

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

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

May, 1997

...FROM THE EDITOR...

As the end of the semester looms on the horizon, those of your tutors who will not be returning next year are no doubt sensing that a special time and place in their lives is coming to an end. They'll find that the first few articles in this month's issue of the newsletter speak to that specialness—the benefits of being a tutor. The pay may be low, the hours long, and the conditions less than perfect, but the rewards are enormous. They know it, you know it, I know it, and this month's authors—Madeleine Picciotte, Barbara Jensen, and Marianne Latham—know it. But do your administrators know it? Will you be including in your yearly report anything about how your lab furthers the education of your tutors?

And now that most of the spring conferences of regional writing center groups are over, you'll be planning for next year's get-togethers. To help spread the word (and to help others put their travel requests in their budgets for next year), please try to send me the notices of next year's conference dates as soon as you can. If e-mail is convenient for you, sending information that way is fine.

Happy spring everyone!

• Muriel Harris, editor

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"Little open letters back and forth": Tutors creating a writing community

While peer tutoring programs are, of course, intended to serve the needs and improve the skills of the students who utilize their services, the greatest impact they have is often on the tutors themselves—especially in student-staffed writing centers that follow a truly collaborative model of learning and teaching. This is not news; Kenneth Bruffee, for example, one of the best-known proponents of peer tutoring and collaborative learning, has always stressed the role of tutoring as "a genuine part of the tutors' own development" (14). But, as Bruffee points out, such development does not just happen without the existence of structures that can support tutors in their intellectual and emotional growth. How can and should such structures be created? What sorts of support are needed, and how can they be provided most effectively?

Muriel Harris notes that the role of the peer tutor in a writing center "ranges among a variety of tasks: offering reader response, leading the student toward finding her own answers, suggesting strategies to try, diagnosing possible un-

derlying problems, listening while the student articulates her message, and offering needed support during the composing struggle" (371). Moreover, in order to offer the "needed support" to their tutees, tutors must often help with what Harris describes as "attitudinal problems, emotional difficulties, writing anxiety, lack of confidence, and other affective concerns" (376). Almost every writing center tutor can tell tale after tale of the tutee who began or ended a session in tears—and such

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is ten to fifteen double-spaced typed pages, three to five pages for reviews, and four pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. If possible, please send a 3 and 1/4 in. disk with the file, along with the hard copy. Please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

Please send articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly subscription payments to the editor.

emotion-laden moments place even further challenges before the aspiring tutor. It comes as no surprise that tutors often become overwhelmed or frustrated by the many demands placed upon them in the tutoring situation. And in the course of facing the multiple challenges presented to them, peer tutors must confront their own "attitudinal problems," often including the same anxieties, doubts, and insecurities that face the students they help. Fortunately, the very process of tutoring, especially when tutoring occurs in the context of a writing center that embodies a sense of community and collaboration, can assist tutors in overcoming their own "affective concerns."

Many who study tutoring programs have noted that they offer tutors an opportunity to improve their own writing and communication skills, as well as their confidence in and their understanding of their own writing processes. What isn't mentioned as frequently—but what may be equally significant—is that being part of a cohesive peer tutoring program can also give tutors a strong sense of community that better enables them to face the challenges and occasional difficulties of tutoring, and that provides them with a support system throughout their university careers. During my five years as Director of Oglethorpe University's Writing Center, I watched as the tutors themselves developed a series of "bonding" activities that worked to build solidarity within the group and make them feel part of a larger community of service and support.

One of the most significant among the "tutor bonding" activities in the Writing Center was the development of a communal writing log where tutors regularly discussed their tutoring experiences with one another and offered suggestions, queries, or comments on each other's log entries. Tutors used this shared forum to work out their own problems with their roles as tutors, with individual tutees, with particular tutoring situations, and with a host of other issues pertinent to functioning in a peer tutoring program. Many "how to" manuals for writing cen-

ters suggest the use of journals as a way for individual tutors to address their own thoughts and feelings about the tutoring process. For example, Marian Arkin describes a tutor training course that requires aspiring tutors to use a journal as a way of "reflecting on the experience" of tutoring (130). But for the most part tutors' journals are meant to be essentially solitary inquiries, with only occasional input from other tutors or from a writing center director.

The log I'm describing, on the other hand, was from the start intended to be a communal affair, a writing space shared equally by anywhere from twelve to twenty tutors in a given semester. Through the process of writing back and forth to one another, tutors in this communal writing space were able to express concerns, doubts, opinions, or questions that they might not have felt able to convey face-to-face; they also found ways, through the process of writing and response, to explore their own thoughts more clearly and fully. The tutors' use of writing in the communal log gave them a clearer sense of the possibilities of writing as a tool for understanding, while the experience of responding to other tutors' entries—and reading the responses others made to their own entries—gave them a greater awareness of the ways in which they chose to respond to the written work of their tutees. Most significant, the sense of a shared writing experience generated by the log resulted in a strong sense of community and trust among a very disparate group of tutors.

I think it was especially meaningful that this shared log was almost entirely tutor-initiated. When I first assumed the directorship of Oglethorpe's Writing Center, I asked all tutors to make regular entries in the Center's ledger after every tutoring session, noting the names of students they had tutored, the nature of the assignment under discussion, and a few brief comments about how the session had (or hadn't) progressed. After a few weeks of brief, dry entries, the tutors began adding more personal tidbits to the log—everything from birthday greetings

for fellow tutors to expressions of frustration with particular tutoring situations. Soon two- or three-line log entries became a thing of the past, replaced by two- to three-page discussions. With the advent of interactive technologies, such written discussions can easily take place electronically. More and more writing center directors are encouraging tutors to use computer networks to communicate with one another. For example, Steven Braye has described the success of the tutor discussion network at Elon College. However, in such cases the discussion is often initiated and structured by the writing center director, rather than by the tutors themselves. And some things (like drawing pictures in the margins) are just easier to do with a pen on paper than on a computer screen. Because of this, the "feel" of a handwritten log is quite different from that of an electronic one. Due to the personal, student-initiated nature of the Oglethorpe tutors' log, the tutors felt a particularly strong sense of ownership and independence.

The log quickly became the focus of the tutors' experience in the Oglethorpe Writing Center; as soon as individual tutors arrived at the Center, they pulled out the log to see what other tutors had written since their last reading. Charles, one of the students who had been among the first to develop the communal log, provided an entry that nicely sums up the importance that the log began to take on for the tutors:

"A few freshmen came by for tutoring on some assignments. I told them to get lost because I had to read the log."¹

I assume, of course, that this entry was not intended to be taken seriously, but it does point to the importance the log was beginning to assume.

Soon tutors started commenting on one another's log entries, in marginal notes or in lengthier responses; comments on the comments followed, and a genuine dialogue among fifteen or so individuals ensued. This dialogue often resulted in concrete action in particular tutoring situations, as was the case when one tu-

tor complained about a tutee's paper draft:

Unfortunately, the paper was not very good; I have a feeling he didn't do all the reading, which didn't help matters any.

Another tutor commented in the margin, "I got the same feeling when I tutored him last week"—an exchange which brought about a face-to-face discussion among both tutors and the tutee, who together devised a "reading contract" that helped to pull the tutee through a challenging literature course. Of course, not all log discussions produced such direct and tangible results. But even the more nebulous interchanges led to a sense of shared enterprise, with the log serving as a sort of "home base" providing, in the words of one former tutor, "a place where I felt like I belonged."

As log entries took on greater depth and significance, Writing Center staff agreed that the log would be kept private, a forum for communication only among tutors and the Writing Center director (who made occasional entries from time to time, just to put in her two cents' worth and establish her standing as part of the tutoring community). The veteran tutors asked all new tutors to begin their service in the Writing Center with a pledge of confidentiality regarding anything and everything written in the log. When several peer tutors got together to write a "Tutor's Oath" for a tongue-in-cheek Writing Center "initiation ceremony," they concluded the oath with a vow "to protect the sanctity and security of The Log." The log thus became a safe space, a place where anything could be (and was) said with no negative repercussions (except for the disagreements expressed in response to individual entries). It also gave the Writing Center tutors a "clubbish" aura, with the log serving as a sort of private meeting place not to be violated by outsiders. The down side of this was that it exacerbated the already existing tendency of the tutors to appear cliquish and to think of themselves as an elite group of students; on the positive side, it brought the

tutors together through frank, open exchanges.

After several semesters, a log "archive" was instituted, housing volumes of old logs for tutors' perusal at off-peak tutoring times and providing hour upon hour of reading pleasure. As one tutor wrote,

Alas! I found myself so intrigued by the past years' logs that I have run out of time [to write my own entry]!

At this point our Writing Center began to develop not only a sense of immediate community, but a sense of history, a solidarity with tutors past as well as tutors present. This shared history could, of course, be intimidating to novice tutors, who often had the feeling that they were entering some long-established secret society, with arcane rules and rituals—which, in a sense, they were. One new tutor, Todd, lamented,

I'm having doubts about my ability to make meaningful contributions. You all have such a rich history together—

I read through some of the old logs. . . A couple of days later another new tutor, Kate, who had also been reading old logs, echoed Todd's doubts:

I'd also like to say that, like Todd, I, too, feel a bit scared being up here with all of you.

At the same time as the log archives could intimidate, however, they also assisted entrance into the community of tutors, as the society was in fact made less "secret" by the availability of past logs for instruction and illumination, and by dialogue in current logs that allowed new and old tutors to interact freely. After a few weeks of log give-and-take, the novices became a part of the group, readily seeking and offering advice, support, consolation, and, occasionally, confrontation within the pages of the log.

The early entries of novice tutors often took one of two forms: expressions of amazement and delight at their own ability to tutor successfully, or expressions of doubt and insecurity about their tutoring abilities, with—in both cases—im-

plicit or explicit requests for reassurance from the veterans. Actually, it may be a mistake to see these as two separate modes; they often went hand in hand. In her first semester of tutoring, Jessica's entries primarily exemplified the former mode—"Wow! I did it!" she seemed to say, again and again. One such entry reads:

Barry from Prof. X's comp. class was back again. I'm happy that somebody actually came back to see me, personally. He said he got a B on his last paper and that's the best he's done so far. I'm so proud—I feel like a real tutor!

The veteran tutors were quick to realize that such entries called for reinforcement and reassurance; a couple of days after Jessica's entry about Barry, veteran tutor Elaine responded,

Jessica, I'm really happy with the way you're progressing as a tutor; you have a sincere enthusiasm about helping students. Good job!

The next week, a somewhat more cynical fellow-novice added a marginal comment to Jessica's entry:

As a fellow new tutor, you're doing better than I am. No hard feelings! My only complaint—your entries are just too damn happy.

Jessica responded by drawing happy faces all over the next blank page in the log, and continued to express her enthusiasm whenever one of her tutoring sessions went well. At the same time, her entries often seemed tentative or hesitant, and her amazement at her own success suggested a fundamental insecurity about her own abilities as a tutor.

This tentativeness or insecurity appeared in a number of other novices' log entries, as well. New tutor Marie described one of her first sessions with a tutee, beginning with a brief summary of the session and ending on a characteristic note of hesitancy:

He was supposed to describe this photograph and say what the artist was trying to do. He did a good job

describing it and he had an idea of what the artist was trying to do, but what he needed to talk about was *why* the artist was doing it. [He] was a really nice kid and he seemed really concerned and eager to fix his paper. I told him to come back later and talk to someone else after he works on it some more, and I think he'll be back. I hope I did okay—this is harder than I thought.

Charles, one of the most experienced tutors at the time, was happy to give Marie the reassurance she needed in a log entry later that same day:

[My second tutee today was the one who had] seen Marie earlier. After a little work on the intro. and conclusion, [his paper] looked pretty good. He said it was better than the first draft, and it was. You must have done a good job, Marie.

With such reinforcement, Marie slowly gained confidence, and by the end of the semester her entries displayed this; she was not afraid to say, quite simply,

The session went well—it was easy for me to work with her, and she left with a much clearer sense of where she was going in her paper.

Like Marie, Jackie's log entries in her first month of tutoring often reflected insecurity, as she referred to herself as "the rookie with little confidence." Faced with a particularly difficult tutee, she lamented, "I'm befuddled, perplexed, and confused—not to mention the fact that I am doubting my own ability as a writer."

Jackie went on to plead,

Any tips or pointers from the old crowd? How do I help her? She made the same mistakes last week. I feel as though I am inadequate—I cannot teach this stuff. Got any ideas? Please?!

Jackie's plea did not fall on deaf ears, as a group of veteran tutors insisted that the tutoring situation she was discussing be the first item on the agenda at the next staff meeting.

In spite of initial hesitancy, though, it generally did not take long for novice tutors like Jackie to become confident enough to offer support to others in the pages of the log. Just a couple of weeks after her desperate plea for help, Jackie was able to reassure Anne, one of the veteran tutors who had earned an outstanding reputation for her skill with a wide range of students. A number of the tutors had been having difficulty working with tutees who were struggling with an assignment that asked them to explain the meaning of "self-realization." As tutee after tutee found themselves unable to offer any clear definition of the term, tutors (especially those who had previously been through the same course, same professor, and same assignment themselves) had to hold themselves back from providing definitions of their own. Lengthy discussions in staff meetings and in the log centered on the ethics of "guiding" a student to a particular way of seeing, especially when the tutor knows that the professor in question is attempting to elicit a particular response. After an especially frustrating session working with a student on the "self-realization" assignment, Anne had written in the log, "I'm not sure if I was able to help her. I did my best with trying to get her to understand Prof. X's view that self-realization does not necessarily mean that one finds all the answers. She didn't get it. Am I wrong to bring her around to this view, especially when she can't support her own? Help!"

The next day, Jackie responded, "I helped a freshman with the same topic, and had the same problem. We know that Prof. X wants them to see that self-realization does not always result from finding a rock-solid solution, right? But we can't just come out and tell them that, can we? Anne, I empathize."

Anne's simple marginal comment of "Thanks," Jackie later reported in a staff meeting, "made me feel like I had really contributed to this whole tutoring com-

munity, and helped me to start building some confidence as a tutor."

Log interactions were not, however, always sweetness and light. Tyler unleashed a firestorm of protest when he commented, after describing a session with a non-native speaker of English, "Call me an elitist snob, or whatever you please, but those who do not speak English as a native language have little to no business taking upper-level English (or Writing) courses in an American university." Tyler's fellow tutors lost no time in indeed calling him an elitist snob, and much worse, and many log pages were taken up by the ensuing controversy. But such conflict seemed, if anything, to bring the community of tutors even closer. As graduating tutor Melanie wrote in her final log entry,

There will never be a time again when I will feel so close to (and even so free to insult) so many people. Feeling part of a group of people gives me a sense of identity, a sense of confidence, and also a sense of being loved. Nowhere else have I been at liberty to be secure in criticizing and being criticized. Tutees come to the writing lab for help; they need criticism so they can improve their writing skills. I think I am a better person than I was—because we've had the experience of writing these little open letters back and forth to one another in the pages of this log.

Perhaps the same results could have been achieved simply by having more time in staff meetings for open discussion—but many tutors indicated that they felt more able to be open and frank in the pages of the log than they did in face-to-face encounters. "There's something secure, safe, about writing in the log," said one relatively shy tutor during a staff meeting; "I know I've written things there that I'd never dare say out loud." Another added, "It's the specialness of the log, too. Other groups have staff meetings, discussions, whatever, but no one else has a log. That makes us

unique—and that uniqueness binds us together."

As plans were made to incorporate Oglethorpe's Writing Center into the university's larger multi-disciplinary Academic Resource Center, one of the first questions the writing tutors asked was, "Will we still be able to have the log?" Without it, the tutors intimated, the group would fall apart; I like to think that there was more than a cheap notebook holding together Oglethorpe's peer tutoring program, and I'm sure there was—but I'm also sure that the log was a very effective form of glue. Communal tutoring logs are, of course, not the only way to provide tutors with the kind of support they need to make tutoring an enriching experience. But the sense of ownership, independence, and solidarity engendered by a tutor-initiated communal writing space can certainly offer one option.

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¹ Students' log entries appear with their permission. Names have been changed to protect privacy.

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Call for Papers

The Research Network Forum (RNF) seeks presenters at the meeting of the RNF at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 1998 in Chicago, IL. The Research Network Forum provides an opportunity for published researchers, new researchers, and graduate students to discuss their current research projects and to receive response. Participants include editors of printed and electronic journals of composition/rhetoric, literary criticism, and electronic publishing (in the last session, editors [as mentors] will meet 3-4. Proposals DUE: 30 May 1997 (2nd deadline: 1 January 1998 [names will not be published in the CCCC program]); presenters at RNF may also present on the regular program. To get the form: [CCCC Web Site]: <http://www.missouri.edu/~cccc96/> Or: Kim Brian Lovejoy, Work-in-Progress Coordinator, Dept. of English, Indiana-Purdue University at Indianapolis, 425 University Boulevard, Indianapolis, IN 46202; Fax: 317-274-2347; E-mail: klovejoy@indyvax.iupui.edu

Returning tutors: What brings them back?

Tutors work hard. We all know this. In the Modesto Junior College Writing Center, our 48 tutors served 120 to 200 students per day. At the end of the semester, when I posted the tutor sign-up sheet for current tutors to sign up to tutor again in the fall, 25 of these hard-working tutors signed up to return, and at least 15 of these tutors are third- or fourth-semester tutors. Ten more tutors told me they would return if they could but were graduating and moving on. Pondering the sign-up sheet, I realized that each semester, in spite of the often stressful pace at which they work, quite a few tutors return to tutor again. What brings them back, keeps 'em here?

On our end-of-the-semester-assessment questionnaire, almost all tutors stated that in some way they had met the objective they had set out to meet: to improve their listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking skills. Comments on this part of the questionnaire include, "I liked learning to work with ESL students and students with learning disabilities. I'm understanding how important listening and 'wait time' are when I am working with these students," and "I'm learning to read papers for other disciplines like psychology and anthropology." One tutor noted, "I'm proud of myself for raising my grammar test scores fourteen points. I want to score in the high nineties next semester." So it appears that improving their own skills is one reason tutors return to tutor in the writing center.

In answer to an assessment question dealing with what tutors like about tutoring in the writing center, no one mentioned the \$4.50 an hour paid tutors receive or the three credits tutors earn. Instead, many responded that they enjoy

working with and learning about our ESL students. This surprised me because at the beginning of each semester, tutors often tell me they feel frustrated as they help proofread papers written by ESL students. But the papers are not what they grow to like, actually. They like the writers, the people. Tutors report that they are exposed to diverse cultures and backgrounds on a level they had never known existed. They laugh, cry, feel hope, and feel fear with these people as they relive experiences brought to clarity in tutoring sessions. Several tutors noted that this awareness will be useful no matter which field they enter. Exposure to other cultures is invaluable in today's world. Certainly these and other comments on our assessment questionnaires show me tutors feel rewarded by the learning experiences they are having in the writing center, but are these experiences enough to keep them coming back?

I started thinking about the other activities going on within our writing center family and realized the word "family"—the term had come to mind so automatically—was the key. Almost suddenly, I became aware that the purpose of many of our activities is not learning based, not academic.

Some activities start out with an educational purpose but develop into something that encompasses much more than intellect. The mentor program is one such activity. Experienced tutors each take from one to three new tutors under their wing every semester. Mentors show new tutors our filing system, share new tutors' journal entries, model tutoring sessions, and have mini-conferences with their mentees at least once a week. New tutors mentioned in their assess-

ment questionnaires that not only were their mentors "very helpful," but they often developed friendships with them that went beyond the writing center environment: "My mentor and I have become great friends. We go to lunch together at least once a week and get together on weekends lots of times." Another tutor noted, "I had a lot of personal problems this semester (I just got married and was trying to work a full-time job at a deli). When I needed someone to talk to, I knew my mentor would be there. I could even call her at home if I needed to. She gave me great advice. More often, though, she was a great listener." The mentor program therefore promotes our writing center philosophies and practices and also seems to promote friendships. I believe this program also helps bring tutors back into the writing center. Many tutors want to be mentors so they can give to in-coming tutors some of the care and concern they received.

Attending the Northern California Writing Center Association Conference started out to be an instructional experience. When I made the announcement about the conference at a Tutorial Projects class, ten tutors signed up to attend. Others had long faces. Why? No rides. Within one week, we had created a sign-up sheet listing those tutors who needed a ride to the conference. Within two weeks, all tutors who wanted to attend had rides. One tutor had taken it upon herself to create a ride committee and matched those with cars with those who had none. Twenty-eight of our tutors attended the conference. Tutors rode together, went to workshops throughout the day together, shared tutoring experiences, and shared a lot of laughs. Many new friendships were born. The conference turned out to be a grand adventure

in getting to know and rely on each other, in getting to know tutors from other institutions, and in raising tutors' self-esteem. One tutor commented, "I made new friends from among our own tutors and from the other tutors at the conference. . . . I met so many people who were like me. And I thought I was pretty much alone. Going to the conference opened new doors for me." Another tutor's journal comment alluded to self-esteem: "I suddenly realized that I don't have to walk on water! I don't have to be perfect to be a tutor." Going to such a conference and realizing there are others out there with similar fears and expectations seemed to put tutoring on a new plane. Although conferences like this do not happen every semester, I believe that activities of this sort should be taken advantage of whenever possible; they promote bonding and self-acceptance and seem to be yet another reason tutors return to the writing center.

Another activity that promotes unanimity is our writing center's Secret Pal Program. Our writing center has had a Secret Pal Program, complete with a Secret Pal Coordinator, for four semesters now. This program is an activity that the tutors started on their own, with no erudite basis, yet it seems to be one of the most significant activities in our writing center. During our first Tutorial Projects class session, the SP Coordinator explains the program, answers questions, and signs up voluntary participants. All but eight of our tutors volunteered to participate this semester.

Secret Pals do all kinds of nice things for each other: leave cheerful notes; jot down riddles, jokes, and poems; share stories on computer disks; bring each other little surprise gifts (even a rose is a nice surprise); and tease each other about knowing who one another's pal might be. One tutor commented, "Sometimes I'm having a bad day, and I come in for my shift and see a happy note from my SP. I know someone cares about me. I feel special. That little note brightens my whole day." Another tutor stated, "I look forward to coming in to work to see if I

have anything posted on the PAL Board from my SP." A feeling expressed to me by several tutors is that our days in the writing center can get busy and tension-filled. Having something fun like the Secret Pal Program helps relieve our anxiety. As one tutor noted in a journal entry, "We need to know that being in the writing center is not ALL work. We'd go nuts if it were (and most of us would need a padded room). The Secret Pal Program is one safety valve." At the end of each semester, Secret Pals reveal their identities. Part of the fun throughout the semester is trying to catch an SP in action. Another part of the fun is trying not to get caught.

In the writing center, birthdays are a big (happy) deal! The SP Coordinator gathers and prints a list of everyone's birthday, taken from her SP information questionnaire. Secret Pals bring gifts, other tutors send cards, occasionally someone sends a bouquet of flowers, banners are hung, and always students and tutors on shift join in singing Happy Birthday to that day's celebrity. Tutors never let a birthday go by without some kind of celebration. This semester, one tutor even came in and worked his shift on a day he was ill and skipped his classes. He didn't want to miss his birthday day in the writing center. Sharing birthdays is another way tutors help each other feel valued. I think this feeling of being valued is another reason tutors are so loyal to the writing center.

Not only do tutors plan and gather for parties within the writing center, but they do so outside as well, usually at the home of a tutor but occasionally at my house, too. Tutors throw Halloween parties, end-of-the-semester Winter Break parties, Groundhog Day parties, Saint Patrick's Day parties, end-of-the-semester Summer Vacation parties, and even "Nobody's Birthday" parties. For days before a party, they chatter about costumes, decorations, rides to and from the party, and food (a pot luck sign-up sheet goes around). One tutor is often appointed Official Photographer. Pictures need to be tacked into our writing center

album. Having parties in and out of the writing center brings tutors together in a relaxed, informal way. When they return to work—to business—they do so with friends. I know the tutors look forward to these parties, and I believe they consider them another "safety valve."

An additional outside-the-writing center activity the tutors enjoy is our semesterly Mexican Food Pig Out. Tutors gather and walk to a nearby Mexican restaurant. We tell jokes we should not tell at work, talk about everything under the sun, and eat chips and hot sauce until they run out our ears. Again, we relax and form friendships with others who might not work the same shift or who might be somewhat shy in a more formal setting. I see these outside gatherings as another reason tutors keep coming back semester after semester.

Something I used to shy away from but have grown more used to lately is tutors sharing problems. Sometimes I feel like the writing center is a *Melrose Place*. Tutors have problems: school problems, children problems, spouse problems, parent problems, car problems, pet problems. . . . They have them all! I've come to understand that if a tutor is worried or stressed, he or she is not as effective, basically unhappy. This baggage can negatively affect a tutoring session. So I encourage tutors to talk. They talk to me and to each other. Often they don't want advice or even a solution. They just need a sounding board, a strong shoulder, a friend. I've found that if I listen, mirror, and ask questions, troubled tutors often find their own answers. This process of sharing another's problem is a great deal like tutoring (many of the same techniques apply). I believe tutors have found tutoring techniques useful in helping each other. I also believe that the friendships formed during this sharing are another factor relating to why tutors return. They not only form friendships, but they create trust and form bonds.

Discussing the need to create trust and form bonds, Daniel Goleman, in his au-

dio book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter more than IQ*, notes that many businesses now rely on group efforts, group projects, and collaboration to reach a goal. Most businesses no longer operate as they did in the '70s and '80s when workers were often autonomous, functioning on their own to meet individual objectives (tape 1, side 2). Our tutors certainly are not autonomous; our writing center is a collaborative business. Goleman believes that to create the sense of community (or family) needed in collaboration, meeting employees' emotional needs, or helping them acquire what he terms "emotional intelligence," is necessary. Goleman contends that helping employees become aware of and evoke "emotional intelligence" is often a higher motivator and promoter of success than is an employee's intellectual capability (tape 2, side 1).

Goleman lists seven areas included in "emotional intelligence":

Confidence—a sense that one will succeed and that others will be helpful in the journey

Curiosity—a sense that learning things is positive and leads to pleasure

Intentionality—a wish and capacity to have an impact and to act on that with persistence

Self-control—ability to modulate and control one's own actions in age- and situation-appropriate ways

Relatedness—ability to engage with others based on the sense of understanding and being understood by others

Capacity to communicate—ability to deliver and understand a message whether verbal or nonverbal

Cooperativeness—ability to trust others and work with others interdependently (tape 2, side 2)

Looking at Goleman's list, I can see that many of these qualities are qualities most of our tutors either possess when they begin tutoring or are qualities brought out as they share our writing center world. And it is this development or polishing of "emotional intelligence" that also fosters bonding, trust, friendships. These alliances allow tutors to work together interdependently in what is often a busy stress-filled environment.

We are intellectual beings. We need to feel that learning is taking place and see the results of our learning. Yet we are emotional beings as well. We also need motivation to keep learning. Often the factors related to "emotional intelligence" are factors that support and motivate us in a learning environment such as the writing center. Our activities, both in the writing center and out, support and stimulate tutors' intellectual and emotional intelligence. Moreover, it is just this combination that keeps our tutors returning semester after semester.

Barbara Jensen
Modesto Junior College
Modesto, CA

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(Editor's note: This month's Tutors' Column, on page 9, is written by Marianne Latham, one of the tutors in the writing center described in Barbara Jensen's article.)

OWL-Shop:

An electronic discussion list for administrators, tutors, and scholars interested in online writing labs (OWLs)

We are pleased to announce the creation of a new listserv for discussion of the theory, pedagogy, creation, design, and maintenance of online writing labs. OWL-Shop was created to continue and widen discussion of issues raised in the CCCC97 online writing lab pre-convention workshop facilitated by Stuart Blythe, Eric Crump, Erin Denney, Joel English, Muriel Harris, Brad Hughes, Barry Maid, Tim McGee, Rebecca Rickly, Catherine Spann, Sharon Strand, and Catherine Yoes.

We invite all those interested in OWLs, cybertutoring, computer-facilitated conferencing, and related issues to subscribe to the list, introduce themselves, and join in the discussion. We also invite you to visit our growing list of OWL resources at http://bsuvc.bsu.edu/~owl_shop/

To subscribe to OWL-Shop, send e-mail to listserv@bsuvc.bsu.edu. Leave the subject line blank, and write in the first message line: subscribe owl-shop

To send a message to OWL-Shop, send e-mail to owl-shop@bsu.edu.

To unsubscribe from OWL-Shop, send e-mail to listserv@bsuvc.bsu.edu. Leave the subject line blank, and write in the first line: unsubscribe owl-shop

(OWL-Shop is facilitated by Joel English. For specific questions or problems with the list, e-mail Joel at 01jaenglish@bsuvc.bsu.edu)

TUTORS' COLUMN

Addicted and loving it . . . a tutor's story

I could say that the reason I returned to the writing center was because I love psych papers, but that would only get me committed to the nearest mental health facility. The truth of the matter is that I came back this semester for the same reason that I have returned in previous semesters: namely, I am *addicted*. I'm addicted to the center, the tutors, the students, the entire environment. The only other thing in my life that I have ever been this addicted to is German chocolate cake.

The reason for this addiction is simple. It's the positivity that has, and hopefully always will, exude from this place. It is watching the bonding that happens between the tutors and the students as well as between the tutors themselves. The center is a microcosm of society itself. The one main difference is that the restraints that may exist in everyday society are not as noticeable here. There is more freedom of expression seen within this group than one would probably see in any other social configuration. This is

because both tutors and students feel freer to express opinions, as well as emotions, in the relaxed, interdependent atmosphere that prevails within its walls.

Don't get me wrong, I don't mean to say that academic pursuits are not evident within the center. A person would have to have the IQ of room temperature not to see the learning that goes on among this unique collage of individuals, backgrounds and personalities. But the learning itself is as unique and varied as the individuals from which it flows. The learning which occurs within the walls of the Writing Center is not restricted simply to that which comes from lectures, essays, or textbooks. The education these individuals receive goes deeper and is much more profound than any mere academic endeavor. The people who frequent these colorfully decorated walls receive an education about life, and about living, through their participation, their very presence within the center itself. By conversing with each other each occupant of this particular niche in the cam-

pus' environment exposes himself to an entire spectrum of ideas, concepts, ethnicities, and personalities. This immersion into the very fabric of human sociology makes for a richer, deeper understanding of not just the persons with whom we may come in contact within the center, but all of those with whom we share this sphere on which we live.

But, above all, the one we learn the most about from this immersion is ourselves. We learn what makes us tick within the realm of human communication, human sociology. We learn our shortfalls . . . as well as our strengths. And perhaps, in the end, we learn a little about what it's like to share space with us. I dare anyone to find a class at any level of academia that teaches all of this in such an open, honest, and thorough way.

Marianne Latham
Modesto Junior College
Modesto, CA

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

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

Nov. 7-8: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Kansas City, MO
Contact: Shireen Carroll, Dept. of English, Davidson College, P.O. Box 1719, Davidson, NC 28036. Phone: 704-892-2012; fax: 704-892-2005; e-mail: shcarroll@davidson.edu

Call for Papers

Researching Technology
in the Writing Center

Many writing centers are leading the charge for high technology in learning, yet doing so has caused practice to precede theory in many cases. On-line writing centers, e-mail tutorials, the use of chat rooms, and MOOs and MUDs—many of these are folded into contemporary versions of writing centers.

This proposed collection of essays will examine current research into technology

(cont. on page 10)

This page under construction

Caught here under shivery fluorescent light
(undiluted by windows or breeze)
we sit amidst discarded computer clutter, once-sharpedged
technology now obsolete, gifts generously given
despite lack of space (or even outlets). The misfit
tables are pushed together, geometrically misconfigured
into a meeting surface of sorts. Chalk dust hangs in the air, though
no chalk can be found for the blackboards bordering two sides.

Here, the high-powered academics gather once every two weeks
to celebrate our nationally-recognized writing program.

This week's meeting will not address tutors who work without pay,
nor couches falling apart, coffeestained rugs, the fact
that we have two thesauri and can find neither, the outdated word
processing program on the director's computer, that dank
asbestos-filled basement given to us as "tutoring space,"
underpaid program coordinators, the guilt we feel
when tutors ask why they're not paid
for the required meeting they just attended.

This week's well-attended discussion is more important.

It concerns the exciting construction of a new electronic space,
an online tutorial that will virtually futurize our program's services,
allowing us to accumulate massive piles of information that should
invariably prove invaluable to graduate student researchers whose
careers could be meticulously carved from the ethereal space
which we're charged with constructing.

A naysayer asks (as if this progress could be stopped by such trivialities),
if it might not be unwieldy to accumulate such a messy monolith of
megabytes inviting electronic voyeurism. Believers quickly reassure
us that progress is unavoidable, that we can either drive the bus
or get run over by it, that the Powers that Be recognize this as an important
program and are willing to fund it without question.

Down the hall, tutors and students cram together to work on writing, spill
out of the Writing Lab onto dusty couches piled in hallways,
as we meet in this cluttered room to talk
about building a new space to clutter and how after seventeen years
we've finally found a project worth funding.

Steve Smith
Washington State University
Pullman, WA

Call for Papers

(cont. from page 9)

use in writing centers and will theorize the
move to high technology which most in-
stitutions are making. Essays are sought
which examine the following topics, as
well as related topics authors would pro-
pose:

- What can current research in writing center environments show us about the use of technology in these environments?
- How does research help us theorize the use of technology in writing centers, and how has this theory been justified?
- Why has practice preceded theory in writing centers, and is this problematic?
- What does research tell us about adding to or replacing face-to-face tutorials with e-mail tutorials? What about other virtual tutoring environments, such as MUDs and MOOs?
- How has technology changed research and practice in writing centers?
- What implications for tutors and students might the move to high technology have?
- Is high technology a sound move for all writing centers, or are some centers right to shy from such a move?

Submissions will be acknowledged and should be completed essays of 2000 to 4000 words in MLA format (and Alliance for Computers and Writing format). Authors should submit two paper copies and one disk copy in Word or WordPerfect format to either editor. Deadline: June 15, 1997; acceptance notice: July 7, 1997; revisions due: Aug. 25, 1997.

Address submissions or inquiries to:
Donna N. Sewell
(dsewell@valdosta.edu) (or)
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WRITING CENTER ETHICS

The ethics of writing center pedagogy

While administrative contexts (the subjects of my last two columns) are certainly important to the construction of a writing center's ethics, even more important are the pedagogical principles which that center—and the members of its staff—embrace and use to structure tutorial interactions with student writers. The first and most important of these principles, the writing center's general *Philosophy of Collaboration*, provides the essential foundation upon which the center's ethical framework is built. If writing centers wish to ground their epistemologies in collaborative learning theory and construct a writing pedagogy that reflects that theory, then writing center personnel must comprehend the rationale for doing so and be prepared to defend that rationale when necessary (Cosgrove; Yahner). In essence, writing centers must be ready to explain to others why their tutoring is ethical. Despite the long history of collaborative writing groups and collaborative learning practices in the classroom—a history we are just now beginning to discover (Gere; Gaillet)—not all members of the academy trust collaborative learning, and many view it with outright suspicion (Stewart; Clark 4). The anecdote related by Richard Behm in "Ethical Issues in Peer Tutoring: A Defense of Collaborative Learning" seems illustrative of this point of view:

In the last year...our tutoring program was challenged by an English faculty member on the grounds that we were in violation of university policy because the tutorial assistance that we were providing to students was a form of plagiarism. His point was that one of the most important functions a university serves is certifying students, making judgments about their abilities so that

employers and others may determine fitness for jobs and so on. When a student receives assistance on a draft of a paper, or even discovering ideas for a paper that is to be graded, the work is no longer solely that of the student, and thus this certifying function is subverted.

The arguments that what we were doing was within the mainstream of writing centers across the country and that the effectiveness of peer tutoring was supported by a wide variety of research did not impress this individual. He denounced all such efforts, including those by teachers who critique drafts before grading the final copy, as unethical. It was his wish that the hand of God should descend upon us all and prevent us from committing further such heinous deeds. (3-4)

Behm, citing the work of educational theorist Henry Perkinson, says his colleague's perspective is representative of "transmission theory," through which "the young [can] be disciplined, or trained, or socialized to the wishes of the adults responsible for them" (9). Linking writing centers instead to the "growth theory" of education, Behm sees that the role of the tutor is to create a responsive environment in which "teacher/tutor and student/learner engage in a critical dialogue that is focused on what is already known, moving, through trial and error, toward an understanding of the nature of the problems and examining possible solutions, thereby creating 'new' knowledge" (9). For this reason, Behm argues that the collaborative learning enacted in the writing center is not only ethical but also reflective of the way people really write.

As the particular forms of collaboration, tutoring, and writing instruction sanctioned by writing centers will vary from site to site, their *Philosophies of Collaboration* will vary as well. A strong influence on the shape of this philosophy will be the Instructional Mission of the writing center, a mission that will incorporate some features of a writing center's *Institutional Positioning and Relation to Other Academic Programs* which I have described in previous columns. It will include essential features of the operation such as what portion of the student body is served by the center, whether tutorial services should be closely tied to the goals (and classes) of specific departments, what the center's obligations are to the campus at large, and how those obligations are to be met. But it will also embody other, more abstract, principles which define the essential posture that the center and tutors take toward students and their written texts. If the mission of the center is defined narrowly—as a grammar or language lab, for example—then the kinds of interactions which are likely to take place in conferences will be vastly different from centers whose missions are defined more broadly—as places where students can get help with a vast array of rhetorical features that might need attention in their papers. A writing center whose primary mission is, in the words of Steven North, "to make better writers, not necessarily—or immediately—better texts" (441), will train tutors differently, structure its conferences differently, and run itself differently than will a writing center that is far more focused on grammatical correctness and the surface features of student writing.

As a consequence, the *Pedagogical Philosophy* of a writing center—its approved tutoring strategies, its perceptions

of an acceptable balance between product and process tutoring, the means by which it discriminates between higher-order and lower-order problems, and its policies for structuring the student-tutor interaction—will be derived from the center's Instructional Mission and form the central core of a writing center's operational ethics. Pedagogical philosophy will determine degrees of appropriateness for tutorial conferences: what is appropriate to do or to ask or to talk about, what is inappropriate to discuss or to change or to demonstrate explicitly. Though writing centers are generally configured as teaching sites, the definition of what constitutes "teaching" and the methods which are employed to put that teaching into practice will vary widely and, ultimately, shape a writing center's sense of its own ethics. For example, many writing centers take an entirely Socratic approach to their interactions with students. Tutors spend most of their time asking questions about the texts students bring in: "Can you state your paper's thesis in a brief sentence or two?" "How do each of the paragraphs in your paper help to develop that thesis?" "Can you think of additional examples to illustrate the point in this paragraph?" "What arguments might readers raise in objection to the claim you're making here?" Other writing centers, however, may follow the advice of Shamoon and Burns and take a more active and explicit role in teaching students about writing and structuring their papers. (Writing centers with significant numbers of ESL students, for instance, may find those students better served in conferences by providing more explicit instruction in grammar and SAWE than can be realized through a series of pointed questions [Powers, Harris and Silva]). Of course, no writing center will ever adopt one of these approaches to the exclusion of the other. Different circumstances and different students will call for varying degrees of implicit/explicit instruction. But a writing center's Pedagogical Philosophy—its stated or unstated guidelines for teaching practice—will overlay virtually all other contexts in the writing center and influence decisions about the ethics of particular situations.

Yet another philosophical principle that is critical to writing center operations—a principle that will, perhaps, form the basis of most ethical dilemmas that tutors and directors have to face while they work in the center—is *Confidentiality*. In essence, writing centers will need to consider and articulate explicit guidelines about what information (if any) can be repeated outside the tutorial conference, under what circumstances, and to which audiences. Should tutors be considered the academic equivalent of lawyers, doctors, priests, or psychologists—professionals who have both the legal right and the ethical responsibility to protect their clients? And is everything said in a tutorial conference privileged information and subject to ethical and legal shielding? There may be a great deal of disagreement among interested parties over what should and should not be reported to people outside the center. Writing center directors are certainly responsible for telling administrators about the number of students they see each year and for providing additional ethnic and demographic information about those students. Information of that sort is relatively abstract and anonymous, and it can be used for the benefit of administrators, students, and the writing center alike. But at what level does the information requested and/or provided become too specific and thereby violate the confidentiality of the center or the individual conference? Is it at the level where we identify the number of students from a particular major? From a particular course? From a particular instructor? From a particular assignment? Can we ever reveal information about an individual student, and under what set of circumstances might we consider it our ethical responsibility to do so?

In next month's column, I'll tell a story about something that happened in my own writing center that forced me to answer a number of these questions directly.

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NWCA News from Joan Mullin, President

The C's went by much too quickly. While the minutes of the board meeting will be printed in WCJ, let me summarize a few things that will be coming your way, and on which you may want to give some feedback. First, welcome to our three new Executive Board members: Neal Lerner, Ellen Mohr and Jon Olson. Those of you who know these folks can talk to or e-mail them about any questions or concerns you may have about NWCA or your regional.

We put out a call, and repeat it here, for any regional that would like to co-host the next NWCA conference. RMWCA is sponsoring it this September in Park City, Utah, and we hope to have another offer from a regional by that time. What that means is that the usual regional meeting combines with the national for that year. Questions? E-mail me, or Eric Hobson (former Midwest coordinator) for answers. You should look into issues like transportation, hotel

facilities, food service, social activities, conference facilities, staff support, institutional support (if you can get it), and most of all, how affordable it will be for the travelers with small budgets.

Two other issues are being carried forward: starter packet updating and the writing of an assessment team plan. Beth Boquet, Paula Gillespie and Jeannette Jordon are working on the starter packet—and yes, we do want it available on-line; however, we need to make hard copies available also. If you have suggestions, contact any of the above three. We make a special appeal to those in high school writing centers—what do/did you need to start a successful writing center? Jeannette Jordon is our high school contact person, and we want to take advantage of her expertise as well as yours.

Marcia Silver, Jo Travers, and Dennis Paoli volunteered to write an assessment

team proposal—one that takes into account a writing center's difference and context, yet sets standards that we can agree upon and that will appease our various administrators. The idea of an assessment team has been bandied about for several years now, and our previous sub-committee (led by Joe Law) did an excellent job of laying the ground work. This new committee will put together a plan that our organization will use as a working/discussion document.

A couple of other issues surfaced, and more news will come to you via the continuing on-line discussion by the executive board. Right now, we're looking at how our 4C's SIG might take shape, and we'll soon post to you a ballot about two initiatives that need membership votes. If you have any concerns that you couldn't bring up at the C's, please e-mail me (jmullin@uoft02.utoledo.edu) or any executive board member, or call us at our institutions (the academic ones).

Director—Academic Resource Center Indiana University South Bend

Indiana University South Bend invites applications for the position of Director, Academic Resource Center (ARC). The mission of ARC is to foster student learning and success. The Director works with academic units and programs to provide support for design, delivery, and evaluation of developmental courses; oversees the operation of the Writing Center, ARC Computer Laboratory, and tutorial services; supports activities that introduce new students to academic culture and campus resources; manages the ARC placement testing program in writing, reading, and mathematics; and manages the operations of ARC. The Director reports to the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. The position may include adjunct appointment in an appropriate academic department.

Candidates must possess either an earned doctorate (preferred) in an appropriate field or a master's degree and extensive experience appropriate to the position. Successful candidates will have leadership skills, experience with adult education/developmental studies and testing, ability to coordinate work of personnel in the

Academic Resource Center, as well as ability to develop and execute plans, and to manage staff and budgets. Knowledge of computers and their use in testing and instruction is desirable.

Salary: Continuing twelve-month position; salary is commensurate with education and professional experience. The University has an excellent benefits package.

Application: The preferred appointment date is July 1, 1997. Applications will be accepted until April 7, 1997 with the screening of applicants to follow immediately. The application should include a letter of interest, a current vitae, and the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of at least three references. Send applications to ARC Search Committee, Office of Academic Affairs, Indiana University South Bend, P.O. Box 7111, South Bend, IN 46634. IUSB is an AA/EEO Employer. Learn more about IUSB through our home page at <http://www.iusb.edu>

Countering misconceptions about the writing center with advertising

Last year I taught a freshman composition class as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). I hated grading papers; I spent too much time on each paper, became too emotionally invested in the quality of the product and assumed too much responsibility for the student. I found out that our department supplies one GTA to the university writing center. Aha! I thought, I can get away from this grading nightmare, learn to separate my life from students' work, put in my twenty hours tutoring at the center each week and leave it all at work! Over the summer the director of the writing center took another position. Our center is under the umbrella of the Academic Skills Center, so it wasn't like I was suddenly on my own, but I didn't have the sort of guidance I had anticipated. In fact, I was given more responsibility than I expected or thought I wanted. One of my responsibilities, I found out, fell under the title of "Director of Public Relations." Nearly 80 visits to freshman writing courses in English, engineering and business needed to be scheduled in a four week slot, and then I had to give the presentations. As a GTA I had seen one of these advertisements; it was short and to the point, here's a pencil with our on-campus location, here's a flyer with the hours of operation, WE DON'T PROOFREAD!

From previous experience, I knew that my own students attached a stigma to the writing center; if I recommended they go, they felt like I was trying to send them a subtle message that they were inadequate, in need of special help, or just plain stupid—all the stigmas students have always applied to what used to be called remedial education. Quite honestly, I probably thought I was sending them for remedial help. I pushed my ESL and basic writers in that direction while I tried to handle all other problems with content and development in additional conference hours. It's amazing I got any of my own writing done that year. So when I heard that the majority

of our clients at the writing center were ESL and basic writers on one hand, and last minute proofreading crises on the other, I determined that we needed to change some perceptions about who we are and what we do. I wanted to directly confront the stigma attached to visiting the writing center as well as confronting the issue of student responsibility for their own writing. Eighty classrooms in four weeks? What a perfect opportunity!

What follows is not a script that emerged full fledged but rather the culmination of an ad-lib blitz I threw myself into. The response following these ads was tremendous. Writing center usage is up over last year; and I can document that a number of new clients responded with a smile—when asked who referred them—that some crazy guy came into their class and passed out pencils. When I tutor drop-ins and recognize the name of an instructor on the assignment or the referral, students will say, "You visited our class," as they try to stifle a laugh or hide a grin.

Cast

The WC Grad Assistant

Small round glasses, excitable at times, prone to moodiness, 30 years old but dressed in the standard undergraduate garb, jeans, t-shirt, untucked flannel shirt, nondescript hat (actually a hat advertising the Sarasota French Film Festival is best) and so looks 23-24.

The Teacher or GTA

Any will do.

The Students

Freshmen with practiced, non-committal, self assured attitudes trying to mask their sense of helplessness and impending despair.

Setting

Medium sized mid-western university classroom. Cinder-block walls in some annoying and yellowed shade of not-quite-white, tile floors. The room is

filled with all the accouterments of the standard freshman composition class, more of those little desk/chairs than can comfortably fit in a room this size as well as a chalkboard or overhead projector and the obligatory teacher figure standing to one side of the front of the room. It is three minutes past the top of the hour, the last two seats have just been taken and one or two more students are still straggling in.

The Teacher

Would you all please give your attention to Mr. _____. He's here to tell us a little about the Writing Center. Mr. _____ . . . (Gestures to go ahead).

Writing Center Grad

(Speaking in the fast patter of a circus barker.) Hi! How ya'll doing? I'm here to pass out free pencils. Why am I handing out free pencils? (Points to student.) Good question, glad you asked. To bribe you into listening to me. Why do I think I need to bribe you? (Pointing to another student.) Smart group, full of questions, that's a sure sign of intelligence. (Hands a pencil to a student entering late.) Have a pencil, sit down, shut up, and listen. Because I figure you think you have your routine down. Let me see if I've got this right. The night before your paper is due you print it out. You walk down the hall to your friendly local English major. (Knocks on a desk loudly.) You knock on his or her door and say. "Hey Jo/e!" (You can spell that with an *o* or an *oe*, no sexism here . . .) You say, "Hey Jo/e! Can you sharpen up your red pencil and dot my i's put my commas in the right place divide my run-ons fix my fragments draw some of those nifty little arrows like you do to show me how to reorganize it (takes a dramatic deep breath) and suggest a good title? Can you Jo/e? Please!?" (Whining.) It's due tomorrow and I need an A." It's a strategy that works, right? So you don't think you need my services, right? (Nods at them until he sees some grins.)

Well, let me tell you about some disadvantages you may not have yet discovered concerning your friendly English major. First, (indicating the count on his raised hand) Jo/e's going to start to get tired of proofreading your paper after a couple of times. Second, when Jo/e gets tired of proofreading your papers, he or she is going to figure out that people in the real world get paid good money for this sort of service and Jo/e's going to start squeezing you for beer money. Third, you may find out that English majors have a bad habit of copping an attitude; they believe (assumes a tele-evangelist voice, with wide dynamic range from a shout to a whisper) that they are smarter than GOD, because they can convert their intelligent thoughts into black ink on white paper so that the world may read and REVEL in their intelligence PRAISE BE! They can WRITE, therefore they are HOLY! (Dramatic pause as he glares at them.) How many of you have encountered such despicable and demeaning attitudes among English majors? Well, when Jo/e has made enough to drink for the rest of the semester courtesy of your back pocket (gestures to his wallet), he or she may take to spreading nasty rumors around your residence hall concerning your lack of intelligence, telling people, "This stupid freshman/engineer/business major down the hall keeps asking me to proofread his papers. Can't he think for himself, or what?" We can't have people spreading rumors about your intelligence now, can we? (Long pause still indicating the count.) Three disadvantages to Jo/e.

Now let me tell you about three advantages to the Writing Center. (Starting a new count with the attitude of a Christmastime salesman demonstrating product features in a department store.) One, we won't get tired of you. Why? Because we get paid to be there. Do we charge you so we can go drinking on the weekend? No! Number two, it's free to you; the university pays us. Three, and most importantly, we do not hire people with attitudes like Jo/e's. We have hired people who understand that writing is a sort of conversation that takes place on

white paper in black ink. The trouble is, the blank page, the blank computer screen, they don't talk back. When you're talking to your friends and you say something they don't quite understand, they'll look at you like this . . . (demonstrates a quizzical/comical look). If you say something they don't quite believe, they say, "Hold up Holmes, where'd you hear THAT?" If they start to get bored, their eyes start to glaze over, they droop a little, you notice that they are watching somebody over your shoulder. The academic conversation, the sort of writing you are being asked to do for this class, is a new sort of conversation for most of you. You're probably having a hard time figuring out what questions to ask, what questions to answer, what's interesting and what's not; and that silly computer isn't helping, right? Well, we have hired people to work at the Writing Center who understand that talking about ideas during the writing process, engaging in a real conversation, helps expand those ideas, helps clarify them so that they are easier to get out in black ink on white paper so that (gesturing and with a Speedy Gonzales voice) Senor/a Instructor/a can put a good grade on it. These people are undergraduates, just like yourselves, not nerdy, over-educated pencil-neck geeks with thick glasses like me. These are people who have used this technique of talking about writing to help themselves in their own writing. They know it works. Now they want to help you the same way.

Will they proofread your paper? No! (Emphatically followed by a pause.) But they can help you learn good proofreading strategies, learn how to find the places where mistakes commonly occur in everybody's writing, learn how to spot the mistakes and learn how to fix them yourself when you find them. What else can they do? If you have a paper on Monday that is only two pages long, but Senor/a Instructor/a (gesturing, funny voice) says, "Noooo, please make it five pages by Friday and kindly include three sources," but you say to yourself, "There is no more I can write, I have written all there is that I know." Come on in to the

Writing Center and talk with a tutor. They can read through the paper WITH you and help you find the places where you started to say something interesting but didn't go into detail, help you find the places where you started to say something important, but didn't back yourself up with facts—those three sources you were supposed to use? We can help you find where they actually contribute to your paper instead of looking like something you clipped out of a magazine (makes clipping gesture) and pasted over one of your own paragraphs so you could say, (childlike voice, gesture to teacher) "See teacher, I have a source." We can read through your paper WITH you and learn to spot the places where the organization starts to fall apart, how to locate topic sentences and see whether they are effective. Are you writing good transitions? Know what one is? Come in and find out how you can spot them. We won't do the work for you; we want to help you learn how to do the work better, for yourself.

Anybody can use the Writing Center; you don't have to be in a freshman writing class, or an English class. We can help with biology, anthropology, sociology, you name it, any course you have to write for. You don't have to speak another language as your native tongue, you don't have to need help like, (simple, slow, funny voice) "this is the noun, this is the verb, you need a period to make a sentence." If this is the kind of help you need, we CAN help you. But, a lot of people think this is the only kind of help we provide. That's a big misconception. We help everyone, freshman through graduate student. If you're writing for class, we want to talk with you.

So now that I hope I have destroyed some of your misconceptions about what we do and who we are, let me tell you where we are and when we're there, because I'm sure you will all want to come see us soon. (Scene continues in pantomime, fade.)

END

James Bandy
Western Michigan University
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New from NCTE

All of the following new books can be ordered from the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

Border Talk: Writing and Knowing in the Two-Year College, by Howard Tinberg

(95 pages, softcover. \$19.95; NCTE members: \$14.95)

Tinberg, who directs the Writing Lab at Bristol Community College, coordinates a summer workshop for the faculty tutors in which discussions focus on their work in the Writing Lab and teaching within the disciplines. *Border Talk* is drawn from one of these workshops where they sought a common language with which to talk about writing and knowing.

Co-Authoring in the Classroom: Creating an Environment for Effective Collaboration, by Helen Drake

(104 pages, softcover. \$12.95; NCTE members: \$9.95)

This book offers research support and a rationale for using co-authoring in the teaching of writing, as well as practical suggestions for implementing co-authoring groups. Dale argues for co-authoring as a means to focus student attention on audience, draw upon higher-order thinking skills, and prompt students to write more recursively.

Mina P. Shaughnessy: Her Life and Work, by Jane Maher

(331 pages, softcover. \$25.95; NCTE members: \$18.95)

This is both a biography of an extraordinary woman and a fascinating historical account of events leading to Open Admissions within the City University of New York (CUNY) system in the 1970's. Shaughnessy's most renowned work, *Errors and Expectations*, was published in 1977.

THE WRITING LAB
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