THE WRITING LAB

...FROM THE EDITOR...

One of the major compensations of being an editor is that I'm among the first to read the steady stream of interesting, thought-provoking, insightful, useful essays written by writing center folks that are sent to the newsletter. (Hmmmm. . . is my bias toward essays written by, for, and about us evident here?) The topics, as in this issue, are those constantly on our minds, and the relationships we focus on shift through a variety of perspectives. As directors and/or tutors we consider our roles in relation to the students we tutor, the instructors who refer the students to us, the institutions we exist in, and the professional world we take part in.

But as I put together this issue of the newsletter, I realized one relationship we tend not to explore is that which exists between the director and the tutors. Michael A. Pemberton's Writing Center Ethics column this month asks us to think about the ethical concerns of hiring tutors. In doing so, we have the perspective of the director considering the tutors who will work in the lab. But how do tutors view the director? What are tutors' concerns, worries, insights, ethical considerations? Just some thoughts on a cold December night.

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

The New Mexico Tech writing center: The first year

In the fall of 1995, New Mexico Tech established its first Writing Center. The Center grew from the knowledge that Tech students needed help with their writing beyond the few writing courses required for graduation. The Writing Center was seen by most faculty members and administrators as an excellent idea to help Tech students improve their writing. We acknowledged that our students could use extra help; we hoped that they would also acknowledge this need and would take advantage of our new resource. Many engineering and science students profess to dislike and avoid writing whenever possible.

While many other colleges and universities in New Mexico have writing centers, New Mexico Tech faces unique challenges due to its student population and staffing resources. We grappled with many questions. Given the Humanities Department's tight budget, who would administer and work in the Center? Regarding our students, the proverbial horse and water analogy came to mind: once the writing center was established, how were we to lure engineering students there

for help? Planning and developing the Writing Center has caused us to examine our students' writing needs, professors' attitudes towards writing, and our composition program overall.

The need for tutorial help

Our NMT Mission Statement includes "creating and communicating knowledge" (9). General degree requirements include 3 writing classes: English 111, College Writing (which may be passed out of with an ACT score of 27 or higher); English 112,

Research Writing; and at the junior or senior level, English 341, Technical Writing. This sequence, for the most part, seems to work. English 111 students generally lack sentence-level skills and need basic help constructing a paragraph, and assembling an essay. English 112 students can construct a five-paragraph essay, but need help in learning to incorporate analysis and more complex thinking in their work. They also learn to use our library's databases, as well as the Internet. By the time students take English 341, they are usually proficient writers. At this time they learn to write in more professional and academic contexts.

Yet some students fall through the cracks. Students may pass their required writing classes with a C (or D in the case of English 112), but this doesn't mean they have mastered writing. Our university offers tutoring in math, science, and various engineering classes. A formalized writing tutorial resource was overdue.

Getting started: Faculty attitudes about student writing

At the suggestion of one of my colleagues, last fall I sent out a plea to University faculty asking them to define their "pet peeves" concerning student writing. The idea was to understand what professors believe (and perceive) to be problems, and then to prepare writing tutors to deal with these concerns. I should mention that there is a sentiment among some faculty members that the Humanities Department is responsible for producing high quality writers. And there is a strong suggestion, in some cases, that we have not been doing a very good job. We take this criticism with a grain of salt. One reason that a senior may display poor writing skills (ranging from unfamiliarity with a report format to substandard paragraphing and mechanics) is that faculty advisors may not know we need their students as juniors. Many engineering students let their English 341 writing requirement slide to their very last semester.

Results of my survey on pet peeves were interesting (about 12 out of more than 100 faculty members responded). We have now posted some of these comments on our Writing Center Homepages. Here is what one Materials Engineering professor had to say:

Students do not seem to appreciate the importance of writing. In and of itself, writing well will not make one a successful scientist or engineer; however, writing poorly almost always assures a mediocre career. Indeed, once "on the job" a large fraction of time is spent writing. There are proposals, papers, and progress reports, and one lives or dies by how well these are written . . . .

Few students view writing as a tool that can aid the thought process. Mainly, I assume, because writing, like thinking, is hard work. It takes me between 50 and 100 man-hours to prepare a, say, 10-page paper for submission to a journal. This is, of course, just the writing, not the research. Most of that time is spent re-reading the paper, expressing my thoughts more clearly, adding to what I have already written. In other words, in revising. My peers assure me that 100 hours is not excessive.

One professor in the Mineral and Environmental Engineering Department believed that we in the Humanities Department had been telling our students that it was acceptable to write in the first person voice. She wrote:

The persistent use of first person is not acceptable in engineering technical writing. As "vogue" as it may be in some disciplines to use first person, engineering professions find it quite offensive.

Another professor wrote:
Two things I see very commonly are choppiness and [poor] paragraph structure. It is often necessary to add lots of transition words like *therefore*, *yet*, *however*, *on the*

other hand, *in contrast*, to make sentences flow better and to let the reader know the relation between thoughts in the sentences. Many of them write in jumbled paragraphs and it is very hard to extract the important points. Part of this is poor science in which they present their interpretation before giving the data. This happens on all scales in the papers. Very often I have to re-write several example paragraphs and then have the student go through the paper paragraph by paragraph and try to get each one to follow a logical progression.

And, indeed, in the Center tutors addressed many of the problems mentioned by professors: lack of organization, incoherent paragraphs, lack of knowledge (or confidence) regarding grammar and style, and inability to formulate strong topic sentences. Perhaps the most important point expressed by these comments is that NM Tech faculty value writing. In this sense, the Writing Center's very existence states that writing is a critical skill in the academic and industrial world.

Who came for help

During the first two semesters, we tried many different advertising strategies and learned a good deal about what caught the students' attention and what did not. A student survey, along with feedback from early Writing Center clients, provided information about NM Tech students' attitudes towards writing and assistance needed. A variety of publicity material was disseminated in the form of brochures, flyers, newsletter announcements, and bookmarks. In our advertising, we made an effort to appeal to a wide cross-section of Tech students by using themes from science fiction, as well as humorous, popular culture images.

All faculty, both within the Humanities Department and across the University, have been asked to announce Writing Center hours to their classes. I have also offered to post any informa-

tion about writing for specific classes on our Writing Center Homepages. Two professors accepted this offer; one who teaches history, and the other electrical engineering.

Based on evaluation sheets filled out by writing center clients, I was able to assemble the following data about the Writing Center. In the fall, we had approximately 55 customers. The vast majority (28) were freshmen who were coming for help in English 111 and English 112. Other customers included four sophomores, two juniors, one senior, three graduate students, and one professor. Several of these visitors received help preparing job market material (résumé and cover letter), while most were related to academic schoolwork. We had a staff of eight volunteers (four students and four faculty members), and we provided 12 hours of assistance each week. The most popular tutoring time was Sunday evening.

In the spring, we had ten volunteers (five students and five faculty members) and we offered 22 hours of assistance per week. About 68 students came to visit the center last spring. Of those, 38 were freshmen, 13 were sophomores, 6 were juniors, 6 were seniors, and 1 was "other." Most students came for help with English papers, although 7 came for help with biology papers, and 4 came for help with job materials. The most popular tutoring times were Monday and Thursday afternoons. Also in the spring, with the help of an industrious tutor, we managed to create a web-site for our writing center. Becca and I surveyed other writing center sites on the World Wide Web and decided on appropriate links. I wasn't sure if Tech students really used the site, but we were glad that we were there for them just in case.

This past summer, I reviewed writing center evaluations and other information collected. I was encouraged by the increased writing center usage, and I discussed with my department chair

the possibility of producing Writing Center paraphernalia to increase visibility. We had 1000 pencils printed ("Do the Write Thing . . . Visit the NM Tech Writing Center"), which, along with small brochures, were stuffed into freshman orientation packets. We repeated other publicity measures that seemed to work, and tried some new ideas (thanks to Jim Bell, University of Northern British Columbia, "Promotional Ideas for Writing Centers," *Writing Lab Newsletter*, September 1996). I sent announcements to all faculty members, posted flyers around campus, and asked faculty members to include the Writing Center links in their course homepages. I also produced table tents for the cafeteria. This fall we have nine tutors (five students and four faculty members), and we are open 17 hours. Writing Center usage remains at a steady trickle.

Room for improvement

Earlier feedback let us know that students don't like to come all the way to Cramer (our Humanities Building). I would like to have a "floating" Writing Center in the Student Union, dormitories, or even near the central computer center. More flexible hours would also be appreciated. Unfortunately, our tutors all requested daytime hours, so we are short-staffed. That brings up another important question. Could we manage a small budget for the Writing Center so that volunteers could be paid workers? Our Humanities Department gets very little Financial Aid money, so we are currently looking for other funding sources within our Institution.

And finally, I come to the question of the Writing Center's name. I deliberated on what to call the center. I finally chose Writing Center over Writing Lab because I believed that a center shows a greater sense of community (and I liked that idea). However, I now realize that it doesn't matter so much what I like. NM Tech students are oriented towards the idea of labs. Science occurs in labs. Labs are places of logic—of understanding

NWCA News from Al DeCiccio, President

During her term as President of NWCA, Joan Mullin kept *Writing Lab Newsletter* readers apprised of NWCA activities, initiatives, issues, and concerns. Since I became President at the NWCA business meeting during this year's NCTE convention in Detroit on November 22, I see one of my responsibilities as keeping up with what Joan started here by writing a monthly column about NWCA. To that end, I want to express my appreciation to Muriel Harris for providing this space and my gratitude to Joan for all the hard work and enthusiasm of her presidency. We all owe a great deal to Joan, and we will be fortunate to have her leadership and her vision while she continues as a member of the NWCA Executive Board. May I ask that when you speak to her face-to-face, on-line, or in writing, you make it clear to her how much you appreciated her effective leadership.

I want to give you some good news about the Active Writing Center we arranged at NCTE in Detroit. The idea of having an Active Writing Center was a response to the elementary, secondary, and high school population that make up a great deal of NCTE's participants. NWCA Executive Board members thought that we could tell more about the idea and work of a writing center by having a site in the exhibition area and by making writing center workers available to do some actual tutoring of texts-in-progress: potential articles, conference papers, proposals, manuscript ideas, manuscripts.

Now, while there was not a lot of tutoring in Detroit, there was indeed some. More importantly, according to NCTE executive Robert Harvey's data, more than 5,000 people registered for the convention, many of whom visited the exhibition area during the three days it was open. In that time, the NWCA booth had many visitors, particularly from elementary, middle, and secondary school workers. A good deal of information was provided, and I expect that our membership (both on-line and official) will swell. In all, I think the Active Writing Center exhibition was a great success, and I will thank NCTE, particularly Robert Harvey and Sandra Gibbs, for allowing us such an opportunity. At the same time, in anticipation of future Active Writing Center exhibitions at national conventions such as NCTE and CCCC, I will point out to our NCTE colleagues that they could have provided much more publicity about the tutoring we were available to deliver.

The thirteen writing center workers who gave their time to the Active Writing Center at NCTE were instrumental

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Call for Proposals
November 6 - 8, 1998
Plattsburgh, New York
"Writers as Readers/Readers as Writers"

Proposals of 150-250 words plus 50-word description for program. Specify 50-minute workshop or 25- or 15-minute presentation. Preference given to proposals actively involving the audience and clearly involving peer writing consultants. Proposals are due March 1, 1998. Notification by May 1, 1998. Include e-mail address for response. Send proposals to Twila Yates Papay; Writing Across the Curriculum; Campus Box 2655; Rollins College; Winter Park, FL 32789; e-mail: tpapay@rollins.edu; phone (407) 646-2191; fax (407) 646-2245. For conference information, contact the conference chair: Mary Dossin, e-mail: dossinmm@splava.cc.plattsburgh.edu; phone: (518) 564-6138.

South East Writing Centers Association

Call for Papers
April 23-25, 1998
Macon, GA
"Stories from the Center"

Proposals should be postmarked no later than February 14, 1998 and be sent to Peggy Ellington, Wesleyan College, 4760 Forsyth Road, PO Box 8463, Macon, GA 31210-4462. E-mail: peggy_ellington@post.wesleyan-college.edu; phone: 912-757-3904; fax: 912-757-4027.

Defining the tutor's role and responsibilities in the triangular relationship of student, professor, and tutor
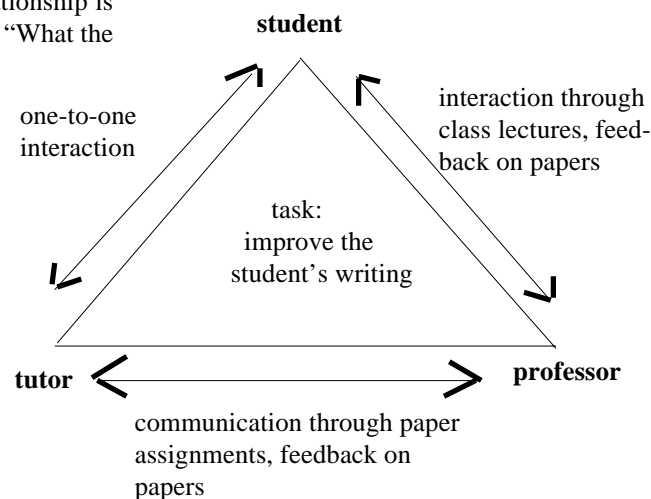
Defining the problem

When Kirsten and I had our first appointment together, she had already handed in two papers for Mr. E's composition class. On the first she had received a D-, with the opportunity to revise it for a higher grade, which she had done. Pleased that she had made the effort, I looked down at the revised copy to find yet another D-, with a vague comment that it was not an improvement. At this point Kirsten burst into tears, and inquired angrily as to why she wasn't granted even a minor grade improvement . . . when she had tried. I, having no answer for this, mumbled something about how each teacher has a different revision policy. After two quarters of tutor training, I knew better than to bad mouth or even disagree with a teacher's methods, let alone his grading system.
(George 7)

Claire George found herself involved in this challenging tutoring conference when she was a tutor at the writing center at DePaul University in Chicago. Just in her description of the beginning of the initial conference, we can see the difficulties that lie ahead for her. She has become the third point of a complicated triangular relationship, and two of the participants are not communicating effectively. As a peer tutor, she sympathizes with Kirsten; after all, she is a student herself. But, she also is aware of her obligation to Mr. E: her tutor training has taught her not to contradict a professor's comments or grades. What is George's responsibility to Kirsten, to Kirsten's instructor, and to herself? How can she apply this knowledge practically in this tutoring relationship?

The tutor's role in this relationship is not immediately apparent. In "What the College Writing Center Is—And Isn't," Richard Leahy makes the point that this lack of definition is partly due to the newness of the task: "Before tutoring in writing became common, the relationship between student and instructor went just two ways, back and forth. Enter the tutor, and we have a new configuration, a sort of triangle but one whose lines of relationship are not at first clear" (44). The tutor not only fills a newly created position, but this position has been added to an already-established teaching relationship.

Both the tutor and the professor are helping the student, but they use different approaches. Ebba Stedillie, a teacher-tutor, believes that a significant difference between her two roles—teacher and tutor—is the amount of involvement of the student in each of the relationships. When she teaches, she is "an active agent . . . with the student playing a passive role." In comparison, when she tutors, she is "less directive" and "serve[s] more as a thought reflector." She describes tutoring as being more "focuse[d] on the writer" (156). Working together, in these active and collaborative roles, the teacher and the tutor help the student to articulate through the written word what he is learning in his class.

Each of the people involved in this writing improvement triangle have working relationships with the other two people. The communication links between the participants can be depicted as follows:

student

one-to-one interaction

interaction through class lectures, feedback on papers

task: improve the student's writing

tutor

professor

communication through paper assignments, feedback on papers

(Actually a fourth person is involved: the writing center director. For now, the tutor "point" of the triangle will represent the tutor, the writing center, and the writing center director.) The two primary relationships involve student-tutor interaction and student-professor interaction. The student receives more individual attention in his tutoring conferences. His interaction with his professor is more limited because of the number of students competing for the instructor's attention. As a result, a student usually receives written, not oral, feedback on his work. The tutor and the professor usually communicate through the student: he conveys information from the professor to the tutor. Through paper assignments and comments on student's papers, the tutor is able to determine the professor's goals for the student. Occasionally, the professor may let the tutor know (through a referral paper or through the writing center director) specific concerns he has about the student's writing. The tutor and the professor have a professional relationship that involves working together to

help a student, but in separate facilities, with different methods and with rare spoken communication between them. Because of the uniqueness and awkwardness of being involved in a relationship that potentially involves never meeting one another, they also have a responsibility to have faith and trust in the process. It is easy to see how misunderstandings can occur when two people, working toward the same objective, rarely talk to one another.

This essay will use George's experience with Kirsten and Mr. E to illustrate the complications that arise for a tutor when a professor and a student are not successfully working together. The paper's main focus is to clarify the tutor's position in this unique triangular relationship of student, professor, and tutor and to provide the tutor practical advice to use in tutoring conferences where there is a potential for conflict with a professor.

Defining the tutor's responsibility to students

[Kirsten] then showed me the grade on her second paper, an F, with a note at the bottom explaining that it was so different in style and substance from her first paper, he surmised it had been plagiarized. Kirsten took this to mean that Mr. E felt she was so "dumb" she was incapable of writing anything insightful or intelligent. I tried to revive her confidence in her writing ability, but inside I was disturbed by the blatantly unjust Mr. E, a man I had not met . . . . (George 7)

The preceding scene illustrates that George has become emotionally involved with Kirsten. Although she continues to adhere to her writing center's policy of not disclosing doubts about an instructor to a student, she accepts Kirsten's version of the story and begins to side with Kirsten against the professor.

As peer tutors, we connect to students in a way that we do not connect with their professors. We conference with students, not their professors. We understand what it is like to feel mistreated or unjustly graded by a professor and to feel powerless to do anything about it. We want to help students because of our shared experiences. We also want to help them because we feel responsible for them. In fact, there are aspects of the writing center environment that result in the tutor-student relationship falling into the same working rhythms as that of a therapist-client. The setting is intimate and relaxed. The conferences are one-on-one. At times, students are writing on subjects that are deeply personal; and even when the subject matter is not personal, the act of investigating their process of writing is. Christina Murphy feels that students may feel insecure coming into the writing center because they "make themselves vulnerable in opening themselves up to understanding or misunderstanding, judgment or acceptance, approval or disapproval" (45). She believes that tutors should respond to students as therapists would to clients, with "empathetic understanding" and "a basic interest, concern, and desire to help another human being" (44). One writing center tutor makes the point that tutors work in the writing center because they want to help others. The motivation definitely is not provided by the money! (Lewis).

Certainly, all this is true. As tutors, we do want to help other students, and we should respond with understanding and support when tutoring a student. We can commiserate with them. We can honestly express concern and interest. But, we should also remember that we are not psychologists, and we are not expected by the writing center to be psychologists. As Chloe Diepenbrock, the director of the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UH-CL) Writing Center, puts it: "We are writing therapists, not people therapists." We are not responsible for any of the student's problems that fall outside the discussion of their writing. As unjustly as we feel that a student is being treated by a professor, placing ourselves in the

middle of a student/professor conflict will probably not help the student, the professor, the writing center, or ourselves. In fact, we might be doing the student a disservice by our interference.

Students need to learn to work within the academic environment. This involves learning to work within the constraints imposed by professors. A tutor can remind students visiting the writing center that writers compose for a specific audience and that their audience is their professor. As Stephen North asserts: "the instructor is simply part of the rhetorical context in which the writer is trying to operate" ("Idea" 441). If friction occurs between a student and his professor, it is to the student's advantage to acquire the skills that are needed to successfully resolve that conflict on his own. Although it may be difficult for a tutor to let the student handle the problem himself, the student may benefit more if the tutor helps him using a more detached tutoring style. When teaching writing to students, Irene Clark suggests that tutors should not define themselves only as nurturers or facilitators, because she feels that students might need to be a little "uncomfortable in order to learn" (83). Her advice concerning the teaching of writing also could be applied to the problem of teaching students to work with professors. Tackling new tasks is difficult, but the student will learn more if he does it himself.

Diepenbrock advises her tutors to avoid involvement in a dispute between a student and his professor. She recommends advising the student to conference with the instructor in an attempt to work out their differences. If this option fails, the tutor can refer the student to his advisor to help him with the problem. It is not the tutor's responsibility to resolve the student's conflict with his professor. Instead, the tutor can give the student suggestions on how to handle it himself (Diepenbrock).

Defining the tutor's responsibility to professors

Our second appointment consisted of more rage, anxiety, and tears from Kirsten—she had cited every source on her "plagiarized" paper, but still received an F since her own ideas made up very little of the paper's content. At this point I went to see Mr. E. I was determined to find out, as professionally as possible, why he had been so harsh. After I introduced myself as Kirsten's tutor, he became immediately defensive and said that Kirsten turned in every paper late, rarely came to class, and never bothered to follow his directions for each writing assignment. As I listened to the frustration and resentment in his voice, it was clear that he held as much animosity for her as she did for him. I left his office confused and exasperated that Kirsten had obviously not told me the whole story.
(George 8)

Because of her understandable empathy for Kirsten, George has decided to take matters into her own hands and ask Mr. E why he is being so "harsh" to Kirsten. She quickly learns from Mr. E that Kirsten has some failings of her own that have not contributed to the improvement of the relationship. George has discovered that tutors only hear one side of an argument. As admirable as George's concern is for Kirsten, her actions have only seemed to increase Mr. E's frustration. From his perspective, he probably feels that his authority has been undermined. He has been working with a student whom he perceives as difficult, and now the student has her tutor backing her up. George appears to have made an already bad situation worse.

In "The Idea of a Writing Center," North argues that tutors must "never play student-advocates in teacher-student relationships," because those working in the writing center have a "responsibility to respect [their] fellow professionals. . . . In all instances the student must understand that we sup-

port the teacher's position completely" (441). George's experience illustrates the difficulties that might arise if a tutor chooses not to follow North's advice. However, North's position does seem to be a too simplistic solution to a complex problem. Although a tutor should act professionally during tutoring conferences and support an instructor's goals, even professionals have disagreements among themselves. If a tutor finds herself in a situation where she disagrees with what a professor has told a student, it places her in an awkward position if she is required to disregard her own opinion in order to back up a professor's opinion. In his follow-up essay, "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center,'" North admits that his original position sounds like he wants "people to raise their right hand and recite it as a pledge" (13). He acknowledges the stress on tutors involved in these situations: "[D]ay in and day out, year in and year out, [tutors] see (and participate in) a range of teacher-student interactions very few other members of the institution can match. . . . In any case, it adds up and in cumulative form puts a lot of pressure on the sort of tutor-teacher détente proposed [in 'The Idea of a Writing Center']" (13).

There are professional ways to handle situations where a tutor may disagree with a professor's assignment requirements or remarks on a student's paper. The tutor can make comments about the student's writing that may contradict the professor's opinion, but she should emphasize to the student that his audience is his professor and that her opinion is secondary to the professor's. She should quickly turn the discussion back to the professor's goals and work on what the professor wants the student to do (Diepenbrock). If a tutor handles a disagreement skillfully, she may even help a professor. For example, sending a student back to a professor to get an assignment clarified can help the professor by signaling to him that the assignment might not be clearly worded or defined; other students may be having trouble under-

standing the assignment as well (Powers and Nelson, 14). Working in these ways, the tutor acts professionally toward both the professor and the student.

Leahy recommends that "[t]he tutor . . . support the instructor and student [by] not taking sides" and acknowledges that "[t]his can be difficult." However, he feels that it is important for the tutor not to be a "little teacher" or "an ally of the student against the instructor" (44). Summing up the advice of one tutor: we should respect both sides and not take sides (Chapman).

Tutor's responsibility to herself and the writing center

I spent the rest of the week contemplating how I would handle the remaining weeks of the quarter. It would have been easy to sympathize with Kirsten, since being a student myself I knew how discouraging it was to revise a paper and then be told my efforts were useless. Perhaps he was overly uncharitable in his comments and revision policy. Yet I . . . could see that Kirsten was obviously unmotivated and had violated several of his rules. . . . my efforts to aid them in reaching a sort of truce by having a teacher-student conference had failed—they had met together on several occasions without success.

I finally decided that I would concern myself only with what I was supposed to be at DePaul's writing center for—writing and ways to make it better. For the remaining weeks the only relationships I allowed myself to become enveloped in were those of writer and audience, rhythm and word choice, style and content. I ignored snide remarks from Kirsten, and waited silently for Mr. E's grumbling to subside. . . . (George 8)

George's experience is a good example of how getting too involved with a student can affect a tutor emo-

tionally. George claims that the experience resulted in "the hardest quarter" of her writing center career (8). In this triangular relationship of student, professor, and tutor, the tutor has a responsibility to protect herself as well. Not only is the situation potentially stressful, it could damage the tutor's working relationships with people at the university. North can refer to other professors as "fellow professionals" and realistically expect a reciprocation of respect from them. Unfortunately, peer tutors are lower on the academic chain: they usually hang onto the last lonely loop. This university hierarchy increases the importance of a peer tutor being aware of the ramifications of inserting herself between a teary-eyed student and an overdemanding instructor: she could end up with that same person as a professor of her own.

The tutor also represents the writing center, and the writing center needs the support of its university professors. Tutor intrusion into a conflict a professor is having with a student could possibly affect the professor's perception of the usefulness of the center. This could influence his decision to send students to us. The tutor should not do anything that might jeopardize the goals of the writing center.

Conclusion

Mr. E and Kirsten may never have been capable of resolving their conflict, but if Kirsten had initially been given suggestions for taking control of the situation herself, she might have developed some valuable skills that she could have used as a student. George could have reminded Kirsten that a student's audience is her professor. George also should have stayed out of the conflict. By the time that she suggested that Kirsten and Mr. E conference without her, the damage already had been done. George learned that taking a student's side in a conflict that the tutor knows little about could increase the antagonism in an already non-functioning relationship. She also learned a valuable lesson: if you can, stick to the writing.

As tutors, we are not the third point of a triangle that defines the student/instructor relationship. We are the third point in the writing triangle that represents the process of improving a student's writing. When the process functions at its best, three people—the student, the professor, and the tutor—work together, and the student's writing improves. Unfortunately, this arrangement does not always work. George's experience taught her "how fragile the relationship between teacher and student is" (8). If the process fails because of personal conflict between the professor and the student, it is not the tutor's responsibility to resolve their conflict, even if it is for the ultimate purpose of improving the student's writing. It is up to the student to take the responsibility to handle her own problems. The tutor can facilitate the process by advising the student on ways to improve her relationship with her professor, but she should not extend her involvement beyond what the center expects from her. The tutor should attempt to keep the student and herself focused on the writing.

It is interesting that George does not mention her center director. If a tutor feels that a situation is serious and someone needs to help the student, she needs to bring the problem to the writing center director and let her determine the appropriate action. Tutors work for the director and rely on the director to support and advise them. Although the director is not directly involved in working with the student on his writing, she plays a valuable role in the writing improvement triangle. Her involvement can be depicted as follows:
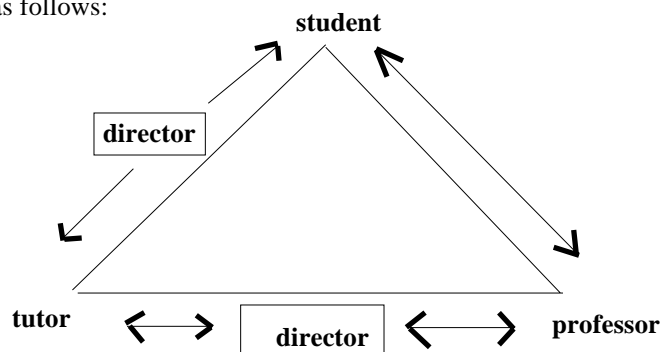
The writing center director ensures that the writing center's contribution to a student's writing process is progressing smoothly. In a difficult situation, such as a conflict with a professor or a student, the tutor relies on her director to provide her guidance. The director should be the person to handle these types of problems. She represents the writing center and its tutors to the university community. A writing center needs one consistent voice and that voice is the writing center director (McGinty).

<div align="right">

Jenny Suffredini
University of Houston—Clear Lake
Houston, TX

</div>

Works Cited

Chapman, Suzette. Personal Interview. 10 November 1995.

Clark, Irene. "Maintaining Chaos in the Writing Center: A Critical Perspective on Writing Center Dogma." *Writing Center Journal* 11.1 (1990): 81-93.

Diepenbrock, Chloe. Personal Interview. 20 November 1995.

George, Claire. "Response to Writing Center Ethics." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 17.8 (1993): 7-8.

Leahy, Richard. "What the College Writing Center Is—And Isn't." *College Teaching* 38.2 (1990): 43-48.

Lewis, Edwina. Personal Interview. 5 November 1995.

McGinty, Mac. Personal Interview. 10 November 1995.

Murphy, Christina. "Freud in the Writing Center: The

Psychoanalytics of Tutoring Well."
*The St. Martin's Sourcebook for
Writing Tutors*. New York: St.
Martin's Press, 1995.

North, Stephen. "The Idea of a Writing
Center." *College English* 46
(1984): 433-46.

- - - . "Revisiting 'The Idea of a
Writing Center.'" *Writing Center
Journal* 15.1 (1995): 7-19.

Powers, Judith K. and Jane V. Nelson.
"Rethinking writing center
conferencing strategies for writers

in the disciplines." *Writing Lab
Newsletter* 20.1 (1995): 12-16.

Raines, Helon Howell. "Tutoring and
Teaching: Continuum, Dichotomy,
or Dialectic?" *Writing Center
Journal* 14.2 (1994): 150-162.

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

Feb. 26-28: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Oklahoma City, OK Contact: Kevin Davis, East Central University, Ada, OK 74820; e-mail: kdavis@mailclerk.ecok.edu

March 6: Northern California Writing Centers Assn, in Belmont, CA Contact Marc Wolterbeek, English, College of Notre Dame, 1500 Ralston, Belmont, CA 94002-1997. Phone: 650-508-3708; e-mail: Mwolterbeek@cnd.edu

March 6: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in New York, NY Contact: Steven Serafin, Writing Center, Hunter College—CUNY, 695 Park Ave. New York, NY 10021. Phone: 212-772-4212; fax: 212-650-3953

March 7: New England Writing Centers Association, in New London, CT Contact: Theresa Ammirati, Dean of Freshmen, Connecticut College, New London, CT 06320; e-mail: tpamm@conncoll.edu

April 2-4: Texas Association of Writing Centers, in San Antonio, TX Contact: Lady Falls Brown, 213 English Dept., Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-3091; e-mail: ykflb@ttacs1.ttu.edu

April 18: Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Assn, in Largo, MD Contact: Richard Profozich, Writing Dept., Prince George's Community College, Largo, MD 20774-2199. Phone: 301-322-0598;

e-mail: rlp@pgstumail.pg.cc.md.us

April 23-25: South East Writing Center Assn, in Macon, GA Contact: Peggy Ellington, Wesleyan College, 4760 Forsyth Road, PO Box 8463, Macon, GA 31210-4462. E-mail: peggy_ellington @post.wesleyan-college.edu; phone: 912-757-3904; fax 912-757-4027.

May 8-9: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Youngstown, OH Contact: Sherri Zander, Writing Center, One University Plaza, Youngstown State U., Youngstown, OH 44555. Phone: 330-742-3055; e-mail: sdzander@cc.ysu.edu

Academic Resource Center Director
Texas Wesleyan University

Duties include overseeing University-wide open laboratory for students seeking assistance with writing, math, and foreign languages, as well as with other academic disciplines; supervising faculty and student personnel; publicizing the ARC among University constituencies; and expanding the usage and resources of the ARC. Qualifications include a masters degree, college teaching experience, writing center experience, strong interpersonal skills, and supervisory ability. The director must be capable of working with all areas of the University to provide laboratory, advising, and tutorial services. Send letter and résumé to Norval C. Kneten, Dean of the School of Science and Humanities, Texas Wesleyan University, 1201 Wesleyan St., Fort Worth, TX 76105-1536. AA/EOE. TWU is a comprehensive Methodist-affiliated liberal arts institution.

Writing Center Director
University of Alabama in Huntsville

The Depts of English and Communication Arts seek a Writing Center Director for a joint appointment. Assistant Professor, tenure-earning, beginning August 1998. Expertise in rhetoric and composition, media writing, and writing center administration. Secondary interests should include public speaking or business communication. Doctorate expected.

Four courses per year. Send letter and vita to John S. Mebane, Chair, Department of English, University of Alabama in Huntsville, Alabama 35899. Applications should be postmarked by Jan. 15, 1998. AA/EOE.

Tutors' Column

When we really help

It is possible for a student to leave the Writing Center with a grand smile stretched from ear to ear, unaware that he may not have been truly helped. Sure, the tutor assisted this student in correcting some relatively minor mistakes in the paper, now ready to be turned in after one last run through the spell checker. However, what about the next assignment, and the next? Because this student did not learn tangible skills that will enable him to conquer even the least formidable of writing assignments, he will become a frequent, dependent visitor of the Writing Center. How could the tutor have truly helped this student make long term progress in his writing, and not just improvements in his immediate writing assignment?

Reflecting back over my early days as a tutor, I now see that I was well on my way to winning the not-so-coveted "quick-fix tutor of the year" award. Fortunately, lightening didn't strike me down, sending me into the tutors' hall of shame, before I had the chance to alter my tutoring techniques. New tutors should become very cognizant of what students need to really help them improve in their writing for the long-run. Proving my point, I will discuss one of my best tutorials that shows what can happen when a student acquires lasting skills.

The student was in the process of revising her composition portfolio submissions. We wasted little time and got right to work, dispensing with the informal chatter. As I began reading the student's paper, I noticed that many of her sentences were awkward and unclear. I asked her to forget about what she had written and to simply express

to me what she wanted to say. She put down her pencil, glanced up at the ceiling, looked back at me, and then brilliantly verbalized what she had awkwardly written. I naively asked her why she didn't write it down like she had just said it. She told me that she always had trouble writing down her thoughts. I jokingly said, "Man, I wish we had a tape recorder to record what you said here. That was great." She looked at me with a smile and said, "I have one in my bag." I thought to myself, "This can't be this easy. Thank you, Lord." She primarily used the tape recorder to record lectures in a difficult class. She found that the tape playbacks helped her to organize and clarify her notes. I hoped that they would do the same for her writing.

She got the recorder out, pushed it to the left corner of the table, and turned it on. We continued reading the paper. Again and again she had sentences that were wordy and unclear. I asked her repeatedly to simply tell me what she wanted to say. Each time, she verbally articulated her thoughts coherently. We looked at each other and laughed after each instance where she succeeded in clarifying what she had tried to write. I put my face close to the tape recorder and blurted out, "Write down what you just said to me." Then I told her, "Whatever you do, DON'T LOSE THIS TAPE." She laughed and said she wouldn't.

Because she had a wonderful gift of verbally expressing her thoughts clearly and concisely, I felt she should use the tape recorder to formulate her thoughts for most, if not all, of her future paper, no matter the disciplines. I also felt that once she had finished

writing a paper, she should read her paper aloud into the recorder. The tape playback of the paper will help her to pinpoint clarity errors herself. More than likely, she will not spot all of the errors, but I'm sure that she will detect some. After finding these mistakes, she should articulate into the tape recorder what she really wanted to say. Open-minded to my suggestion, she said she would try it.

She didn't realize that the same tape recorder that was so useful in organizing and clarifying her lecture notes could be used for similar purposes in her writing. She not only left the Writing Center that day with help on the immediate draft, but more importantly, she discovered a useful technique that will make her a better writer for any assignment. This is real help—help that empowers students for the long run.

<div align="right">

Eric S. Broadus
Peer Tutor
Indiana University-Purdue University
Indianapolis, IN

</div>

New Mexico Tech

principles and solving problems; I rather wish I had chosen the name "The Writing Lab" instead.

Faculty support for the Writing Center remains high, and an increasing number of students know about us. Still, our Writing Center seems to remain more theory than practice.

<div align="right">

Emily F. Nye
New Mexico Institute of Mining
and Technology
Socorro, NM

</div>

Continuous quality management in the writing center

Watching a final episode of *This Old House*, a popular program on public television, I was reminded of exactly the kind of work that skilled craftsmen do. As part of the final segment on the renovation of a house in Salem, Massachusetts, Steve Thomas, the host, visited a carpet mill in England in order to see historically correct floor coverings being loomed. Today, the same pattern that was hand-loomed in the 1700's is carefully programmed into a computer that creates the design. The methods have changed, but creating a one-of-a kind carpet still takes time-consuming energy even with modern technology. The idea of quality has not changed—only the means to achieve it.

Before the Industrial Revolution, skilled craftsmen defined quality for the American people; however, mass production brought inspectors whose jobs were to detect mistakes made by individuals working on the assembly line. American industry was dominated by the idea of sampling plans and statistical process control until after World War II. It was post-war Japan which embraced the idea of Total Quality Management (TQM) expressed by two American statisticians, W. Edwards Deming and Joseph Juran. After its surrender in 1945, Japan needed to rebuild its industry as well as its credibility throughout the world. Deming and Juran were invited to Japan to share their views that quality could be built into manufacturing processes. TQM soon evolved into a broadened view which included the use of statistical tools, consumer research, goal-setting, team work, problem solving, human resource management, and strategic planning. After adopting the philosophy of TQM, Japan became an economic powerhouse. Forty years later American business and industry,

hard hit by Japanese competition, have turned to TQM as the key to successful international competition.

Driving American business toward TQM are two crucial factors according to Armand V. Feigenbaum. The first is from foreign competitors. The high quality of Japanese, German, and other foreign products and services is evident to American customers. The second crucial factor, an invisible form of competition that is difficult to measure and hard to visualize, has its roots in how foreign managers, teachers, workers, engineers and economists think, act, and make decisions about quality. In the end, "America's competition with other industrial nations in the quality of the basic educational infrastructure . . . is of paramount importance"(83). American education is faced with the task of preparing individuals to compete in a global economy, and those individuals must understand that quality is not just a "catch phrase" but a concept that finds its deepest roots in the American education system.

During the 1980's numerous reports focused on the need for colleges and universities to validate their program standards. Calls for accountability came from the American Council on Education, the National Commission on Excellence, the National Institute of Education Study Group, and the Association of American Colleges. In 1993, Richard W. Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education, said:

> As we [America] approach the 21st century, our prosperity and dreams hinge on education as never before. . . . Today's global economy is characterized by an information-rich world, dependent on technology and filled with high-skill, high-

wage jobs. In this world, the workers, businesses, communities and countries that are the smartest and best educated will do the best. (25)

Many American universities publicly embraced the idea of creating a quality philosophy in education. College administrators soon learned that TQM had to be modified to fit each institution. Today, many institutions have some form of TQM in place, so it follows that, as an extension of TQM, writing centers/labs have been established with excellence as a goal. They are places where the environments are conducive to learning, and good writing is encouraged by every tutor.

After a declaration of commitment to good writing, the writing center manager must go one step further and commit to Continuous Quality Management (CQM), the idea that every day must include activities that focus on quality of service. How does a manager keep his/her center focused on quality? Among a number of choices are three important activities that require daily attention: communication, training, and commitment.

Communication

At the heart of CQM is communication. The manager (director, coordinator, etc.) is the vital link between the writing center staff and the administration. It is important that he/she communicates immediately and accurately any information important to the writing center staff. Many centers use part-time employees, and the manager may be their only link to the college in general. Writing center managers may work with presidents, vice presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, faculty, and staff; and since communication from these individuals is chan-

neled directly through the manager, it is her responsibility to share information with the staff.

Regular staff meetings are vital in the communication process. These meetings, whether held once per week or once per month, provide the opportunity for the manager to share information with his/her staff. Whenever meetings are held, it is important to hold them at the same time and place on a regular basis. Consistency in time and place allows tutors to plan their schedules in order to participate in these important communication processes. Topics for meetings may include administrative announcements, staff concerns, future planning, guest speakers, role playing, etc.

Used in conjunction with regular staff meetings is the writing center newsletter. A brief one-page newsletter per week provides a place for announcements like birthdays and be a reminder of the important decisions that have been made or need to be considered in staff meetings. It can also serve as a link to daily college activities for full and part-time employees. Newsletters can be created in almost any format. Templates are available on Microsoft Word, but individualized newsletters can be done in desktop publishing or on a word processor. One can be as creative as he/she pleases! The responsibility for publishing the newsletter can be delegated to a secretary, student employee, or the manager can take charge himself/herself. Schmidt and Finnigan state, "Good communication is a perquisite for openness and trust. . . . managers who communicate regularly, frequently, and candidly with their teams and customers improve quality (60). Heeding this advice, newsletters must be published regularly whether weekly or bi-weekly. What if there isn't much happening in the writing center? The newsletter should still be published. One can always find cartoons or articles from other sources that will interest tutors. One writing center manager keeps a file of cartoons on writing and articles

on tutoring. Tutors are invited to add to the file when they find something interesting or funny. This cooperative effort insures that there is always material for a newsletter.

The goal of good internal communication is the development of an ownership of the writing center by its employees. This leads to a concern for the quality of service rendered by the writing lab and its tutors, a product of CQM. It is also important to communicate with the general student body. Advertising the services of the center is useful. School newspaper ads and special feature stories keep students informed of changes within the center. Many writing centers produce bookmarks with services and hours of operation. These can be given out by the bookstore or as a part of registration. Naturally, they are available in the writing center itself. Videos are also good ways to advertise services to the general student body as well as the public. College cable stations often need something to fill the 10 minutes between televised classes, and a video showing the personnel and services of the writing center can be a perfect fit. Video can also be shown in presentations to classes. It might also be played on a monitor with a continuous loop during registration. Videos can be made for as little as $50-$100 when the college's instructional technology is put to work. Some student-made videos are quite good! In addition to videos, college cable stations often run brief public service announcements which might include a description of the writing center's services, its location, and its hours. Brochures are another print source for advertising. Including some candid photographs of tutors at work makes the content appealing to first time readers. Another way to reach the general school population is to offer space to display student writing on the center's bulletin boards. In addition, writing center flyers can be posted on classroom bulletin boards and in high traffic areas such as the student activities' center. The only cautionary remarks about advertising is

that one should never promise a service that he/she cannot deliver. Candid representation of services is at the heart of communication with the general student body.

In addition to good communication with the student body, it is equally important for writing center managers to create a network among both faculty and members of the administration. Brad Hughes, Director of the Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, recommends that writing center managers make a conscious effort to meet members of both the faculty and administration in order to create a knowledge-based support group that understands the purpose and services of the center. Hughes notes that this is a time-consuming activity, but the creation of a network of informed supporters is invaluable to the writing center (Winter Institute '96).

Training

In addition to communication, tutor training is a cornerstone of CQM. Who gets training, and when is it done are questions that the writing center manager must answer for each individual university. However, tutor training must be a continuous process. Training programs may take place weekly, monthly, quarterly, or bi-yearly, but they must be consistent and regular. A number of tutor training manuals are available to use as guidelines. One highly recommended source is *The Tutor Training Handbook* that follows the College Reading and Learning Association's (CRLA) guidelines for tutor training. This program is easily implemented in both small and large writing centers, and trained tutors receive certificates from the centers after they have completed their training. Some of the requirements of this program include no more than three hours of video programs, 25 hours of verified tutoring, and recommended training sessions on topics such as diversity, special needs, tutoring styles, learning styles, and college services. Another source for tutor training information is Ross MacDonald's well-researched

training manual entitled *The Master Tutor.* Among many useful ideas included in this text are time management strategies for tutoring sessions and techniques for dealing with a diverse population. Prescribed programs provide good models for tutor training; however, a writing center manager may choose to create his/her own program. Whatever method is chosen, the training program must be consistent and relevant to the activities and individuals tutors encounter every day.

Training makes tutors feel like professionals, and previously trained tutors can serve as mentors to new tutors in each repeated training program. Just as communication helps create quality through ownership of the writing center by its staff, continuous training helps maintain a professional quality in the delivery of services to writing center clients.

Commitment

CQM cannot work without commitment, both personal and professional, from the writing center manager. Personal commitment means taking a daily and concerted interest in the quality of tutoring that takes place in the writing center. Many managers spend part of their time each day tutoring as well as completing administrative duties. Working as administrator and tutor can be difficult at times, but it is good for the manager to set a good example for his/her tutors. Even if a manager's position is strictly administrative, it is important to actually show paraprofessional and peer tutors how an "expert" does the job. In a recent speech to college and university presidents, Robert Rosen, president of Healthy Companies said, "leaders should be positive visible role models" ("Schools Urged to Transform from the Inside Out" 7). Peterson says that businesses and industries that have been the most successful in implementing TQM have seen the necessity for a combination CEO and chief quality officer in one key leadership position (18). These words remind us that giving lip service to the idea of Total Quality Manage-

ment or Continuous Quality Management is not a realistic approach to improving the writing center's service to its students/clients. A writing center manager must become personally knowledgeable about all aspects of CQM and synthesize its tenets before quality can be attained. Creating a "quality" organization requires time and energy, and the manager who is not committed to expending a great deal of energy, as well as time, will not build a successful CQM team.

A professional commitment is also required if CQM is to be implemented in the writing center. Where does one read or learn about CQM? First, there are numerous books in both college libraries and local bookstores that deal with the topic of quality management in education. However, there are few that deal with the more focused topic of quality management in the writing center. Thus, the writing center manager must be an explorer as well as a pioneer. He/she must read as many relevant articles as possible and share new ideas with other professionals in the assistance learning area. Hughes suggests that writing center managers participate in presentations at conferences, share mailing lists, and even e-mail conversations (Winter Institute '96). It is equally important to take every opportunity to travel to conferences, to visit other college and university writing labs, and to focus on the creation of a professional network whose membership is readily accessible for advice and information. Rosen suggests, "If leaders . . . borrow from the best of what works; listen to and learn from the marketplace; and are willing to rethink their role as leaders, then they will succeed in creating learning communities that produce world-class students" ("Schools" 7).

Many educational leaders think that TQM and CQM are just passing fads that business has temporarily embraced. In education, both concepts have met opposition, but many individuals, like writing center managers, have been practicing Continuous Qual-

ity Management since the inception of their centers. In the writing center the idea of offering quality to students has been the bedrock of existence; however, managers are beginning to look at the overall picture of training and communication with a commitment to quality management. In reality, even though college administrations may not publicly endorse CQM, writing center managers have been conscious of it and have been using its principles as they coordinate the activities of their student assistance programs. The main point is that the search for quality never ends; it is a continuous quest, and the writing lab manager is the leader in the creation of a quality service to students.

<div align="right">Diann P. Back
Central Piedmont Community College
Charlotte, NC</div>

———————————

Works Cited

Feigenbaum, Armand V. "Quality Education and America's Competitiveness." *Quality Progress* Sept., 1994: 83.

Hughes, Brad. "Networking and the Successful Learning Assistance Program." Winter Institute 1996 for Learning Assistance Professionals Conference. 3 Jan. 1996. Tucson: University of Arizona Foundation.

MacDonald, Ross. *The Master Tutor: A Guidebook for More Effective Tutoring*. Williamsville: Cambridge Stratford, Ltd., 1994.

Peterson, C.S. *Continuous Quality Assurance: Adapting TQM for Community Colleges.* Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges, 1993.

Riley, Richard W. "A Message from the U.S. Secretary of Education." *Quality Digest* Sept. 1993: 25.

Rosen, Robert. "Schools Urged to Transform From Inside Out." *American Council on Education Update* 11 March 1996: 7.

Schmidt, W.H. and J.P. Finnigan. *TQM Manager: A Practical Guide for Managing in a Total Quality Organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

WRITING CENTER ETHICS

Equity issues in hiring for the writing center

One component of the decision-making process in hiring in the writing center may well be the desire for equity or equal representation. Are there roughly equal numbers of men and women working in the writing center, and if not, is that a problem? A discussion on the WCenter newsgroup some time back considered this question, and members were asked to participate in an informal survey about the relative proportion of male to female tutors on their respective campuses. Though there was a good deal of variation (as might be expected), a majority of the respondents indicated that they had a significantly higher number of female tutors than male tutors. Several reasons were proposed for this interesting statistic, ranging from the assertion that not many men actually applied for tutor positions to the claim that writing centers were, by and large, nurturing environments that women felt more comfortable in. Whichever the case, writing center directors must think about the ethics of gender representation in their centers. How important is gender balance in the center, and how active should the director be in trying to achieve it?

Other equity concerns should also be considered. Are minorities adequately represented in the writing center? How can minority recruitment be enhanced if they are not? Do the tutors represent a broad spectrum of academic majors or just a few? Is this a problem? Is there an adequate balance of experienced and newly-hired tutors? Is this something that can be controlled, or is this figure subject to the whims of circumstance and everyday life?

At the University of Illinois, I have found that female applicants for tutorial positions far outnumber male applicants, in some semesters by more than eight to one. The reasons for this are hard to discern, but the result is that relatively few males, overall, obtain positions as tutors in the Writers' Workshop. Obtaining some sort of idealized gender balance is less important to me than hiring the most qualified candidates, so I generally end up hiring a disproportionately high number of female tutors. Minority representation in my writing center is, I must admit, less than I might wish (there are three people of color on my staff this semester), but it's not for the lack of trying. At a recent orientation meeting for the Office of Minority Student Affairs, I talked with advisors about the services of the Workshop and made a strong pitch for them to send me interested graduate students who were looking for TA positions. I didn't receive a single referral. Competition for qualified minority TA's is pretty tough, I'm coming to find out.

For me, maintaining a balance of new and experienced tutors is also extremely important. As a rough estimate, I try to keep a ratio of two experienced TA's to each new person I hire each semester, and I have rarely had any difficulty in keeping those numbers relatively constant. Most of the tutors I hire really enjoy the work, and they regularly reapply year after year. My hardest decisions often come when I have so many people wanting to return that I have to decide whether it is more important to me to bring in a new person (and give more people the

chance to experience working in a writing center) or bring back a tutor I know is qualified and experienced and whom I don't have to train. But even with a set of informal guidelines like this to direct hiring practices, it's not always possible to follow them. Last year, for instance, a lot of my experienced tutors did not reapply to work in the writing center. Some were moving to other parts of the country, some were dropping out of graduate school, some won fellowships, and some needed to get experience teaching other courses. In all, over half of my tutors did not return in the fall, a truly unusual situation for me, and one that left me scrambling to find warm bodies to fill the positions I had available. Sometimes, the vagaries of fortune and circumstance will upend even the best plans of a writing center director.

Tutor training

Once new tutors are hired, they must be trained, and much of the training tutors are given—whether we realize it or not—focuses on the ethics of writing center work. Tutors must be taught the policies and ethics of the particular writing center they happen to be working in, and they must also begin to develop ethical sensibilities of their own—sensibilities that warn them, for instance, when the help they are offering students is becoming too directive or controlling. They must be taught what to do when students bring in papers that address sensitive issues, when students adopt points of view that tutors find offensive, or when students reveal emotional problems that are beyond the ability of a writing center tu-

tor to deal with. To be sure, tutor training sessions must also spend time developing interpersonal skills, engaging in role playing activities, and practicing pedagogical strategies, but teaching tutors about the ethics of what we do—and the rationales we believe justify our ethical stances—is an integral part of the preparation tutors must have to do their jobs and work with students effectively. The ethical training tutors receive is acquired both explicitly and implicitly, in condensed packages and over a long period of time. Explicit instruction in writing center policies and certain kinds of problem situations (plagiarism, abusive students, papers about religion, and the like) will usually take place early in a tutor training program, either because these topics are deemed to be critically important or because they represent common situations that nearly all tutors will have to face, in one form or another, when they work with students. Other problems, somewhat less common or more abstract, will likely emerge on an *ad hoc* basis in regular tutor meetings or in informal discussions among tutors after troublesome sessions.

Supervising and evaluating tutors

The final component of tutor-administration I wish to address in this column concerns the manner in which tutors are supervised and evaluated. Tutors, like any other employees in any other job, have responsibilities to fulfill, and writing center directors have a duty to *ensure* that those responsibilities are being met. But what constitutes an ethical means for performing those evaluations, and what constitutes an ethical set of criteria by which tutors should be judged? There are no definitive guidelines here, and most directors will do what seems best to them or most reasonable to all the parties involved: tutors, students, and directors. Directors may, for instance, decide that they wish to observe some of the conferences their tutors have with students and write reviews based

on their perceptions of how the conferences proceed. Though this kind of observation may be extremely useful when trying to determine a particular tutor's strengths and weaknesses, the director's presence may affect, subtly, the shape of the conference and thereby provide unreliable or misleading data. The tutor may get nervous knowing he or she is being evaluated and appear insecure and tentative with students when such may not normally be the case. Directors must also consider whether their eavesdropping constitutes a breach of conference privacy. This breach is, admittedly, a relatively minor one, and I suspect that most directors would consider any possible violation of tutorial privacy in this case to be less important than the overriding ethical concern that the writing center employ only those tutors who can work well with students and help them improve their writing. But I think directors nevertheless need to be aware of—and sensitive to—their own hierarchy of ethical values and the compromises they must sometimes make to work within it.

One part of this hierarchy may be the extent to which the director is willing to be tolerant and accepting of tutors with tutorial styles other than his or her own. Different tutors have different approaches to the writing conference. Some are perpetually positive and supportive with student papers, no matter how good or bad the actual product might be. Others are more critical and confrontational with students about their work, constantly prodding them to think more carefully about what they've written and consider arguments they haven't yet addressed. Still others will shift back and forth in their approach, based on their past histories with students or their judgments of which stance seems most appropriate at any given moment. I have seen all of these approaches used by some of my own tutors, and none of these approaches seems, in and of itself, inappropriate or out of line for what I want to see accomplished in the writing cen-

ter. It is worth mentioning, however, that the "feel good" tutors generally receive far more positive evaluations from their students than do the "get tough" tutors, yet this is a quite different matter from saying that students with the first kind of tutor *improve their writing* more than those with the second. True, we want the writing center to be a place where students can work on and feel good about their writing, but when evaluating tutors, we must be as willing to question whether they are being too supportive as whether they are being too confrontational. The same holds true for judgments about whether tutors are being too directive or too diffident in conferences, too involved with students or too impersonal, too patient or too impatient, too lofty or too condescending in tone. When making subjective assessments such as these, director may find that their ethics are coming in direct conflict with the ethics of the tutors they evaluate, requiring a good deal of negotiation, explanation, and priority-setting to iron out.

Michael A. Pemberton
University of Illinois—Champaign

Listserv on writing and learning disabilities

Landmark College has started a new listserv on "Teaching Writing and Learning Disabilities/ADHD" (LDCOMP). This discussion list is for professionals engaged in the complex questions involved in teaching writing to individuals with l.d. or ADHD. The focus is on post-secondary students, and the list would be appropriate for educators, writing center personnel, disability support staff, and adult writers with learning disabilities or attention deficit disorder.

The listserv address is LISTSERV@HOME.EASE.LSOFT.COM Send the message "subscribe LDCOMP <your name>" to the listserv. For further information, contact the listowner: lshea@landmarkcollege.org

NWCA News

in the success I have talked about and I want to thank them here: Joan Mullin, Tracy Strauss, Martha Marinara, Denise Stephenson, Jim McDonald, Marcy Trianosky, Michael Pemberton, Suzanne Swiderski, Becky Rickly, Eric Hobson, Pam Childers, Dennis Paoli, Eric Gardner, and Paula Gillespie. Having such colleagues is one of the reasons why I have sought to serve NWCA for as long as I have. They have terrific ideas that I believe can move the organization forward.

For example, at the NWCA business meeting in Detroit, Executive Board members were presented with a report about Writing Center Accreditation authored by Marcia Silver, Dennis Paoli, and Jo Tarvers. The report and accompanying self-study questionnaire has moved the topic of accreditation to a prominent place on the NWCA discussion table, and I know this will

please those like Joe Law and Barry Maid who have been talking about writing center accreditation for quite some time. Indeed, the NWCA Executive Board sees the need to move more expeditiously on this matter than it has. As a result, we have accepted Eric Crump's offer to help the Executive Board arrange a MOO/MUD meeting to work through some of the larger issues associated with accreditation so that we can have a profitable and conclusive debate on this issue in a timely fashion. In this way, the Executive Board can then take up some of the other initiatives that deserve attention, such as becoming international, expanding membership, and providing research opportunities.

There is a great deal of activity within NWCA; we are a robust organization! Soon NWCA press will issue a new writing center publication, and it

will make available a resource packet aimed at helping all those who are at work in starting or maintaining a writing center. In addition to monthly issues of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, we will also soon have an issue of the *Writing Center Journal* produced by its new editors. And we continue to investigate and to reflect upon ways that will make writing center work more effective and more valued.

It is a fortuitous time for one to be President of NWCA. However, I ask that you keep me and the NWCA Executive Board apprised of activities, initiatives, issues, and concerns that we may neglect to consider. I look forward to serving you in what I expect will be a terrific year for writing centers.

Al DeCiccio, Merrimack College
(adeciccio@merrimack.edu)

THE //RITING LAB
N E W S L E T T E R

Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
Purdue University
1356 Heavilon Hall
West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356

Address Service Requested