communally, have constructed themselves in the academy for themselves and others in light of their marginal status" (92). If we can move beyond the idea that writing centers are institutionally marginal and acknowledge that we "have gained a place at the institutional table" (109), we can address marginalized students more effectively in our public texts. Our public texts are part of the discourse of an institution, and as such participate in negotiations of institutional, or organizational, reality. According to discourse scholars Dennis K. Mumby and Robin P. Clair, we should see "organizations not simply as social collectives where shared meaning is produced, but rather as sites of struggle where different groups compete to shape the social reality of organizations in ways that serve their own interests" (182). Our texts, then, can participate in the struggle to shape the social reality of the university towards serving the interests of basic writers.

The choices writing centers make in describing themselves to the university community reflect and affect writing center practice and also constitute either advocacy for or benign neglect of the basic writing agenda. Writing centers can remain committed to educational equity even as we diversify our programs and become more influential in our institutions. The diversification of services does not mean that the writing center must abandon those students who really may need them the most. As writing centers become more integrated, professional, and influential, they become places that can make a difference. As writing centers change and grow, becoming associated with upper-level writing classes and incorporating terms such as 'excellence' in our promotional literature, we can still maintain a commitment to basic writers and the basic writing programs which serve them. One vital way to accomplish this is to ensure that our public texts make visible the services that we provide to writers at all levels, including basic writers. ♦

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TUTOR'S COLUMN

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

◆ Ryan Kim
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA

I remember the first time I came across the acronym “ESL.” I didn’t know what it meant, but knew that it was attached to kids who couldn’t speak English. I was in elementary school, and certain kids would get pulled out of class to go spend time with an ESL teacher. I had a very negative perspective on the whole thing because it seemed like these kids were less intelligent than others and the only way they could be “normal” was to be abducted and taken to these ESL sessions. I spoke English just fine, and I wanted no part of that, until the unthinkable happened.

“Is Ryan here?” asked the lady at the door.

“Yes,” the teacher answered as she pointed me out. I threw her a look of betrayal as I followed the ESL lady out the door. I went into a little room and sat down with the other kids around a small table. I was wondering why I was there and was going to protest that I could speak English until I saw the bunny rabbit on the floor. I decided this wasn’t so bad and petted the rabbit. The lady asked me some questions, I answered them to the best of my ability, and I was on my way back to class. I guess I didn’t have what they were looking for, but I always knew in the back of my mind that they had pulled me out of class for one reason: my outer appearance.

Stereotypes are met with different reactions, ranging from laughter to anger to hatred, but many of us find ourselves entertaining these beliefs about certain people when we see them physically. It may be just a flash or a lingering thought in the back of one’s mind, but stereotypes have an impression on us before the actual person does. In a writing center, most of the tutors take notice of ESL students. The thought of seeing broken English and horrible grammar written on the page make us feel uneasy. We fear that sessions will devolve into English lessons. At the same time, stereotypes make us feel insecure about what other people may think of us because of the thoughts that we have about them.

One time I was tutoring a Japanese student and found myself making an unfair assumption about her. She needed help understanding her assignment, so I assumed that she couldn’t speak English. I asked to see her assignment sheet, so I could relay it into simpler terms that a foreigner could understand. I condescended to her as if she was of lower intelligence because she couldn’t understand her homework. She caught me off guard when she spoke in English, “Oh, I don’t need you to read it to me; I just need you to explain a part of the assignment that is unclear to me.” I replied with a humbled, “Oh, okay.” Because of prejudice, I made an unfair assumption about her intelligence. We continued the session, and I ended up being the one having trouble understanding the assignment because it was vague. The assignment asked students to compare and contrast how different teachers and teaching methods affected their view of teaching, and how students would view them in light of their own teaching methods. The student was in a similar situation as I was, having lived in two cultures; she had the advantage of experiencing two distinct methods of learning. The session went well because it was focused on the content of the paper. There was no English lesson, just a good, fun discussion of what to write her paper about.

When I was tutoring an American student, he wanted me to look over his marketing paper. It was an analysis of a Mac advertisement featuring an Asian woman looking over a laptop in front of a green blackboard covered in mathematical formulas. I was aware that the student writer was white, but it didn’t bother me. I was just another tutor helping out a student until we reached the point in his

paper where he argued that the advertisement was using an Asian girl to exemplify intelligence to sell the product. I just nodded my head in agreement, but as soon as he made the point in his paper, he started apologizing to me as if I would be offended by this point. I told him it was all right, but I was offended—not at the point, but at the fact that he thought I would be offended by it. The student wasn't necessarily racist, but his reaction shows how stereotypes have a place in our minds and how unconscious we can be of them in our daily interactions.

In the same way, sometimes tutors may not see past the outer appearances of students, which hinders our ability to help the students' writing. This is similar to a tutor who will not see past the local issues of a paper and into the global issues to improve the paper. We get caught up in the grammar, the syntax, the language barrier, and we will make judgments based on those mistakes. We naturally react and point out those mistakes because papers full of grammatical errors makes the writer appear unintelligent. However, we must stop thinking that simply editing a paper is going to make the ESL student a better writer. Tutors must be willing to look past the mistakes into the content of the paper, so that the students' voices may be heard loud and clear in their own unique ways. The temptation comes when we want to put our hand over theirs and write what we want. Instead, we must be those who are willing to listen and understand. When we don't understand a writer, we tell him what is unclear and how to make it clear to the reader. One of the main challenges lies in overcoming that stereotypical mindset.

One of the last students I tutored was a Nepalese woman who attended a boarding school in India; I was blessed to work with a person from such a culturally diverse background. She wrote about going back to her roots, visiting her grandmother in Nepal. She wrote about how eating traditional, home-cooked Nepalese food paralleled her reabsorbing of the culture she was born into. There was a moment when she couldn't quite describe what she felt on paper and said, "You know how when you go back home and eat home cooked food, it brings back those memories? Especially in Asian cultures, *you know?*" I smiled and said, "Yeah, I know what you mean." Scratching my head, I looked back at all the times I've bonded with people over a meal. Looking over at the student, I wondered if she had similar experiences. I can't remember the word I suggested to her to describe her experience, but if I could tell her now, I would say that *connection* would be an appropriate word. Or in her case, *reconnection*.

When we give in to stereotypes, we miss out on this connection. No matter what race or culture we are a part of, the content and character of a good paper will resonate with us. The act of eating Nepalese food resonated with her, and I believe that we all can relate to that experience. Even though the details may differ—whether we're eating a home-cooked meal that reminds us of the comfort of going back home or going back to an old diner to eat with friends—the humanity unites us. Grammar and syntax may make a paper harder to understand, but quality content will resound with the reader and tutor. This was my favorite session because I connected with the student, not just as an Asian person, but as a person who is trying to see the deeper meaning behind the outer appearances. I believe that is the answer in moving beyond stereotypes in the writing center; we need to reconnect as people. We also need to view the paper the way we view people: from the inside out. ♦



Muriel Harris, editor
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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

Oct. 16, 2010. Northeast Ohio Writing Centers Association, in North Canton, OH

Contact: Leah Schell-Barber: LSchell@starkstate.edu; 330-494-6170-4863.

Nov. 3-6, 2010. International Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Baltimore, MD

Contact: Barb Lutz and John Nordlof. E-mail: IWCAconference2010@english.udel.edu; conference website: <http://www.mawcaonline.org/iwca>.

Feb. 17-18, 2011: Middle East North Africa Writing Centers Alliance, in Dubai, UAE

Contact: Maria Elftheriou (meleftheriou@aus.edu) and Lynne Ronesi (Ironesi@aus.edu); conference website: <http://menaw-ca.org/13.html>.

Feb. 17-19, 2011: Southeastern Writing Centers Association, in Tuscaloosa, AL

Contact: Luke Niiler: e-mail: lpniiler@ua.edu; phone: 205-348-9460.

Feb. 17-19, 2011: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Houston, TX

Contact: Chloe Diepenbrock, e-mail: Diepenbrock@uhcl.edu; conference website: <http://ualr.edu/scwca/2011%20Conf%20Website/callforpapers.html>.

March 3-5, 2011: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Kalamazoo, MI

Contact: Western Michigan U. Writing Center: 269-387-4615; conference website: <http://www.ecwca.org>.