THE WRITINGLAB

...FROM THE EDITOR...

As articles are accepted for the newsletter, we try to keep them in an orderly stack so that they also appear in the same order (unless there is a pressing reason for appearing in a more timely manner). So, while the essays in this issue were the ones that simultaneously surfaced for this month's issue, they seem unusually well grouped in a theme. These surveys, reports, and analyses offer local results, but in doing so, they may suggest general truths to you or suggest the possibilities of similar surveys and analyses that you want to undertake.

In addition, this month we have some voices from WCenter, an electronic listserv, discussing problems in tutoring ESL students. While many of us also read WCenter, there are hundreds of us who don't have electronic access. "Voices from the Net" is offered here partly to share that e-mail conversation with the rest of our newsletter group and partly to help WCenter subscribers re-read good discussions. If you like these WCenter excerpts, we'll continue this from time to time.

And for those of us feeling harried by work that should have been done yesterday, a quotation from Douglas Adams: "I like deadlines. I love the whooshing sound they make as they fly by."
• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

The writing center and student expectations: A case study

At Valdosta State University in Valdosta, Georgia, the campus writing center serves a number of students, each possessing different concerns and needs. VSU's Writing Center maintains as much flexibility as possible, but meeting every student's need often seems an unreachable goal. Students enjoy taking advantage of the technology—24 Zenith computers with 486 processors and a laser printer all spaced throughout a medium-sized lab—and the services—private scheduled and walk-in tutoring sessions in a separate room with several tables, punctuation workshops held in classrooms, and class orientations to software. At VSU, as with any institution, staff members seek to improve their performance and to be more directly attentive to student concerns. In 1994, the Center director and I designed a survey in an attempt to focus services directly upon student needs.

To encourage as many students as possible to respond, the survey asked questions in a variety of ways to in-

clude numerical scaling of specific services —computer lab, tutoring services, Regents' prep sessions, and punctuation workshops—and general response queries. These response queries included "What suggestions do you have for improving the writing center and its services?" and "Use the space on the back of this page for any additional comments about the writing center and/or its staff." Many students did respond as the surveys were handled as a part of the standard class evaluation process; what follows is an

overview of the most significant indicators—environment, attitude, scheduling, and software selection—that appeared, and, although the results specifically target VSU, I believe that these indicators when considered as a case study prove valuable to writing center staff members at any institution.

Written responses to the first query, "What suggestions do you have for improving the writing center and its services?" revealed that students have strong opinions relative to the environment in which they would prefer to work. In recent years at Valdosta State, the transition from writing lab—a computers-only environment where tutoring often suffers for lack of space and quiet—to writing center has largely taken place with the addition of a separate room for tutoring; every employee is now required to possess significant computer knowledge and to tutor English composition. As background, I should acknowledge that the current Writing Center attracts large numbers of students because we offer personal assistance. Whereas in other computer labs a single tutor studies throughout his or her shift and shows little concern for the patrons, we make a special effort to be accessible. More often than not, we stay on our feet for the duration of our shift, and we are not permitted to use the computers for any purpose other than official lab business. Student write-in responses demonstrate that they appreciate such attention and that they feel more comfortable in such an environment. Students cite that employees of other computer labs are not interested in helping them with their troubles whereas our center staff seems eager to assist. Even graduate students, generally serious-minded students, seem to appreciate a warm approach. As a matter of fact, graduate students in general responded most favorably towards a socially-interactive relationship between center employees and center patrons. They tend to be more serious about their studies, and they want help to be available whenever it is needed.

Taking note of the type of environment that students seem to prefer, we face a great challenge in establishing the personal, yet professional attitudes students indicated that they wanted by their responses to the second general response query, "Use the space on the back of this page for any additional comments about the writing center and/or its staff." Several students cite episodes where they believe that we as tutors acted inappropriately, and these remarks delineate further how one must take great care in approaching a student. The remarks essentially address one concern: lack of professionalism. First, students commented that some of us spent too much time with friends who came into the facility and that some of us seemed to be attempting to extend our relationships beyond the professional level to the personal level. Essentially, what seems professional for some individuals does not always seem so for others. Also, the comments seem to address the generally accepted notion that tutors should be friendly while maintaining a distance; this distance often creates the professional sense that today's tutors need to maintain. Often, students' expressions offer an accurate and honest impression of their thoughts, and, while we should not be expected to read anyone's mind, we should attempt to increase our awareness of such interpretations. In tutor training sessions developed to target professionalism, we have found that simulation and group discussion of typical student concerns enable us to more effectively cope with potential problems, and I believe that similar sessions would benefit other centers.

The other side of the coin, that we do not pay enough attention to students, was targeted as well by several students in their answers to the second general response query and should not be regarded as invalid simply because employees are required to attend actively to students. Signs of frustration—a confused look, running one's

hands through his or her hair, excessive sighing—are not difficult to observe, and we should offer help to such persons in a polite and respectful manner. VSU's Writing Center managers must avoid the fallacy that requiring tutors to walk around the facility while on duty will somehow make them more observant. At all levels, interpretive skills must be trained, and we must be motivated to watch diligently the efforts of both colleagues and students. After all, professionals know that the mission of a service establishment emphasizes making patrons happy, and they work diligently to achieve that standard.

At Valdosta State University, the Writing Center works directly with the English Department and often hosts class sessions in the center for composition and professional writing courses. Students' remarks demonstrated that they were often frustrated by blocked-off hours, even though we make a conscious effort to post open hours at the beginning of each day. Last year, we began making promotional visits to classes; included in the presentation material was a summary of policy concerning hours and the facility phone number. In hopes of helping students avoid wasted trips, tutors reminded students that they could call the center to check on the availability of terminals before they left their homes. The survey results indicate that students need more hours available to them and want fewer instances of institutional rules-making or control as, even after having a tutor come to class to explain writing center practices and services, most students cited that they were unaware of policy. Students expect, sometimes unrealistically, that the Writing Center should be available for their use any time that they need to type or to be tutored. The need for a more successful dialogue between students and staff members draws support from these results.

With this need in mind, I note that some responders did suggest alternative plans of action. Suggestions ranged broadly from the very practical to the outrageous. On more than one occasion, students recommended that class reservation time be strictly limited. For example, faculty members would only be allowed to block off time for their classes on an interval basis such as two hours every two weeks or three hours every three weeks. Also, students often pointed out what has become a pressing concern—space. Instead of blocking off an entire lab, only a portion of a larger writing center's lab could be reserved; the lab would be more accessible, and at least a few computers would always be available for students.

The student surveys demonstrate that students expect software to be useful specifically for them. At the VSU Writing Center, we offer a wide variety of programs including WordPerfect 6.0, Express Graph, and Harvard Graphics in hopes of meeting the needs of our clientele. Relative to the specific needs of the English Department, the Writing Center does generally succeed in providing appropriate software. Composition students and professional writing students discover that they possess the capability to produce everything from a descriptive essay to a technical report. The tension lies in the Writing Center's working to meet the needs of all students. In 1993, Valdosta State moved from a college to a university, and with that transition comes significant responsibility. In an essay about the Purdue University Writing Lab, Muriel Harris suggests, "diversity may not be a virtue, but for a writing lab in a large multiversity, it is a necessity" (1). However, this responsibility does not only fall upon universities and large schools. Julie Neff, speaking about the University of Puget Sound, demonstrates the burden of personal attention that it bears as a result of its smaller size: "A small liberal arts college is in many ways an ideal place for a writing center. Writing Center values—writing as process and product, active learning, the worth of the indi-

vidual—are also the values of the institution" (127). VSU is an "in-between" school relative to the size of these schools, but we are working to develop an equally similar means of meeting student needs. Many of the VSU students who complained on their surveys about the software available remarked that they were unable to complete assignments for other classes in the center. For instance, subject areas ranging from nursing to sociology to education all require statistics, so perhaps the center needs to add a statistics program to its catalog. Student remarks indicate that their needs are constantly evolving and must continue to be met in order for the center to be most effective.

Also, students indicate that they want software to be practical and simple. At least, they want the software to be presented to them in a simple manner and explained effectively to them. One of the more productive undertakings at Valdosta State has been the Director's authoring and publishing two basic user manuals—*Using WordPerfect (5.1) at VSC* and *Very Basic WordPerfect 6.0*—that are tailored to the needs of local students. With one of these texts in hand, students are able to directly follow our instructions when they attend their orientation. Also, when they return to the center's lab, they can work independently and confidently. Students indicated that they were pleased with the practical voice of these texts. Generally speaking, students offered few complaints about our computer–based knowledge. At Valdosta State, most of our staff are English majors, so the student comments reflect the determined effort that staff members make to be familiar with the software in the facility. The most specific problems occurred when students were working on the Internet or with under-utilized software packages that don't receive our everyday attention.

Valdosta State University students provided specific points of concern—environment, attitude, scheduling, and software selection—for staff members to address. Because of the success of the first application of the survey, I

Within and without

The phenomenal growth in the number of high school writing centers is matched only by the phenomenal growth of new and expanded services which these centers provide both within the center and beyond its walls. I have been most fortunate in helping develop our expanded services and in working and communicating with many other centers around the country. To help increase awareness of the possibilities for center services, the following is a brief sharing of the unique and beneficial activities which are occurring in high school writing centers.

Within the center . . .

In addition to drop-in and referrals to the center and the center assuming an "essence" of its own, many centers are pro-active in seeking opportunities to work within classrooms. Both staff and student tutors/coaches often make in-class presentations about study skills techniques, research processes and products, writing forms and structures, etc. Many of these presentations are videotaped for future reference and made available to those who may have been absent.

Staff and student tutors/coaches also work in on-going response groups within classes. Both staff and student tutors/coaches work with athletic coaches and other extra-curricular sponsors in providing study skills, test-taking, and other sessions to help athletes and other participants in extra-curricular activities be more successful in the classroom. Center personnel have also developed specific forms for note-taking, study skills, etc. which are available to all students and staff.

The center is an ideal place to publicize writing contests and opportunities and to arrange mini-workshops for those interested to work collaboratively on their submissions. Many centers have expanded the scope of assistance provided and have tutors in all content areas, to help with computer development skills, and other non-writing areas. Staff in the center also provide valuable assistance to other staff in completion of their own advanced college course writing assignments and work.

One of the most important functions of a center is to serve as a clearinghouse for a variety of most valuable activities. Centers can coordinate writing/learning assignments across the curriculum, i.e. a combined research project in history and language arts. Centers can be the storehouse for cross-curricular staff sharing of writing and writing-to-learn activities and strategies. Centers can coordinate the use of keyboarding students to publish the writings of students in content classes and in producing center publications. Such work often provides more realistic practice for keyboarding students and is an efficient way to produce center newsletters, celebrations of writings, etc.

Outside the center . . .

One of the most successful activities beyond the school day is what our center calls "Study Skills Night." We sponsor an evening of mini-presentations for all high school and middle school students and their parents. We ask staff from all content areas to share study skills, note-taking, and learning strategies for their particular areas. We sponsor general sessions about study skills and test-taking strategies, sessions for students and parents to discuss scholarships and other issues with counselors, and a session for parents and students to discuss issues with administrators. We contact local businesses to provide free pencils, highlighters, and refreshments. We provide free copies of all study skills and note-taking materials, and our local Education Association provides free copies of a locally produced book to help parents help their children in school and free copies of *Writers Inc* and *Write Source 2000* as door prizes.

In the spring, we sponsor mini-workshops for high school students and their parents who are completing college applications or scholarship applications. We provide several evening sessions for students and parents to receive response to and revise their works. In some centers, staff create heightened awareness of the center through work with local businesses in improving communication skills for employees. Our staff has worked with local management and office personnel in improving internal and external communication skills. Many centers also provide services to local civic groups and organizations by helping with writing, editing, and production of their organization newsletters.

Student tutors/coaches also expand their duties in many centers. Student tutors/coaches work with middle school or elementary teachers and students in reading-writing enrichment activities and in helping produce class books or newsletters. Student tutors/coaches make audio recordings of books for elementary students and help with the design and development of student portfolios. I know of a school where the center staff and students regularly visit local nursing homes and work with residents to help them write, publish, and share accounts of their lives and opinions.

In addition to these on-going services, many centers have special events and activities to raise consciousness of their existence. "Read-Around-the Clock" or "Write-Around-the-Clock" events, giving coupons for "free" visits to center, creating special shirts or clothing for center staff and tutors/coaches, providing free pencils,

notebooks, and other school items with the center name and logo, and/or providing refreshments for center clients are just a few of the unique and effective methods centers have used.

I know there are undoubtedly many more services which centers provide, and I am interested in sharing information about all high school writing center activities. All of these efforts, especially those outside of the center, demand the greatest professional dedication and commitment. However the increased awareness and support for the center created by such services, and more importantly, the benefits provided to others make these an important investment.

Writing center and student expectations

priority. However, we plan to address each valid suggestion in order to enhance the quality of our performance and the quality of experience for our students. And, in fairness, many of the concerns—expansion of facility in general and of software library—must be addressed at the administrative level. We can only continue to do all that we can. In the very near future, we hope to direct our attention even more to specific student needs, our motivation, and our perception of student concerns.

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Works Cited

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Neff, Julie. "The Writing Center at the University of Puget Sound: The Center of Academic Life." *Writing Centers in Context: Twelve Case Studies*. Ed. Joyce A. Kinkead and Jeanette G. Harris. Urbana: NCTE, 1993. 127–144.

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

Feb. 28: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Hayward, CA
Contact: Kimberly Pratt, Division of Language Arts, Chabot College, 25555 Hesperian Blvd., Hayward, CA 94545. Phone: 510-786-6950.

March 1: New England Writing Centers Association, in Providence, RI
Contact: Meg Carroll, Writing Center, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI 02908. E-mail: mcarroll@grog.ric.edu

March 21: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in Brooklyn, NY
Contact: Gretchen Haynes, Writing Center, Library 318, Queensborough Community College, Bayside, NY 11364-1497. Fax: 718-428-0802; phone: 718-281-5001.

April 3-5: Texas Association of Writing Centers, in South Padre, TX
Contact: Lady Falls Brown, 213 Dept. of English, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-3091; e-mail: ykflb@ttacs.ttu.edu

April 10-12: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Baton Rouge, LA
Contact: Judith G. Caprio: phone: 504-388-4077; e-mail: jcaprio@unix1.sncc.lsu.edu

April 11: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Bloomsburg, PA
Contact: Terry Riley, Dept. of English, Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA 17815. Phone: 717-389-4736; e-mail: triley@bloomu.edu

April 18-19: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Pittsburgh, PA
Contact: Margaret Marshall, Dept. of English, Cathedral of Learning, U. of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Phone: 412-624-6555; e-mail: marshall+@pitt.edu

April 18-20: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Augusta, GA
Contact: Karin Sisk, Augusta College, Writing Center, Dept. of Languages, Literature, and Communications, Augusta, Georgia 30904-2200. Fax: 706-737-1773; phone: 706-737-1402 or 737-1500; e-mail: ksisk@ac.edu

Sept. 17-20: National Writing Centers Association/Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Park City, UT
Contact: Penny C. Bird, English Dept., Brigham Young U., Box 26280, Provo, UT 84602-6280. Fax: 801-378-4720; phone: 801-378-5471; e-mail: penny_bird@byu.edu

VOICES FROM THE NET

ESL students and non-tutorial resources

The following excerpts are from postings that appeared on the electronic listserv WCenter during the period of November 18-21, 1996.

From: James Bandy (96bandy@wmich.edu)

The tutors in our WC seem to be waging a constant battle against insecurity in regards to tutoring the ESL student. As writing center tutors they have been trained not to lead directly, not to "give" answers or "correct" student "mistakes" and yet, in the face of a discouraged or frustrated ESL student, who may have been told by their instructor that they needed to go to the WC because he or she did not have the time or experience to deal with the ESL problem, our tutors feel enormous pressure to break the rules of the book. Tutoring by the book becomes a slow painful process yielding little sign of improvement week to week. I am sure I have taken much space to say what all have experienced. I will get along to my question.

It seems to me that the problems for which our ESL students frequently come looking for help (articles, word endings, agreement) are the sorts of problems whose corrections are best assimilated through exposure over time to written and spoken English, rather than one-on-one instruction over a piece of writing. In other words, these are the mistakes these students aren't "hearing." We're trying to address the problem in a writing tutorial when it comes

from another sector of language acquisition entirely, speech and listening. Now, I know the lines can get fuzzy here, we could say that many of the problems we deal with in other non-ESL students could be described the same way, but they have acquired the language differently, by and large.

What I am curious about is this (and I said I was getting to my question earlier)—there are many web-sites out there, and I am sure there is other software available as well, where ESL students can sit down by themselves for whatever length of time is comfortable and get in some good practice. . . . Some of these sites have short quizzes that target particular problems. Students can self-administer these and they are checked in a matter of seconds. Now the problem comes with WC theory. In theory, as I understand it, we are not supposed to be in the business of "drilling" students, assigning or recommending busy work. I suppose this is in part because we do not look at our function as "remedial." Something with which I agree wholeheartedly. However, when we have students coming in largely to have their papers proofed for the same repeated mistakes, would it be permissible for us to recommend that these students get practice on these problems elsewhere so that more time can be spent in the tutorial on other, hopefully higher order, concerns?

From: Steve Davis (sdavis@carleton.edu)

I don't know . . . whether teaching English skills in this context will be effective. I believe that part of the reason our Japanese students at least have occasional problems here is that they were taught English through a skill/drill approach; for such students, "learning English" means doing more of the same, and the now-traditional writing tutorial doesn't feel very satisfying. But I suspect that some combination of both approaches will work the best, a combination that frames the skills-n-drill in the context of the individualized writing tutorial.

From: Jane Nelson (jnelson@uwyo.edu)

I want to comment on "tutoring by the book" when it comes to ESL students.

As your tutors have discovered, tutoring by the book doesn't work. When we discovered this, we faced the same decision—do we change the "book" or do we refuse to work with ESL students on articles, plurals, tenses, and so on? We decided to change the book.

It takes years for some (most?) ESL students to become fluent with the oddities of articles and so on. At the same time, they are in a limited degree program, sometimes very limited. MA candidates have, at most, two years; and we have a situation here in which some Taiwanese graduate students are expected to complete the course work and write a full thesis

in English in 3 semesters. Also at the same time, many faculty simply will not put up with errors. So what can a student do?

We help by cheerfully and willingly providing the answers about articles, plurals, tenses, and a million other things when we are working sentence by sentence with ESL students. We have discovered that if we welcome ESL students for all reasons, especially for the nagging problems of English that cause their major professors to turn blue (or red or purple), they very willingly start to talk about the "higher order" concerns with their writing.

By the book, we are working backwards with ESL students. But we consider our work a success if, by the third or sixth or ninth appointment, an ESL student comes in and says something like this: "I don't want to work on grammar today. Can we look, instead, at organization?"

And, oh yes, sometimes we also work "backwards" with native English speakers, too.

From: Kim Jackson (kijcc@cunyvm.cuny.edu)
No, I don't think you're out of line with wanting to help these students. Some of our "non-directive" approaches don't work with some ESL students, and we need to admit that and find other ways of working with some of our ESL students. In fact, I tend to advocate a mixture of non- with directive strategies to tutors to use. Like teachers, tutors need to be flexible and see what works with helping a student with a piece of writing.

From: Lynne Belcher (lrbelcher@saumag.edu)
ESL students have very different

needs from their native English-speaking counterparts. Consequently, I tutor them in a different way. I first find out what level of language the student is actually going to need. That is, I find out if the student is an exchange student in the U.S. for a short time, a student who plans to get a four year degree and then go home, or a student who plans to live in the U.S. When I work with an exchange student, I help him/her find errors and correct them. I point out the nouns that need articles and help the student make corrections with tense and endings. Even that activity might help the tutee gain some confidence in monitoring those language areas that are always a big concern.

I try to work with ESL students who plan to live in the U.S. in the same way I work with other U.S. residents. Those students need more language ability. I help them recognize those areas that they need to learn to monitor more carefully. I try to give them specific rules about language use, such as when to use definite and when to use indefinite articles. They need more explicit explanation than native English-speaking students, but they need to be able to produce near-native text eventually.

At least, I find it helps me to figure out how to proceed with a tutoring session if I know what level of ability the student is finally going to need in English. A couple of ESL handbooks with clear grammatical explanations can help when the tutor isn't sure she/he can provide those explanations.

From: Neal Lerner (nlerner@mit.edu)
James—a couple of thoughts come to mind in response to your ideas

about ESL students. While I can understand the desire to find drill-and-practice software for "intensive grammar instruction," I've seen little evidence that this practice works for anyone, ESL or native-English speaker. If anything, it seems to have more symbolic value for those who assign it (and I have)—some tangible means of having dealt with an intractable problem.

What intrigues me about working with ESL writers (and over half of the students we see are non-native English speakers) is how they challenge our assumptions for what writing tutoring should be. Our doctrine calls for our sessions to be responsive to students' needs, but when those needs are language-focused, why do we balk? Why do we think that pointing out errors to students is a pedagogical no-no? How do we reconcile our stated focus on process with most ESL students' product-oriented goals? Just about every ESL writer I encounter gives rise to these questions (and unfortunately few answers!).

From: Bobbie Silk (bsilk@keller.clarke.edu)
I certainly understand Neal's description of the process conflict in dealing with ESL clients. When we're looking at them across the table, we see people who just plain need to *learn* the language. While I feel compassion for their situation and I would never recommend ignoring their needs, I also wonder if it is the mission of a *writing* center to teach English as a second language. ESL teachers can do a much more effective and efficient job of this.

If we're only diagnosing the situation, the ESL student who needs serious help with grammar is an

institutional problem, not a writing center problem. Our schools often admit or even recruit international students, but they do not always offer the support that these students so desperately need. Of course, while this may be an institutional problem, the practical reality is that it's a writing center problem "de facto."

As I see it, this situation is further exacerbated by three other issues affecting interaction in the writing center:

1. Many ESL students present problems in the writing center that go beyond what we might normally (or even broadly) consider writing issues. In some cases, not only their English skills are weak, but they also lack experience in Western or American processes of thought, idea structures, and academic (and non-academic) cultural conventions, motivations, perceptions, and expectations. Sometimes, too, the pressures of social roles in their own cultures make them unwilling to participate in what they may perceive as a demeaning or uncomfortably intimate tutorial.

2. When ESL students come into our writing centers they, like many English-speaking novice writers, may think that all they need is help with their grammar. And because they do indeed need help with their grammar, we may not be able to (or have time to) recognize or to get down to the help they need with other writing issues. Unfortunately, there's no natural law of compensation that balances an ESL writer's difficulties in grammar with increased competence in essay structure or idea development.

3. Another complicating factor that many of us must deal with is that our writing center staff may

consist mostly or entirely of undergraduate peer tutors. In many cases these peer tutors are not even English majors (nor should they be, in my opinion). Although the collaborative, minimalist method of tutoring is ideal for this kind of tutor (since it does not demand a great deal of specific grammar-rules knowledge), it may not help the ESL client at all.

. . . . We train the peer tutors as thoroughly as we can, and we hope this gives them enough confidence to be flexible in dealing with ESL students. And we don't forbid them to give grammar help to ESL writers if the tutors feel confident enough to offer it.

If tomorrow someone brings us the news that there's a computer program that solves (or significantly alleviates) our ESL writers' problems, I'll hock my diploma to buy it. But I'm sufficiently experienced in disappointment to fear the news would just be another snow job.

From: Margaret Clark (clark@uhdux2.dt.uh.edu)

[H]alf our student body are L2, and while they may be hard to understand and their writing skills may be very rough, they are definitely fluent users of English. They don't need to be taught English; they know it quite well. They do need to learn the same process-oriented writing strategies that all our students need, and they need to be able to apply their knowledge of grammar rules when they proofread.

Bobbie's point are very well taken (no surprise!). We do very much the same things, and for the same reasons. We're "open admission" and frequently students are (mis)placed in regular classes when they should be in ESL classes. But, when we see students

who have passed 60+ credit hours with a decent GPA, are L2, and who've flunked our writing proficiency exam a couple of times, we do need to stretch ourselves to incorporate essay-level and sentence-level issues into the tutorials. IMHO, a very experienced tutor is essential as this kind of tutoring is a virtuoso act.

From: James Bandy (96bandy@wmich.edu)

Neal,
I share your (and others) hesitancy about the *book* on tutoring. I have always been a practical strategy sort of guy myself and frequently become frustrated with theory when it fails to suggest immediate strategies. Some of the sites available on the web are, however, not simply drill sites. There are

(Editor's note: websites with English as electronic discussion groups for ESL/EFL students world wide. These seem to be places where students can log into an English environment and read stuff interesting to them. I have never had any doubts about the recommending these sites to ESL students, send me via the subject line blank, and with any doubts about recommending these sites to ESL your names.)

but I did want to find out what current feeling was on drills and non-*book* approaches to tutoring ESL. And there have been some wonderfully helpful responses.

Thanks All, again.

TUTORS' COLUMN

Caring about student success through follow-up notes

Our university writing center at Texas Tech University has recently developed a trial policy of sending follow-up notes to first-time clients. Each tutor personally writes or types a note to the client with whom he or she worked, and the note expresses some sort of thanks to the person for coming by and an invitation to come back again. Some tutors write varying notes to individual clients, while others have a standard form letter on the computer. We began the project in an attempt to retain our clients and to foster a "we care" attitude. In the beginning, we were all a little uneasy about the project: we were not sure we wanted to add to our hectic schedules the five minutes or so it would take to write each client, and we worried about being too personal with our clients. Ultimately, however, we discovered that the notes were well-worth the effort. While the notes may not have any statistical, budgetary, or administrative value, they do have a human value: students appreciate and even need the personal support of their university educators.

In terms of retention, our center has very little proof that the clients returned or did not return because of the notes. We began the project last spring and only informally tallied the results at the end of the semester. We mailed 156 notes to first-time clients, and of those, 55 returned more than once. According to the statistics, then, only 35% of the clients came back for a second tutorial. These numbers are misleading, however, since they do not necessarily correlate with how the client felt about the tutorial or the notes themselves. We do not know how

many of these clients would have returned or not returned without the reinforcement of the notes. A future project might be to establish an evaluation form in which students indicate their reaction to the notes and if the notes played a role in their decisions to return. For now, though, we have to set aside our administrative desire to number crunch and value the notes instead in terms of setting a caring image for the center.

Statistics aside, we do know that many students appreciate the extra effort the writing center makes to reach out to students on a personal level. Many students verbally thanked the tutors for their notes; others mentioned to their classroom instructors that they had received a nice note from the writing center. One student with whom I had worked [we'll call him Brian] actually wrote a thank you note back to me. It read:

> I would like to thank you for the note regarding the editing of my paper. It totally blew my mind when I opened my mail yesterday to find out that someone actually cares about students at T[exas] T[ech] U[niversity]. All the other people at the university just want your SS#; you are the first person to treat me with respect. I *appreciate* that.

I was dumbfounded by his response, especially when I recalled the tutorial. He was a very good writer, actually, but he was extremely irritated with his freshman composition instructor who, as he claimed, had given all of his papers a grade of B+, with a one line

comment at the bottom which read "Work on style." I moved throughout the tutorial cautiously and tried to give supportive comments on ways to vary his sentence structure and to replace his "to be" verbs with action verbs. I have no idea of the final grade on this paper or if I covered what the instructor meant by "style," but at the very least I gave Brian the few moments of personal attention that he obviously wanted. The note, as the icing on the cake, perhaps confirmed my intended message in the tutorial that someone at Texas Tech cares about his success as a student.

I mention this experience to suggest that we, as writing center staff and as concerned educators, need to take very seriously the power of personal interaction. Most of us were successful students and thus we constantly received pats on the back from our teachers. But the majority of students enter college unsure of their abilities, an apprehension that is compounded by large lecture classes, by long lines at the unfriendly financial aid office, and by teachers who focus on the grade or the document instead of the student. This feeling of anonymity and uselessness certainly exists as no stranger for students fresh out of high school. Educational reformer Gene Maeroff suggests that "many high school students feel by and large, that few people, not even their teachers, really know them as they would like to be known. They get the sense, rightly or wrongly, of acting as human fungibles as they march from class to class, encountering different teachers every 50 minutes and sitting with an entirely different set of classmates each time" (60). It should be no

NWCA News

The NCTE Convention in November is the first time that the new (academic) year's National Writing Centers Association (NWCA) board meets, and planning went so well at the last meeting at NCTE that we concluded like all our tutor meetings do: with food. Over borsht, stroganoff, and Russian beer (made in California?), some of the executive board members continued talking about how we can continue to connect with each other through our publications, conferences, and conversations. We agreed that increasing communication among those in the regionals and among the regionals themselves is essential. So many of us have few writing center colleagues at our institutions, or there's too little time in our day to connect with those at nearby schools; we have to find ways to continue supporting each other—and find ways to expand our support to each other. So, while you'll all read the Executive Board's NCTE notes in *Writing Center Journal*, let me point to a few ways you can help strengthen this incredible community of writing center colleagues:

- Be an active member on the Executive Board.

- Attend regional meetings to pick brains and find out local issues that writing center directors and tutors need to know: potential technology links; ways to deal with particular groups of students; what makes an effective report; state legislation that will affect what you can do or how accountable you must be.

- Present your ideas at regional and national meetings: get feedback; submit your articles to the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, the *Writing Center Journal*, *Focuses,* and other publications outside of our own so we reach scholar/practitioners outside our own borders. (Look what Mickey's publications have done for us in *College Composition and Communication* and *College English*!).

- Find out about other writing centers or potential sites for writing centers in your area: grant projects between high schools and colleges have funded fledgling tutor programs; the NWCA list of writing centers (in revision) can point to writing centers in your area; local or community newspapers or newsletters often welcome articles about how writing centers help writers—these can bring kindred spirits out of the woodwork! And, I'm not above convincing the principals of my children's schools that they need a writing center. By expanding what we do, we enlarge our community and the resources on which we can draw.

One of those opportunities to connect—the national meeting of NWCA—draws near (or at least the March 15 deadline for paper proposals will be here soon). Plan on joining us in Park City, Utah—we'll be there just before the Olympians arrive. Your registration fee includes several meals and "perks," including the opportunity to head into the mountains for a hoe-down barbecue (if the weather holds up, of course). We also will be holding mini-regional meetings during one afternoon session, so you can learn about a close group of instant resources! With this much notice, you can plan ahead—and hope to get one of those cool condos with a kitchen where lots of people can stay for the price of one!

Also plan on joining us for the Special Interest Group (SIG) and meeting at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Phoenix (March). We have lots to discuss and plan including the success of our fledgling NWCA Press; the implementation committee for establishing assessment and review teams; acknowledging this year's best article and book on writing centers , as well as those deserving of the distinguished service award (see nomination notices in this issue). And then there's connecting with your colleagues over food! Now about that list of Mexican restaurants. . . .

Joan Mullin
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University of Toledo
Toledo, Ohio 43606-3390
419-530-4913; fax: 419-530-4752
(jmullin@UOFT02.UTOLEDO.EDU)

NWCA Nominations

Please send nominations for best book and best article on writing center topics to Joan Mullin, jmullin@uoft02.utoledo.edu, or mail to her at Writing Center, University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio 43606.

Please send nominations for our Outstanding Service Award to Joan Mullin at the above address. Both will be awarded at the Executive Board Meeting at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (in Phoenix), in March.

Deadline: February 1, 1997.

Paula Gillespie
Executive Secretary, NWCA

Tutor positioning in group sessions

For the past five years, the University of Vermont Writing Center has been working with groups from introductory art history classes to help students write interpretations of works of art. In the spring of 1993, we decided to videotape some sessions and have students fill out response forms so that we could look more closely at what the sessions accomplished. In viewing ten of the taped sessions, we were struck by the very different tutoring styles we saw: some tutors positioned themselves as authorities, while others seemed to deliberately avoid that role. To study the process of tutor positioning and how that positioning affected the sessions, we looked closely at one session in which the tutor was authoritative (Karen's) and another in which the tutor facilitated (Abbie's). We also got copies of final papers, accompanied by Professor Mierse's comments and grades.

In viewing the tapes, we had noticed that the tutor positioned herself in the first few moments. Karen, for example, immediately sets up a one–on–one dynamic by asking individuals to present an idea or thesis to her for discussion: "Anyone have a particular idea that they have developed? Or want to start out with? The thesis? Or are you all at the now–what–do–I–do stage [group laughter]?" Next, Karen uses art history terminology to establish herself as an authority: "The now–what–do–I–do stage. OK, does anybody have a particular focus, you know, like iconography or stylistic features, they're working on?" When a student presents an idea, Karen responds by evaluating it as she thinks the professor would, positioning herself as the professor's representative: "When you say similarities, can you be more specific about what kinds of similarities, 'cause I can guarantee that's the first question that would be asked. In what way?"

Throughout the session, Karen continues to do much of the talking, often in dialogue with one student at a time. She continues to use art history terminology, pushing students to work from one particular perspective—stylistic, compositional, or iconographic—and to use that terminology in their theses (something Professor Mierse feels they do not need to do). And she continues to evaluative students' ideas as she thinks Professor Mierse would.

Abbie, on the other hand, positions herself as a facilitator, intent on getting the group to discuss amongst themselves: "Are there any things you noticed, that struck you as, that you want to start off talking about?" In the ensuing conversation, three of the four students (a fifth comes in later) respond to this invitation and discuss the use of color in the relief. Abbie quickly assumes a non–authoritative role by making it clear that she hasn't seen the piece:

> Kirsten: And the two kings were dressed in darker clothing to offset baby Jesus and Mary probably. . . . And both of them were also raised above. She's on a bed, she's not touching the ground, and he's above her.

> Abbie: Um, well, I didn't, you said she was on the bed?

Throughout the session, Abbie continues to do little talking, instead posing questions that stimulate long discussions among the group members. When Abbie does speak, her language is encouraging rather than evaluative—"uh hum," "yeah," "that's a good point."

This positioning results in very different sessions. Karen's is a series of one–on–one discussions with her; Abbie's is a group discussion. Karen's session is focused on the paper, on coming up with a good thesis that meets Professor Mierse's criteria (as understood by Karen); Abbie's aims at generating ideas, at coming to a richer and fuller understanding of the art. In Karen's session, each student's ideas are discussed separately; in Abbie's, students work toward a group interpretation, toward reaching a consensus.

At first, all three of us thought Abbie's session was better than Karen's. There was more student interaction, more genuine conversation, more excitement over ideas. We were rather appalled at Karen's session—at how she kept coming back to art history terminology, at how she insisted on being "the authority" and maintaining control of the discussion. But after studying the videotapes and the papers the students wrote following the sessions, we began to see things differently.

We were struck by the limitations of the facilitated session. Abbie's group ends up having its own hierarchy: after a while, three of the five students dominate the discussion. Those three write successful papers using ideas from the session, two based on the collaboratively–created interpretation (the composition consists of a pyramid divided into three triangles that tells a Biblical narrative in chronological order). But the other two students almost seem hindered by the session. They try to write a paper based on the collaborative-ly–created interpretation, but can't do so effectively (Susan got a 15/20 on her paper, Peter a 14/20, with the professor's comments on both focusing on weaknesses). They seem to have left the session with the illusion that it had supplied them with all the ideas they needed for their papers. Abbie, possibly aware of this, tries toward the end of the session to get each of the five students to talk about a possible thesis for the paper.

"Authentic assessment in the writing center:" Too open to interpretation?

Assessment, with its attendant quandaries—"What to do? How to do it? What to make of it when we are done?"—haunts many writing center administrators and staffs. In the fall of my first year as interim director of the Oklahoma State University Writing Center, an English education graduate student working for the university-funded writing assessment program asked if he could assess the Writing Center. He hoped at that time to tape some conferences, observe others, and conduct a survey on student writers via an exit poll. Since I was eager for feedback that would help me get "up to speed," I agreed immediately.

We worked together to design a questionnaire to be given to students as they left their conferences. Jerald, the grad student, planned to use a Likert scale, measuring degrees of response from 1 (one), the lowest, to 6 (six), the highest. He wanted to ask a number of questions based on the kind of statistics he was seeking, but willingly accepted my alternate suggestions. Brevity was an important goal, since I was certain that a long form would discourage many students. Together we shortened and restructured the questions, finally reducing them to the seven listed here.

We needed to administer the questionnaire during a "typically busy" period, and the middle of the spring semester seemed to guarantee that we would have a representative group, from ESL graduate students to first-year comp and even tech writers, all of whom we serve throughout the year.

We placed the forms on a corner table by the door, hoping to suggest privacy and to insure anonymity. Respondents placed their completed questionnaires in a whimsically decorated box.

I encouraged my tutors to ask all their student writers to participate, but sometimes they forgot, and sometimes they asked only after a particularly successful conference. Some students could not or would not take the time to answer the questions, but from approximately 200 conferences, we got 179 responses the first year and for comparison, used the same number of responses this year.

The overall results were highly favorable the first year, and my initial reaction was one of delighted reassurance (see Writing Center Survey, page 13). But by the time we were ready to administer the survey for a second time, I had begun to question the validity of the instrument. For purposes of comparison, we decided to use the same survey. But finding the same degree of satisfaction the second year, with no significant differences in either the means or the percentages, has ironically confirmed my suspicions that the survey needs revising. The positive responses have given a boost to our tutors and our program. But revisions now underway, based on the suggestions of a professor of statistics and our own careful considerations, will yield more reliable, precise information.

We did not originally consider the extent to which the language and design of the survey could influence the results. The instrument itself sent several messages, some of which conflicted with our philosophy and methods. For example, in Question #1, "suggestions" indicated that tutors would make pointed comments, more directive than not. Was this perception accurate? Unfortunately, tutors offer "suggestions" more often than they need to. Did the question reflect our reader-response/whole language approach? On reexamination, "suggestions" set up expectations of more tutor involvement than we were comfortable with. We will use "comments" or "responses" in the future.

The percentage questions, #2 and #3, offered more obvious clues to what students want in conferences. The language in Question #2 reinforced the idea of specific suggestions as a viable option, but it also introduced the notion that the student writer was allowed, even expected, to participate actively in the conference. The results indicate that this participation is much less important to students than concrete directions for improving their papers. Next year, "more specific suggestions" will be replaced with "more control of conference." And as a result of what we perceived as the student's expectations of a tutor-dominated conference, we decided to talk less and be more descriptive and less prescriptive in our comments.

The number of students wanting "more encouragement" was countered by those wanting "tougher criticism." We read these responses as coming from two different types of writers, the first uncertain and insecure, the second already highly motivated to improve. In both cases, however, we detected signs that students wanted more tutor involvement, a wish we were prepared to grant only partially. All the tutors admitted that they could be more diplomatic, more sympathetic, and yes, more encouraging. As for "tougher criticism," how could we identify this

WRITING CENTER SURVEY

Please Circle the Best Answer:

1. Are you satisfied with the suggestions made during your conference?
Very Satisfied> 6 - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 <Unsatisfied
(MEAN 1995:5.44   1996:5.47)

2. What might have made your session more helpful? (Circle all those
   that apply.) (Many students gave more than one answer.)

1995	1996	
34%	38%	more specific suggestions
29%	28%	clearer explanations
18%	17%	more encouragement
17%	17%	tougher criticism
11%	13%	more chances to ask questions
8%	14%	better summary at the end
2%	5%	more time (note: this was a write-in answer)

3. What was your main reason for scheduling a conference?
(Again, students gave multiple answers.)

1995	1996	
45%	43%	grammar
34%	40%	organization
28%	31%	instructor recommendation
25%	25%	idea or thesis
16%	15%	problem with assignment or format

(2% of the 1996 respondents came in because they could get extra credit from their instructors.)

4. Will you use the Writing Center in the future?
A. Yes (100% in both years.)   b. No

5. I found the tutoring session comfortable, and I could share my
 ideas freely.
Agree> 6 - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 <Disagree
(MEAN   1995:5.53   1996:5.49)

6. My session in the Writing Center will help me improve my paper.
Agree> 6 - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 <Disagree
(MEAN   1995:5.64   1996:5.61)

7. I found my tutor to be effective.
Agree> 6 - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 <Disagree
(MEAN   1995:5.60   1996:5.53)

ing the students to speak, read and write during the conference. Requests for "better summary" inspired us to try to close each session with a summary of the day's accomplishments as well as some concrete objectives and if possible, another appointment. The new survey will ask the student to indicate specific plans for revision as well as for future conferences.

Also informative were the responses to "What was your main reason for scheduling a conference?" These reasons did not surprise us, but we found that most student writers who assumed they had grammar problems often recognized more significant weaknesses when these patterns were pointed out. The order in which these choices were listed on the survey form, however, suggested that grammar was our first concern. In the revisions currently underway, we are placing grammar last, with more global concerns at the head of the list.

Question #4, "Will you use the Writing Center in the future?" came back 100% yes both years. Jerald assured me that the numbers accurately reflected students' opinions as they left the conference. I have since realized that these feelings might fade with time, especially if a paper revised on the basis of a conference has been evaluated negatively by an instructor. But each of the respondents left the Writing Center feeling good enough about the experience to be willing to repeat it. This fact seems reliable, and it has boosted morale as much as a pay raise would have.

As in Question #2, Question #5 sent the message that the student was expected to engage actively in the conference. Responses suggested that most of the students felt both comfortable and able to share their ideas. But the two parts of the question were not equal in importance to us. Student comfort is critical to a good conference, but not as critical as the writer's feeling free to ask questions. (I have seen students so comfortable they were practically

need? What signs would indicate that a student wanted extensive, perhaps detailed criticism? This response sounded a lot like another plea for the tutor to put ideas or even words in the student's head. To neutralize this expectation, we resolved to try harder at the beginning of each conference to recognize the student's goals and to look for signals for "more encourage-ment" or "tougher criticism."

Ultimately the responses to Questions #2 and #3 were more helpful in improving our tutoring than the Likert scale questions. Although only a small percentage of students chose "more chances to ask questions," they reinforced our determination to apply whole-language theories by encourag-

asleep!) More to the point, did they in fact initiate any part of the discussion? In revising, we decided to make this into two questions, with the second one reading, "I shared my ideas freely."

Responses to the last two questions, regarding improving the paper and tutor effectiveness, again seemed to reflect the student writer's satisfaction at having received specific "suggestions." And when students described their tutors as "effective," did this mean that the student writer felt that the tutor had rewritten or otherwise corrected all or most of the weaknesses in the paper?

The next survey will ask specifically how much revision the student did—or planned to do—based on the conference.

Broader changes include a different scale and more comprehensive polling methods. Rather than the six possible choices, we will use a seven-point scale with the middle number signifying neutrality and the upper and lower ends "very satisfied" and "very unsatisfied" to offer more precise terms. Each of the numbers on the scale will be labeled, as 7—very satisfied; 6—satisfied; 5—somewhat satisfied; 4—

neutral or no opinion; etc. We also learned that the results of the two surveys are probably skewed because tutors might not be asking student writers to complete a survey if the conference has been unpleasant or unsuccessful, and the students likeliest to be willing to complete the form are the satisfied students. For the most accurate results, we will need to survey every student writer, a daunting prospect and nearly impossible, since many students rush from conference to class or work.

How can we assure that more students are represented in the survey or that we at least have a good cross section? Random sampling could be one answer, with the receptionist randomly polling students as they leave. Another might be a follow-up phone call, which may or may not be effective in terms of time and energy. In search of a better assessment tool, we will continue to experiment and evaluate our evaluations. And as always, we welcome and cherish suggestions from others in the field.

Linda Ringer Leff
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK

Tutor Positioning

but the students seem unable to switch modes from group discussion to thinking about their individual papers; Abbie makes three attempts and finally runs out of time.

In the directed session, on the other hand, the students had more control than we had thought at first. Several times, some of the students are able to ignore or divert Karen and take over the discussion for themselves. For example, at one point, Karen looks up an art history term in the dictionary. Three of the four students take the opportunity to have their own conversation on a different aspect of the relief. Furthermore, when we looked at the students' papers, it turned out that they had simply ignored Karen's repeated emphasis on the terminology (none used it in a thesis, as she had pushed them to). And it was apparent that the session had helped each student move her thinking substantially beyond where it had been at the beginning of the session. The students, then, were much more adept at ignoring what wasn't valuable to them and taking away what was than we had given them credit for. All of these students wrote good papers (ranging from 17.5/20 to 20/20, accompanied by comments that focused

on the papers' strengths). Furthermore, this group ends up with more diversity of interpretation. While the Abbie session leads to a rich single interpretation, the Karen session leads to four different ideas that develop from each student's own starting place.

What do we take away from this analysis of tutor positioning? Primarily, more awareness of our own preconceptions that group sessions should be group collaborations and that tutors should facilitate rather than direct these collaborations. We chose these two sessions to analyze because the tutors positioned themselves so strongly as authority or facilitator. And we were not surprised by how that positioning affected the nature of the sessions: the facilitated session was a group collaboration, while the directed session was mostly collaborations between individual students and the tutor. But the categories did not turn out to be so neat. In the facilitated session, some of the students took on positions of authority, while in the directed session the students managed to collaborate outside of the parameters set up by the tutor.

More importantly, the end results of the two types of sessions did not fit our preconceptions. We evaluated our evaluations. And as we had expected, that the facilitated session was somehow better for the students than the directed session. In focusing on the quality of the discussion in the session itself, we had failed to look closely at what individual students took away from each session. Two of the students didn't take away much from the collaborative discussion that had so impressed us with its richness and excitement, while all of the students took away something personally valuable from what had appeared to be a dry, tutor–controlled session.

So we do not come away from our analysis with insights into what makes a "good" group session or into how we should train our tutors, but rather with more awareness of our own preconceptions. We hope we come away with less of a tendency to categorize tutors and sessions and then to jump to conclusions about their effectiveness. And we come away with more respect for our tutors' ability to work within their own complex tutoring styles, and for some (though certainly not all) students' ability to get what they need from their tutor and their group.

Sue Dinitz and Jean Kiedaisch
Writing Center
and

South Central Writing Centers

Call for Papers
April 10-12, 1997

Baton Rouge, LA
Keynote speaker: Irene Lurkis Clark

  Peer tutors and writing center professionals are invited to submit proposals for individual (20-minute) or panel (45-minute) presentations. Presentations may focus on any aspect of writing center theory and practice. Possible topics include the following: writing center administration, ethics, paradigm shifts, collaborative learning philosophy, professional concerns, community outreach, links to writing across the curriculum or other campus programs, educational technology, tutoring techniques, tutoring special student populations, peer tutor training, expanded roles for writing centers, discipline-specific tutoring, and trends in education that might affect writing centers.

  Deadline for proposals: January 15, 1997; length of proposals: 300 words (maximum). Please send two copies of proposals to Steve Sherwood, President, SCWCA, William L. Adams Writing Center, Texas Christian University, TCU Box 297700, Fort Worth, TX 76129. Phone: 817-924-2484; e-mail: S.Sherwood@tcu.edu. For questions about the conference contact Judith C. Gavrie, conference chair, phone: 504-388-4077; e-mail:

Wyoming Conference on English

Call for Proposals
June 17-20, 1997
Laramie, Wyoming
"Really Useful Knowledge"
Invited speakers: Joseph Harris, Sara Horowitz, and Ira Shor

  Deadline for paper proposals is March 31, 1997. For more information, contact Kathy Evertz at 307-766-6486 or KEVERTZ@UWYO.EDU. Conference information and updates may be accessed via the Internet at http://www.uwyo.edu/A&S/engl (click on 1997 Wyoming Conference on English).

Association for the Teaching of English

Call for Proposals
July 18-19, 1997
Williamsport, PA

Keynote speaker: Art Winnbley

  Please send a 250-500 word description of your presentation. Deadline: June 1, 1997. For more information about the conference and proposals, contact Ed Vavra, DIF 112, Pennsylvania College of Technology, Williamsport, PA 17701. phone: 717-326-3761 (ext. 7736); fax: 717-327-4503; email: evavra@pct.edu

Job Opening: University of Central Florida

Director, newly established Writing Center, to begin August 8, 1997. Assistant Professor with PhD and substantial experience preferred, MA minimum requirement. Must be sensitive to the diversity of population and program needs of a growing state university with 27,000 students. The Writing Center provides undergraduate and graduate student support, interdisciplinary curriculum and faculty development, and long-distance learning opportunities.

Candidates must demonstrate management skills and a strong commitment to teaching, research, and publication. Send letter of application, c.v., and three letters of reference to John Schell, Chair, English, U. of Central Florida, PO Box 16-1346, Orlando, Florida 32816. Applicants whose materials are received by January 22, 1997, will have priority for CCCC interviews in March. Women and minorities are especially invited to apply. UCF is an AA/EO employer. For more information, please visit http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/-english.

Caring about student success

surprise, then, that a large university enhances a freshman's feeling of simply being a number, as Brian's letter so honestly reflects.

While our main goal in the writing center is to help students become better writers, a second goal is to help our clients build self-confidence as students. For some students, the writing center proves to be one of the only places on campus where they receive the reassurance that is missing from the daily routine of university life. As tutors and teachers, we often overlook the power of a few supportive comments or of a few words on a piece of paper that simply say "I enjoyed working with you today."

Elizabeth SoRelle
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, TX

Work Cited

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Forward & Address Correction

HELP—The postman cometh . . . AGAIN!

PLEASE, please, please. As you renew, or even before, send a "CASS-certified" mailing address for your future issues of the newsletter. If you want your newsletter sent to your campus address, you may have to check with your campus mail system to ascertain the correct one for your building although there frequently is one for an entire campus.

We have been working with our campus mailroom to verify zip+4 addresses for all subscriptions. Last month, the issues for almost 200 subscribers were improperly coded so badly that the software program did not even prompt suggested zipcodes. So that the newsletter can be eligible for the deepest mailing discounts (and so that we're able to keep our low-low subscription rates) and to ensure that you get your monthly issues, our entire list must be what the U.S. Postal Service calls "CASS-certified."

What we have found is that most schools have a street address which belongs on the third line (of four). Once the program recognizes a street name, city, state, and zip, it can give an appropriate mailing address. Use the top two lines for the most important information to get it to your building on campus.

Thanks for your attention to this nagging, but important, detail. And, of course, please check the expiration date on your mailing label and send your renewal in time to keep from being dropped from our lists. We don't want to lose you!

Mary Jo Turley, Assistant Editor