Re-Modeling Basic Writing

Rachel Rigolino and Penny Freel

ABSTRACT: In 1996, the State University of New York at New Paltz developed the Supplemental Writing Workshop Program for its basic writing students in response to public pressure to discontinue the offering of so-called remedial writing courses at four-year institutions. Our primary purpose in this article is to describe the design of the SWW Program, which we envision as a Seamless Support model of instruction. In this model, basic writing students receive extra support in the form of integrated writing workshop and tutoring sessions. SWW sections of composition have the same objectives and requirements as non-SWW sections and award the same credit, enabling basic writers to progress towards completion of the Composition I and Composition II sequence in two semesters. Now in its eleventh year, the SWW Program has proven to be successful in terms of the way its students compare with their cohorts in the areas of retention and graduation rates, and overall GPAs. While further research, including more thorough qualitative analysis, needs to be done, it is our hope that the success of this model can be used to inform the ongoing conversations about the future of basic writing in the academy.

KEYWORDS: basic writing; writing instruction; higher education; remedial instruction college instruction; program description

In their 2006 article, "In the Here and Now: Public Policy and Basic Writing," Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Harrington warn that the public discourse about basic writing programs and their role in the academy is increasingly being shaped by constituents outside of composition classrooms. As a result, writing program administrators (WPAs) often find themselves reacting to edicts from policy makers instead of informing policy; and, as Bruce Horner points out, modifications to the curricular designs of many basic writing programs are often "implemented in hurried response to circumstances not chosen by either composition teachers or their students but others—deans and provosts, political appointees, [and] state legislators" (134). Indeed the success of the various permutations of basic writing models that have evolved since the mid-1990s is a testament to the commitment of basic writing faculty and administrators, to basic writing scholarship and research, and to the students who seem perennially to be at risk of being shut out of the academy.

Rachel Rigolino *is the Coordinator of the SWW Composition Program at SUNY New Paltz. She also teaches writing for the Black Studies Department as well as lower-division literature courses.* ***Penny Freel*** *is a Lecturer in English at SUNY New Paltz, where she teaches ESL composition. She has also taught at the University of the Sacred Heart in Tokyo, Japan.*

DOI: 10.37514/JBW-J.2007.26.2.04

By 1999, William B. Lalicker, who had conducted a national survey of WPAs, could identify five alternatives to the increasingly maligned non-credit baseline model of basic writing. Because students are placed into basic writing classes largely on the basis of how well they perform on standardized exams and/or timed writing samples, one approach to reconfiguring basic writing programs is to amend placement procedures. Under the self-directed placement model, students place themselves into non-credit bearing sections of basic writing; while yet another approach is to eliminate the designation of basic writers altogether, as City University of New York (CUNY) has done at their senior, four-year colleges, effectively mainstreaming students. (It should be noted, however, that although Lalicker describes CUNY's as a mainstreaming model, the reality, at present, is more complex. Students who do not score above 480 on the SAT verbal or do not pass the CUNY/ACT placement exams in reading, writing, and math are excluded from the senior colleges—a mechanism that came about, as will be discussed later, in a heated political climate.) While the self-placement model and the mainstream model approach placement and course design in two very different ways, they both resist the labeling of students by the institution. In the first model, it is the student, not the university, who assesses the student's level of proficiency. In the second model, the composition program declines to identify any accepted student as a remedial writer so there is no longer a label to affix.

Another approach to redesigning basic writing courses centers on finding ways to provide students with additional time as they work towards fulfilling first-year writing requirements. The stretch approach, first implemented at Arizona State University, provides students an extra semester to complete ENG 101. At the end of the second semester, students at ASU earn credit for ENG 101 as well as three elective credits. The studio model, pioneered by Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson at the University of South Carolina, provides an additional hour of workshop time outside of class to mainstreamed basic writers. Instead of "stretching out" a one-semester, credit-bearing course into two or more semesters, the studio model provides students with additional time each week to strengthen their writing. While the amount and type of credit awarded for participating in stretch and studio programs vary, both models address an inherent inequity in the baseline model through reconfiguring courses so that they award academic credit (see Glau, "*Stretch* at 10: A Progress Report on Arizona State University's *Stretch Program*," this issue; Grego and Thompson).

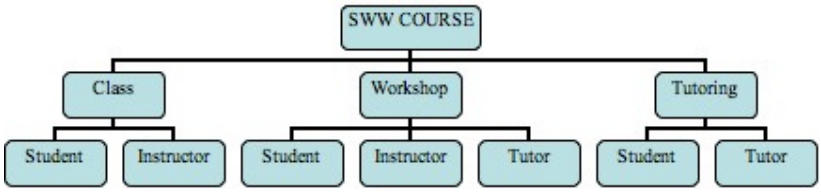
All of these models seek, in one way or another, to eliminate the stigma

attached to the labeling of students as "remedial" as well as to address the problems associated with granting some students credit for writing courses while denying credit (and advancement towards degree) to others. That these models have been successfully implemented is beyond dispute, as anyone conducting a review of the literature can attest. Still, if we are searching for a way to "reframe the concept of remediation" (28), a task Adler-Kassner and Harrington call upon teachers of basic writing to undertake, we must do more than to rethink how we place students on the one hand and how we award academic credit on the other. The self-directed and mainstream models, for example, do not directly address issues of curricular design; and the stretch model, while redesigning basic writing courses so that they share the same course objectives as non-basic writing courses, requires that students spend more time working towards a degree, a residual problem of all baseline models.

The intent of this paper is to offer up for critique a fifth model of basic writing program design, one which, we posit, attempts a more thorough re-modeling of the traditional remedial approach. The Supplemental Writing Workshop Program at the State University of New York at New Paltz is an example of what Lalicker calls an "intensive" model. As with the studio model, the intensive model provides students an additional hour of workshop time. What differentiates the intensive from the studio model is that the workshop hour is integrated into the rest of the course. All the students in a particular class section attend the same workshop session, which is often taught by the course instructor. While it was this model which we used as a template when redesigning our basic writing program at the State University of New York at New Paltz in 1995, instead of the word "intensive," faculty and administrators in the SWW Program have used the term "seamless support" to describe our program model since its inception. Disputes over jargon are seldom enlightening, yet examining our long-standing use of seamless support is, we feel, worth a brief digression.

From the outset, the concept of providing seamless support grew out of a desire not only to provide students with extra time, but also to weave together specific resources into a cohesive course design. We wanted to incorporate both individual tutoring as well as workshop sessions into our program in such a way that these elements, while distinct from time spent in the classroom, were part of a holistic pedagogical approach. Unlike Grego and Thompson's original studio design, in which students from various sections of composition come together once a week to work with an outside instructor, the Seamless Support Program keeps students, instructors, and

in-class tutors together. The chart below illustrates how the course is structured, focusing on who participates in which areas:



Not only are classroom instruction, workshop time, and individual tutoring all integral parts of the course design, the roles of the instructor and tutor overlap in areas that have been proven critical to student success, as will be discussed later in this paper.

Moreover, it is important to note that the SWW Seamless Support model is not "remedial" in its design. In other words, students enrolled in the program are expected to complete the same assignments and readings as their cohorts in non-SWW composition courses. All of our composition courses share the same objectives and aims; have the same course numbers: ENG 160 (Composition I) and ENG 180 (Composition II); and award the same amount of academic credit. How the SWW Program differs is in the amount of support the students receive: students spend one (or two, in the case of ESL students) additional class hour(s) in a workshop and another hour working one-on-one with an experienced tutor. While these hours are not awarded academic credit—an aspect of the program with which many of the SWW faculty members are not comfortable—they are integral components of the course, not merely contact hours that have been added on. As we will demonstrate, this model, which has proven versatile enough to serve the needs of both native and non-native speakers of English, provides students with the support and time they need to complete their composition requirements in the same two-semester sequence as their cohorts.

Background

The SWW Program, like so many other innovative basic writing programs, grew out of a re-assessment of traditional basic writing courses which began in the mid-1990s when calls for eliminating what were known as remedial classes at four-year colleges became increasingly insistent. The National Center for Educational Statistics reported in 1995 that almost 30%

of first-year college students were enrolled in at least one remedial course; and stakeholders both within and outside the academy were becoming more vocal in their criticism of this state of affairs. A June 1995 article in the *New York Times* noted that "with today's atmosphere of budget-balancing and cost-cutting, more people are raising questions about whether remedial education belongs in the four-year college setting" (Knowlton B11).

Basic writing courses were the focus of much of the criticism, and many writing program administrators around the country found themselves scrambling to reconfigure their course offerings in anticipation of imposed curricular changes. During the 1990s, perhaps the most well-known battles over the place of basic writers in the academy occurred during what Bart Meyers, a professor of psychology at Brooklyn College, aptly named the "CUNY Wars." Critics were making headlines in the New York press with their calls for reform of the CUNY system where, it was asserted, "remediation has cheapened the CUNY degree, and dumb[ed] down . . . college classes" (Berman, qtd. by CUNY Community College Conference). At the same time, both Governor George Pataki and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani were threatening to slash the CUNY budget, raise tuition, and eliminate EOP (Educational Opportunity Program) and SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge), programs which typically serve educationally underprepared students. In May 1998, the CUNY Board of Trustees, many of whom had been appointed by Pataki and Giuliani, responded by putting an end to remediation at the four-year colleges, a move which the head of the University Faculty Senate noted was made "without considering the human and financial consequences," and promised "not to reform but to destroy the university" (Cooper).

Fallout from the battles being waged downstate reverberated throughout the State University of New York system. In 1995, SUNY administrators and the SUNY Board of Trustees discussed dismantling remedial programs at the four-year campuses. One proposal was to require students lacking college-level skills to complete basic writing and math courses at two-year colleges, or even at local high schools, before they could be admitted to the baccalaureate institutions (Lively A41).

At the State University of New York, New Paltz, many of us involved in teaching and administering courses and programs for underprepared students were aware of these discussions and became alarmed at the implications of such an edict for our students.

Located in a small town midway between Albany and New York City, SUNY New Paltz attracts students primarily from the New York metropoli-

tan area. Although the majority of our first-year students showed readiness for traditional composition courses, in the mid-1990s we still had a sizable number, around 10% of our incoming class, who placed into our non-credit "preparatory writing" course. (Since 1995, this percentage has remained more or less consistent.) We were concerned that discontinuing our basic writing courses would diminish the diversity of our student body by excluding students from a wide range of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, students who had historically succeeded and even excelled at SUNY New Paltz.

In Spring l995, Jan Zlotnik Schmidt, Coordinator of the Composition Program, along with Lisa Chase, Director of the Educational Opportunity Program, Bill Vasse, Provost of SUNY New Paltz, and Richard Keldar of the Center for Academic Development and Learning, began working with Lee Cross, Coordinator of the Writing Center, and faculty in the English Department who regularly taught preparatory writing. The objective was to design a model of instruction that would satisfy the demands of the SUNY Board of Trustees while meeting the needs of basic writers. We were aided in this process by having models of successful academic support services already in place at SUNY New Paltz. The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) had been providing its students with writers' workshops for nearly a decade. These workshops, which first-year EOP students are still required to attend, are held twice a week in designated spaces in two of the residence halls and are facilitated by composition instructors. The instructor assumes the role of writing tutor, offering students oral feedback on the pieces of writing they bring to workshop (which may include assignments for courses other than composition). In addition to the type of support EOP provided to all of its first-year students, the Composition Program also offered assistance to basic writers and ESL students. The Writing Center provided in-class peer tutors to those instructors of preparatory writing and ESL sections of composition who requested them. Most instructors had the tutor come to class once a week to work individually with students on brainstorming or revision activities. Although such meetings were not mandatory, instructors often encouraged individual students to make follow-up, weekly appointments with the in-class tutor. It would be these models that we used in developing an integrated—or what Lisa Chase envisioned as "seamless"—support program for our basic writing students.

A Model Emerges

Envisioning how the SWW Seamless Support model would work was not as difficult as one might assume, not only because other institutional models were in place, but also because our Coordinator of Composition had already redesigned the preparatory writing courses to reflect the then-recent scholarship of Shaughnessy, Bartholomae, and Rose (among others), who were advocating for the full inclusion of basic writers into the academy. As a result, instead of completing grammar workbook assignments and being limited to paragraph writing, basic writing students at New Paltz read challenging texts, kept journals, and wrote entire essays. And rather than using standardized test scores as a means for placing students into preparatory writing sections, Jan Schmidt instituted a placement essay exam, which was administered to all first-year students, not just those who failed to meet a certain SAT verbal score. As an additional assessment tool, composition instructors were required to give their students a second essay exam during the first week of class. (It should be noted that this process remains the current mechanism by which we place students into sections of SWW Composition. See Appendix A). The instructors of our preparatory writing sections, all of whom held at least an MA degree, were recruited from among the most experienced composition faculty, and most had taken Jan Schmidt's Theories of Writing course in which progressive models of writing instruction and theory were examined. The nature of the course invited conversation about teaching methods as well as a close scrutiny of rhetoricians and theorists from Quintilian through Shaughnessy. Dr. Schmidt's initial redesign of the basic writing program meant that by 1995, when the SWW Program initiative began, the basic writing faculty at New Paltz did not have to convince administrators and other faculty to make a paradigm shift—it had been effected nearly ten years previously.

Lisa Chase, Director of EOP, shared Jan Schmidt's commitment to a process-oriented, holistic framework for the teaching of writing. Recognizing the importance of writing skills as a key component to student success, EOP required that all of their first-year students attend writing workshop sessions, staffed mainly by composition instructors, twice a week. By 1995, some of these sessions were organized so that the students were being tutored by their own composition instructors. Because 40-60% of preparatory writing classes were made up of EOP students, these sections were most easily aligned. The writing faculty who were teaching these aligned workshop sessions readily envisioned how the workshop could become part of their classes—after all,

they were already working in this way with their EOP students—and they urged that the extra workshop hour (the second hour was dropped for reasons which will follow) should immediately precede or follow the time scheduled for the class. Because EOP writing workshops were held in computer labs, the faculty also suggested that the extra workshop hour be scheduled in a computer lab. Both recommendations were followed.

Just as with the integrated writing workshop, the third component of the SWW model, individual tutoring, grew out of a pre-existing program. ESL sections of Composition I and II were already assigned in-class tutors. Peer tutors, often juniors or seniors but sometimes graduate students, attended one class session a week and then worked individually with those students who requested extra assistance. While those of us designing the SWW Program were interested in having an in-class tutor, we felt strongly that if we were to offer individual tutoring, it should be mandatory. (In our experience, many students who needed tutoring often did not seek it out.) Recognizing the possibility of student resistance and possible scheduling difficulties, we decided to incorporate only one hour of writing workshop and to replace the second workshop hour with an hour of tutoring which could be scheduled at the student's convenience. Later, a second hour of workshop was added for ESL students with the lowest levels of proficiency in written and spoken English.

The result of our efforts in and by 1995 is a model that challenges students to complete, in two semesters, the work that had previously taken three or more semesters. To sum up, students enrolled in SWW composition courses receive three academic credits for: three hours of class; one (or two) hour(s) of workshop; and one hour of individual tutoring.

In Fall 1996, six sections of Composition I SWW were offered in place of preparatory writing. Our hope was that some of the SWW students would meet the exit criteria for Composition I during that first semester so that they could move into Composition II. At that time, exiting criteria included not only passing Composition I with a "D" or higher, but also passing a timed essay writing exam, which was graded pass/fail by two faculty members who had not taught the student. (We have since moved to a portfolio review at the end of Composition I; portfolios are also graded pass/fail by two readers, although one is the student's instructor.) In December of 1996, we were pleasantly surprised at the outcome—67% of the students had passed into Composition II. By Fall 1997, the pass rate of our SWW students (75%) was closer to being equivalent to those of students in "regular" sections of Composition I (91%). Pass rates continued to improve, and by 2002, data

revealed that not only were our students' pass rates into Composition II nearly equivalent to those of their cohorts, but so were retention and graduation rates. And perhaps most surprisingly to us, the GPAs of students who had been enrolled in SWW Composition classes were almost equivalent to students enrolled in non-SWW sections when measured at the end of their first year as well as six years out (See Appendix B). So what had begun as an effort to resist an impending exclusionary policy resulted in a robust curricular design that actually accelerated the progress of our basic writing students toward their Bachelor's degrees.

Seamless Support: In the Classroom, Workshop, and Beyond

When discussing the SWW Seamless Support model with parties both inside and outside the academy, our faculty often speak about how the model provides a framework for building community. Since the interest in learning communities has grown in recent years, we often place the model in this context, noting that the SWW Program places the same emphasis on "increased intellectual interaction with faculty and fellow students" (Gabelnick et. al., qtd. in Kellogg 2). Just as learning communities seek to facilitate the first-year student's transition from high school and home to college, our model has as one of its central objectives the creation of spaces where students can become self-assured members of the academic community. The classroom, workshop, and Writing Center are designed to be places where students can experiment with language, grow as writers, and establish relationships with faculty and peers.

In the classroom, these communities develop around the shared experiences of students and instructors as they grapple with texts, both in terms of analyzing outside texts as well as producing and critiquing their own. (It is not uncommon for instructors to share their own writing with students and/or to model best practices with class assignments.) Instructors are free to choose their own textbooks, and in the case of Composition II, use a theme-based approach to teaching their courses. All Composition I courses require that students write four out-of-class essays of approximately 750 words each. These essays move from more personal, exploratory essays to expository writing, analysis, and argument. In Composition II, students are expected to write four expository analysis and/or argument essays, one of which is a research paper of least 1,250 words. Because SWW and non-SWW composition courses share the same objectives and requirements, class time in both courses is spent in similar ways: discussing essays and other literature,

analyzing and actively engaging in the writing process, reviewing grammar and other conventions of English, and acquiring research skills.

While class time is, of course, an important part of the SWW Program, it is the workshop hour that sets the program apart from our other sections of composition; hence the designation, Supplemental Writing Workshop. During workshop, students engage in tasks which help them to think critically not only about their writing, but also their positions within the academic community. We would describe the writing workshop portion of the SWW Program using Edward Soja's concept of "thirdspace" (Mauk), just as Grego and Thompson do in *Teaching Writing in Third Spaces*. The workshop is designed to be a space where students are freed from the constraints of the traditional classroom setting, where they can step back and evaluate their writing in a context which encourages broader critiques of the academy, their roles as students, as well as their roles in the world outside of academia.

The workshop hour, which immediately precedes or follows the class period, is held in a computer lab, necessitating that instructors and students move from one space to another. In addition to this literal shift in perspective, there is a figurative shift as well. While classroom time is managed by the instructor, activities in the lab are primarily student-directed, with the instructor, as well as the in-class tutor, acting as facilitators and sounding boards for ideas. Students use this time for brainstorming and drafting, revising, and other hands-on writing assignments. In addition, the labs can be used for small-group assignments, from preparing PowerPoint presentations to conducting group research assignments on the library's electronic databases or on the Web.

Much has been written over the years about the pedagogical benefits and drawbacks of computer lab instruction, and it is not our intention here to critique specific practices; yet we feel it is important to briefly conceptualize our use of the computer labs in the creation of thirdspace. While acknowledging the complex relationships among corporate hierarchical structures, software design, and the student's use of computer tools, our faculty have observed that students are increasingly using the Internet—in all its various facets—to question and sometimes even resist the dominant ethos of the academy. The digital divide, which once meant that computers were accessible only to middle-class students, has narrowed. While it may be true that "even within the online world true democracy is a polite fiction" (Spooner and Yancey 271), students from a wide range of economic backgrounds come to college with at least a basic knowledge of how to use word processing and search the Internet. In the computer lab, the world beyond

the classroom walls is now at their fingertips, so that the voices of those who have been marginalized share the same desktop space as those whose words are enshrined in the canons of the various disciplines. Complaints about Wikipedia and other non-academic sites notwithstanding, these alternative sites of knowledge offer students perspectives from which to critique, perhaps more holistically than ever before, what they are reading and hearing in the classroom. In some cases, these alternate spaces even allow students to engage in the process of knowledge-making through contributing to wikis, blogs, and discussion boards. And even when the university ostensibly devalues these forms of knowledge (i.e., "You can't cite Wikipedia as a source."), these sites offer students vantage points outside the academy from which to assess the ways in which knowledge in a particular field is constituted.

In creating a student-centered workshop space where the worlds inside and outside the academy are permitted to intersect, the instructor's role necessarily changes. As can be inferred from the chart on page ___, the workshop hour always has the potential of being the most dynamic part of the SWW course because the students, instructor, and tutor are all present. During the workshop hour, the instructor's role shifts—either overtly or more subtly—from that of teacher to tutor. While this transformation is deliberate in the sense that the instructor has planned to move around the classroom in order to work with students individually, the tutor's presence in the workshop often heightens the instructor's (and perhaps the students') awareness of this shift in roles. Both the tutor and instructor engage in the same activities, usually one-on-one discussions with students about assignments. They report using the workshop time in much the same way that Tassoni and Lewiecki-Wilson define the purpose of the writing Studio, as a time and place for "students and instructors [to] work together . . . to uncover the rhetorical situation . . . of particular writing assignments; teacher expectations; and social issues in students' lives, home, and work, and in the university" (70). As the Educational Opportunity Program had discovered when implementing its aligned Writing Workshop sections, having the teacher assume the role of tutor means that the students are receiving critical assessment of their work directly from the instructor, not only on paper or during a ten- or fifteen-minute office meeting, but in informal, one-on-one work sessions where texts can be analyzed and even manipulated. Both student and faculty questions about a work in progress can be answered, and instructors report having a better sense of student perception of a particular assignment. Students also seem more willing to express negative reactions to an assignment while in the workshop setting, perhaps as a result of perceiving the instructor in a different role.

An important outcome of working with students in this way has been increased opportunities for effective communication between student and instructor. Communicating with instructors is, as Grego and Thompson have pointed out, a process which many basic writers find frustrating:

> The non-traditional student's job is . . . made all the harder when the academy consistently pretends that the mental processes which deal with the personal and interpersonal have little to do with student learning and performance, and the academy's evaluation of that performance. Over time these students may giveup trying to find a "match" between what their experience of writing is and how the results of that experience are responded to by their educational environments. ("Repositioning Remediation" 79)

Those of us who teach in the SWW Program have found that working with students in the role of a tutor not only helps them to decode instructor feedback, but also forces instructors both to analyze and reflect on our own meanings when using common phrases ("too wordy"; "needs more details"; "expand this idea"). These comments, which we read days or even weeks after writing them, are artifacts from a past engagement with the text, and, interestingly, we sometimes find ourselves struggling to interpret their meanings. Perhaps our work as tutors helps to reveal to students the true nature of language, with its always shifting meaning, as well as our own successes and failures at communicating with our readers. Certainly, more research needs to be done in terms of understanding how the instructor shifts her role and how students perceive this shift.

As we hope we have shown in our discussion of the workshop hour, a primary objective of the SWW Seamless Support model is to create spaces basic writers can call their own in an environment that has often been traditionally dismissive of, and sometimes even hostile, to their presence. Before moving on to a consideration of how tutoring is integrated into this design, we will briefly describe another space where our students are given the opportunity to literally discover their voices in the academy. Each semester, students hold a reading that is open to the public, providing them the opportunity to share their writing with the entire campus community, which often includes such campus VIPs as the provost and president. In conjunction with the reading, the students publish *Fresh Perspectives*, a collection of essays, poems, fiction, and nonfiction. In Spring 2007, our ESL/SWW instructor, Penny Freel, developed a new journal with her students: *ESL Exchanges*, a

publication of exploratory writings on food and family that includes recipes from the students' native cultures. Over the years, we have discovered that students often choose personal narratives rather than samples of their academic writing to submit for publication. This is not surprising. In his essay "Narrative Discourse and the Basic Writer," Norbert Elliot observes that narrative writing "is the most significant form of discourse for [basic] writers" as it is "through narrative, [that] basic writers incorporate the world of the academy into their own lives" (19).

Seamless Support: In the Writing Center

Finally, the concept of seamless support is carried over into the individual tutoring component, which is staffed by tutors who work closely with the instructor. Before the semester begins, tutors are assigned to a specific section of SWW composition and meet with the instructor to discuss class objectives. The majority of our in-class tutors are teaching assistants enrolled in our Master's program, so it is likely that the instructor and tutor already know each other and that the tutor is well-versed in the requirements of the composition program. Once the semester is underway, the instructor and tutor typically discuss student progress at the start of the workshop hour, so that both the tutor and instructor are made aware each other's concerns. In the past, we experimented with formalizing the dialogue between them by having the tutor keep an attendance log with comments which was then turned in to the instructor weekly. However, instructors reported that they got more out of talking directly to the tutor as the comments on the official attendance log were, by necessity, cursory. We have also found that instructors and tutors often continue these conversations via email or in person.

In addition to bringing their own training in composition and rhetorical theory and classroom teaching experience to the tutoring sessions, the tutors are also students themselves, and this positions them in a mediatory role. Tutors not only provide academic support but often lend a sympathetic ear to student concerns. We have found that students are often more quickly able to develop a meaningful relationship with the tutor, who is closer to the student's age and position within the academy. That the tutor spends at least two hours with each student per week, between workshop and tutoring sessions, further helps to establish this relationship.

The comments of Meri Weiss, a former tutor who is now an instructor of composition at the School of New Resources, reveals the way in which students sometimes share their personal lives with a sympathetic tutor:

> Many [of the students] said that their parents had sacrificed so much for them to live in America and attend college, and they felt pressure/obligation/pride to illustrate to their parents both that the sacrifice was worthwhile and that they were worthy of it. They loved getting good grades and succeeding. The domino effect of working hard, earning a high grade on an essay or test and then earning a solid B or A- for the semester really affected them; they became living proof to themselves that academic dedication pays off in many ways.

Instructors are not always aware of the multiple pressures first-year students are under and often learn of them only when a student finds herself in a situation requiring accommodations (extensions on papers, excused absences, etc.). While we would never ask a tutor to betray a student's confidence by sharing personal information, the tutor does provides important feedback to the instructor about the assignments, students' progress, and individual problems she may see in students' work.

Finally, we feel it is important to point out the role of tutor training in the SWW Seamless Support model. As a result of Sarah Gardner's and Mark Bellomo's (former and current coordinators of the Writing Center) leadership, the College Reading and Learning Association granted its Level 1 Certification to the Center in 2005. In-class tutors are expected to attend weekly training sessions, and are also encouraged to work towards nationally recognized CRLA certification. Training ranges from discussions of recent research in the area of composition and rhetoric to workshop sessions, such as those led by ESL specialists and staff from the office of the Disability Resource Center.

Assessment: Our Ten Year Anniversary

Identifying how student perceptions of their own writing have changed, and how the design of the SWW Program has influenced/mediated this change, is the primary focus of our current research. To this end, we have recently begun reviewing reflective letters students included in their final portfolios at the end of Composition I. We are planning to conduct follow-up interviews with students, such as the one who wrote the following:

> Since the course, I feel a bit more confident in my writing. . . . I still have some trouble getting some thoughts clearly written and

> writing strong sentence structures but working along side someone like a tutor has been truly a big help. For me it is important to get some feedback and some guidance.

As well as this student:

> After experiencing this class I have gained a new respect for writing. I enjoy being able to have a thought that I can put together to make an essay that I am proud to have my name on top.

After reading almost a hundred letters from students in various sections across a range of years, we are beginning to identify common themes centered on students' emerging sense of agency as writers. Certainly, some may exaggerate how much their writing has improved or may insist that "they have truly grown as writers" in order to please us and perhaps even to earn a higher grade (although the letters themselves are never graded). Still, we believe these letters are giving us a better insight into student perceptions of their own writing and will serve as a rich source of follow-up study.

The letters written by a majority of our SWW and ESL/SWW students often speak about how they felt about their writing skills prior to entering college and a college writing class. For example, one student's reflective letter begins with her declaration that she has always been "disappointed" by her lack of English language writing skills. As other basic writing instructors have noted, students often express their feelings of inadequacy as writers in moral or social terms. For example, another student writes:

> At the beginning I used to hate sharing my writing with other people, especially in peer critique. I was not sure of the way I used to express my ideas. . . . I was ashamed of my writing.

This student's reflection reminds us of the important role basic writing programs have in helping students to gain confidence in using what Richard Rodriguez calls "the language of public life" (qtd. in Torres). Students become uncomfortable with writing and speaking in high school for a variety of reasons, often growing frustrated with their attempts to conform to the conventions of standard English, conventions which are, of course, socially constructed. Thus, feelings of "shame" become associated with the writing process.

While the letters of our students do not reveal a sophisticated awareness of how the dominant culture attempts to fix their places within (and without) the academy, what we have found is that these letters express an increasing sense of self-confidence as well as an awareness that they are stake-holders in the academy. For example, one student writes:

> My attitude toward writing has changed, because now I do not write an essay because the teacher told me to do so. I do it because I like it and enjoy it. . . . Through the semester I saw my writing develop and it was satisfied for me. . . . Now, I do not mind reading in front of the entire class because I am reading my feelings, the information I searched, or my opinion.

As discussed earlier in this article, one of the SWW Program's central goals is to create a supportive community among our students, faculty, and tutors, a community that places value on student ideas and risk-taking. Whether our students can clearly articulate this shift in values from the high school to the college classroom is not yet certain (another area we hope to assess in a follow-up study), but it is clear that, for the majority of our students, their perceptions of themselves as writers have changed by the end of Composition I.

While we are primarily interested in qualitative assessment, quantitative assessment has become the by-word of administrators and policy-makers seeking to make systemic changes to both K-12 as well as college-level instruction. As basic writing instructors know, assessing student progress is complex, and assessments of only the short-term are of limited value. In addition, the ways in which we assess our students, as Mike Rose and David Bartholomae, among others, have pointed out, is suspect, sometimes revealing more about institutional biases than about student writing.

Be that as it may, those outside of our programs who evaluate us often use quantitative data to form opinions about the "success" of a particular program and use such data to argue for curricular changes. In 2002, SWW Program Coordinator, Rachel Rigolino, requested that the Office of Institutional Research compare the graduation rates and GPAs of students who had been in the SWW Program with those of their cohorts. The results showed that students in the SWW Program were achieving similar rates of success as their peers using standard benchmarks. Additional data was collected in late 2006, the ten year anniversary of the inception of the SWW Program. The charts in Appendix B illustrate how closely the data collected on SWW

students mirrors that of their counterparts. We have found this data to be helpful when discussing basic writing with interested parties both on campus and off.

While there remains much to be analyzed and researched in terms of the pedagogical underpinnings of the SWW Program and the Seamless Support model, we believe that this model's success can be used to find ways to talk to those outside of the classroom about basic writers and basic writing programs. What follows are some insights which can be shared with interested parties.

Given access to enough resources, basic writers can progress to degree at the same rate as other students. Knowing that administrators might balk at spending extra money to provide an hour of workshop and tutoring to students, we were careful to point out that we would be eliminating an extra layer of classes (preparatory writing), an argument which won us enough time to begin the pilot program in Fall 1996. If we were making the same proposal today, we would express this result in a different way: namely, our data shows that the additional resources expended on our basic writing students results in quicker progress to degree than under the old, three-semester model. In addition to appealing to administrators concerned with accrediting bodies, this rather straight-forward observation has the potential to change the public perception of basic writers.

These resources are similar to those being allocated to learning communities at campuses around the country. Of course, it is not only basic writing faculty who must contend with public perceptions of their programs. College administrators are also finding themselves driven to institute changes often as a result of data published by widely read college guides such as *U.S. News and World Report: America's Best Colleges*. The effort to increase first-year retention rates has been fueled, in part, by public perception, and the Learning Community movement has greatly benefited from this trend. The Seamless Support model is, it can be argued, a type of Learning Community, and certainly our data on retention rates can be used to buttress this position. If institutions are committing expenditures in order to improve retention rates, Seamless Support models of instruction for basic writers should be included.

External measurements are not necessary to determine student success. Measuring student achievement through standardized testing is, of course, a well-entrenched practice in our K-12 schools, and it is not improbable that state governments might eventually mandate benchmark exams at various points in a college student's academic career. Heated debates about the merits of such exams are likely to continue *ad nauseum*,

and it is unlikely that, at least in the public forum, nuanced arguments based on scholarly research will win the day. However, what our longitudinal study of the SWW Program shows is that meaningful comparisons can be made among cohorts at a particular college. While we would need further research to demonstrate cause and effect between specific components of the program and data on, for example, student GPAs, we *can* give a broad picture of the program's success. What can be shown is that students placed into the SWW Seamless Support model are succeeding according to the traditional tools to measure success: pass rates into Composition II, retention rates, graduation rates, and GPAs.

Including student voices is necessary. Now that we have collected quantitative data about the SWW Seamless Support model, we plan to conduct more research in the area of student perception. How do students perceive classroom time, workshop time, and tutoring time? Do students see the model as being "seamless" or do they use descriptors that reflect other visions of the program? How do students view the roles of the instructor in the classroom and the workshop? The role of the tutor inside and outside of the Writing Center? In addition to collecting information from recent students, we plan to solicit feedback from students who have been out of the program for several years, including, we hope, from students enrolled in the first SWW classes in 1996. As basic writing instructors, we profess to value our students' voices, and if this is true, then we must find ways to bring them into the public discussion about basic writing programs and their place in the academy. While we may draw attention to the success of various models through the presentation of data and research, debates are rarely won on the strength of logical arguments alone. Once we professionals have caught the public's ear, the voices of our students may be what finally have the power to effect lasting change.

Works Cited

Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Susanmarie Harrington. "In the Here and Now: Public Policy and Basic Writing." *Journal of Basic Writing* 25.2 (2006): 27-48.

Andrews, Jacqueline, and Kirsten Rowe. "Composition Mean Grade Point Average." Chart. Office of Institutional Research and Planning. SUNY New Paltz. January 2007.

_____. "Composition Retention/Graduation Rate." Chart. Office of Institutional Research and Planning. SUNY New Paltz. January 2007.

Bartholomae, David. "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum." *Journal of Basic Writing* 12.1 (1993): 4-21.

The City College Undergraduate Bulletin: 2005-2007. 24 November 2007 <http://www1.ccny.cuny.edu/CCNYBulletin/upload/2005_07_UGraduateBulletin.PDF>.

Cooper, Sandi. "Remediation's End: Can New York Educate the Children of the 'Whole People?'" *Academe* 84.4 (1998): 14-17. ProQuest. Sojourner Truth Library. New Paltz, NY. 2 June 2007 <http://proquest.umi.com.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu>.

CUNY Community College Conference. "Myths and Facts about Remediation at CUNY." Fall 1998. 19 June 2007 <http://www.psc-cuny.org/mythfact.htm>.

Elliot, Norbert. "Narrative Discourse and the Basic Writer." *Journal of Basic Writing* 14.2 (1995):19-30.

Glau, Gregory R. "Stretch at 10: A Progress Report on Arizona State University's Stretch Program." *Journal of Basic Writing* 26.2 (2007): PAGE NUMBERS TO COME.

Grego, Rhonda, and Nancy Thompson. "Repositioning Remediation: Renegotiating Composition's Work in the Academy." *College Composition and Communication* 47.1 (1996): 62-84. JSTOR. Sojourner Truth Library. New Paltz, NY. 30 May 2007 <http://www.jstor.org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu>.

_____. T*eaching Writing in Third Spaces: The Studio Model.* Publisher's Abstract. Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois UP: 2008. 7 July 2007 <http://www.siu.edu/~siupress/books/GregoThompsonTeachingWriting.html>.

Horner, Bruce. *Review of Mainstreaming Basic Writers: Politics, and Pedagogies of Access.* Eds. Gerri McNenny and Sallyanne H. Fitzgerald. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Lawrence, 2001. *Composition Studies* 32.1 (2004): 32-138. EBSCOhost. Sojourner Truth Library. New Paltz, NY. 4 June 2007 <http://web.ebscohost.com.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu>.

Kellogg, Karen. "Learning Communities." *ERIC Digest.* ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education. 1999. ED430512 1999-00-00.

Knowlton, Steven. "Questions about Remedial Education in a Time of Budget Cuts."*New York Times* 7 June 1995: B11. Historical New York Times. Pro-

Quest.Sojourner Truth Library. New Paltz, NY. 4 June 2007 <http://web.ebscohost.com.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu>.

Lalicker, William B. "A Basic Introduction to Basic Writing Program Structures: A Baseline and Five Alternatives." *BWe: Basic Writing e-Journal* 1.2 (1999). 7 May 2007 <http://www.asu.edu/clas/english/composition/cbw/bwe_fall_1999.htm>.

Lively, Kit. State Notes. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 3 Nov. 1995: A41. ProQuest. Sojourner Truth Library. New Paltz, NY. 30 May 2007<http://proquest.umi.com.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu>.

Mauk, Johnathon. "Location, Location, Location: The 'Real' (E)states of Being, Writing, and Thinking in Composition." *College English* 64.4 (2003): 368-88.

Meyers, Bart. "The CUNY Wars." *Social Text* 51 (1997): 119-30. JSTOR. Sojourner Truth Library. New Paltz, NY. 2 June 2007 <http://www.jstor.org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu>.

National Center for Education Statistics. "Remedial Education at Higher Education Institutions in Fall 1995." 25 May 2007 <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/peqis/publications/97584/index.asp?sectionID=1>.

Rose, Mike. "Narrowing the Mind and Page: Remedial Writers and Cognitive Reductionism." *College Composition and Communication* 39.3 (1988): 267-302. JSTOR. Sojourner Truth Library. New Paltz, NY. 2 June 2007 <http://www.jstor.org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu>.

Shaughnessy, Mina. *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing.* Oxford UP, 1979.

Southern Illinois University Press. *Review of Teaching Writing in Third Spaces.* Rhonda C. Grego and Nancy S. Thompson. Southern Illinois UP, 2008 1 Nov. 2007 <http://www.siu.edu/~siupress/books/GregoThompson-TeachingWriting.html>.

Spooner, Michael, and Kathleen Yancey. "Posting on a Genre of Email." *College Composition and Communication* 47.2. (1996): 252-78. JSTOR. Sojourner Truth Library. New Paltz, NY. 24 Nov. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu>.

Tassoni, John Paul, and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson. "Not Just Anywhere, Anywhen: Mapping Change through Studio Work." *Journal of Basic Writing* 24.1(2005): 68-92.

Torres, Hector A. "'I Don't Think I Exist': Interview with Richard Rodriguez." MELUS.28.2 (2003): 164-202. JSTOR. Sojourner Truth Library. New Paltz, NY. 15 Nov. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu>.

Weiss, Meri. Email interview. 25 July 2007.

Appendix A:
State University of New York at New Paltz Placement Rubric

Level:	**5 (honors)**	**4 (Exit Level Comp 1)**	**3 (Entrance Level Comp 1)**	**2 (SWW)**	**1 (SWW)**
MEANING/CONTENT: the extent to which the response exhibits sound understanding, interpretation, and analysis of the task or text:					
Thesis:	Exhibits a thesis that is highly insightful, original, and cogently stated. Key terms are defined in depth.	Exhibits a thesis that is insightful and clearly stated. Key terms are defined.	States thesis. Defines some key terms.	States vague thesis. Does not define terms.	Presents no thesis. Does not define terms.
Analysis:	Reveals both in-depth analysis and independent thinking; makes insightful and original connections.	Reveals in-depth analysis; makes insightful connections.	Conveys a thorough understanding of topic and makes clear connections.	Conveys a basic understanding of topic; makes a few connections.	Provides an inaccurate understanding of topic with unclear connections.
DEVELOPMENT: the extent to which ideas are elaborated using specific & relevant evidence:					
Ideas:	Develops ideas expertly; and demonstrates an unusual ability to interest a reader through use of substantive details.	Develops ideas clearly and fully, making effective use of a wide-range of relevant/specific details.	Develops ideas clearly; uses relevant/specific details.	Develops ideas briefly; uses some detail.	Presents incomplete or undeveloped ideas.
Paragraph Development:	Clearly develops paragraphs directly related to thesis; each paragraph extends the main idea.	Clearly develops paragraphs directly related to thesis; paragraphs contribute to the thesis/main idea.	Most paragraphs relate to the thesis.	Some paragraphs relate to the thesis.	Few or no paragraphs relate to the thesis.
Level:	**5 (Honors)**	**4 (Exit Level Comp 1)**	**3 (Entrance Level Comp 1)**	**2 (SWW)**	**1 (SWW)**
ORGANIZATION: the extent to which the response exhibits direction shape and coherence:					
Organization:	Maintains a clear, coherent essay structure including exceptional command of essay format.	Maintains clear, appropriate focus; exhibits a logical, coherent structure through appropriate transitions.	Maintains a clear, appropriate focus; exhibits a logical sequence of ideas through appropriate transitions.	Establishes but does not maintain appropriate focus; inconsistencies in sequence of ideas/transitions.	Lacks an appropriate focus, but suggests some organization.
Introduction:	Creates an engaging focus on topic.	Clearly focuses on topic; conveys a powerful message to the reader.	Focuses on topic in the introduction.	Lacks a focus on topic/purpose in introduction.	Contains no focus on topic in introduction.
Conclusion:	Provides further thinking and implications (e.g., suggests further research, or extends key ideas).	Extends, connects, and comments on key ideas.	Summarizes key ideas.	Somewhat restates main idea.	Contains an incomplete conclusion or conclusion is missing.
Overall Organization:	Exceeds requirements of assignment.	Consistently meets requirements.	Meets requirements.	Meets some requirements	Meets few/no requirements.

	5 (Honors)	4 (Exit Level Comp 1)	3 (Entrance Level Comp 1)	2 (SWW)	1 (SWW)
LANGUAGE USE: the extent to which the response reveals an awareness of audience and purpose through an effective use of words, sentence structure, and sentence variety:					
Description:	Demonstrates a level of professional excellence in style,	Creates vivid "pictures" through concrete language, rich sensory detail, and literary devices.	Creates "pictures" through concrete language, sensory detail and literary devices.	Uses concrete language, sensory detail, and literary devices.	Uses little concrete language, sensory detail, or literary devices.
Word Choice:	word choice,	Uses sophisticated, precise vocabulary.	Uses effective word choices.	Uses some effective word choices.	Uses few effective word choices.
Sentence Variety:	complexity of language,	Uses well-varied sentence structure throughout.	Exhibits good sentence structure/ variety.	Uses occasional sentence variety.	Uses little sentence variety.
Voice/Sense of Audience:	and sense of audience.	Has a unique voice and strong awareness of audience.	Exhibits evident awareness of voice/audience.	Exhibits some awareness of voice/audience.	Exhibits a rudimentary sense of audience.
CONVENTIONS: the extent to which the response exhibits conventional spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, capitalization, grammar, and usage:					
Grammar/ Punctuation:	Achieves excellence in grammar basics.	Exhibits correct grammar in smooth, fluid sentences; error-free punctuation.	Exhibits mostly correct grammar; punctuation errors do not interfere with communication.	Exhibits errors in grammar that occasionally interfere with communication.	Exhibits errors that are awkward and interfere with communication.
Spelling and Usage:	Exhibits error free prose.	Exhibits correct spelling; error-free prose.	Exhibits mostly correct spelling and usage.	Frequently misspells and misuses words.	Excessively misspells and misuses words.
Presentation:	Achieves all-around excellence in presentation; MLA format.	Displays a neat and professional presentation; MLA format; attention to detail; unique title.	Demonstrates a neat and easy-to-read presentation; MLA format; appropriate title.	Exhibits average presentation; incomplete format; average title.	Pays little/no attention to presentation; no format; poor/no title.

Appendix B:
Composition Retention/Graduation Rates and Composition Mean GPA Comparisons

Fall 1998 - Fall 2005 | Composition Retention/Graduation Rate | Last Update: January 8, 2006

Cohort Entering	Category	Total Cohort	Retention Rate as of end of: 1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Graduation Rate within: 4 Years	5 Years	6 Years
Fall 1998	Non-SWW	549	75.6%	62.8%	60.1%	27.0%	49.4%	54.5%
	SWW	88	79.5%	68.2%	67.0%	21.6%	54.5%	60.2%
	Total	637	76.1%	63.6%	61.1%	26.2%	50.1%	55.3%
Fall 1999	Non-SWW	677	80.6%	71.9%	68.5%	34.0%	59.5%	64.1%
	SWW	104	84.6%	72.1%	70.2%	24.0%	56.7%	66.3%
	Total	781	81.2%	72.0%	68.8%	32.7%	59.2%	64.4%
Fall 2000	Non-SWW	667	82.9%	66.3%	62.1%	29.8%	53.2%	57.0%
	SWW	117	83.8%	77.8%	73.5%	28.2%	59.0%	64.1%
	Total	784	83.0%	68.0%	63.8%	29.6%	54.1%	58.0%
Fall 2001	Non-SWW	687	84.0%	75.0%	71.0%	34.5%	62.3%	
	SWW	97	84.5%	79.4%	73.2%	29.9%	61.9%	
	Total	784	84.1%	75.5%	71.3%	33.9%	62.2%	
Fall 2002	Non-SWW	719	84.4%	76.9%	73.2%	40.5%		
	SWW	47	87.2%	85.1%	78.7%	27.7%		
	Total	766	84.6%	77.4%	73.5%	39.7%		
Fall 2003	Non-SWW	651	82.8%	74.3%	70.8%			
	SWW	105	91.4%	81.9%	79.0%			
	Total	756	84.0%	75.4%	72.0%			
Fall 2004	Non-SWW	573	86.6%	75.9%				
	SWW	80	80.0%	68.8%				
	Total	653	85.8%	75.0%				
Fall 2005	Non-SWW	751	85.1%					
	SWW	104	81.7%					
	Total	855	84.7%					

Note: 1. Data Source: Student Data File
2. Retention includes those who return or graduate within 3 years.

Page 2

Fall 1998 - Fall 2005 **Composition Mean Grade Point Average** Last Update: January 9, 2006

Cohort Entering	Category	Total Cohort	1st Year		6th Year	
			Mean Cum. GPA	Count of Cum. GPA	Mean Cum. GPA	Count of Cum. GPA
Fall 1998	Non-SWW	549	2.85	415	3.05	297
	SWW	88	2.76	70	2.96	53
	Total	637	2.84	485	3.04	350
Fall 1999	Non-SWW	677	2.88	545	3.09	429
	SWW	104	2.82	88	3.01	69
	Total	781	2.87	633	3.08	498
Fall 2000	Non-SWW	667	2.90	550	3.11	376
	SWW	117	2.80	98	3.01	75
	Total	784	2.88	648	3.09	451
Fall 2001	Non-SWW	687	2.97	577		
	SWW	97	2.88	82		
	Total	784	2.96	659		
Fall 2002	Non-SWW	719	3.04	607		
	SWW	47	2.81	40		
	Total	766	3.02	647		
Fall 2003	Non-SWW	651	3.07	539		
	SWW	105	2.90	96		
	Total	756	3.05	635		
Fall 2004	Non-SWW	573	3.14	494		
	SWW	80	2.95	64		
	Total	653	3.12	558		
Fall 2005	Non-SWW	751	3.09	636		
	SWW	104	2.89	85		
	Total	855	3.06	721		

Notes:

1. 1st Year GPA calculated for those who returned; 6th Year GPA calculated for those who graduated.
2. Count of GPA values may be lower than those in Retention-Graduation chart due to missing GPAs.
3. Difference between means is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

	1st Year			6th Year		
	t	df	p	t	df	p
Fall 1998	1.270	86	0.208	1.592	348	0.112
Fall 1999	1.115	631	0.265	1.770	496	0.077
Fall 2000	1.616	646	0.107	2.116	449	0.035
Fall 2001	1.404	657	0.161			
Fall 2002	2.761	645	0.006			
Fall 2003	3.203	633	0.001			
Fall 2004	3.100	556	0.002			
Fall 2005	3.348	719	0.001			