THE //RITING LAB

...FROM THE EDITOR...

Welcome back! I hope your summer has been a pleasant one and hasn't zoomed by too rapidly to finish at least half the items on your "to do" list.

As you ease back into the academic swirl, you'll find this first issue of the year to be filled with helpful discussions to start you off with new ideas and insights. The Tutors' Columns by John Layton and Adam Hanson offer advice that new and experienced tutors will want to discuss; Ronald Heckelman's lead article lists management tips for those of you enmeshed in the administrative end of our work; Diane LeBlanc and Jane Nelson's report on improving their outreach programs has solutions to solve the difficulties many of us find when we enter classrooms to offer workshops. And Michael Pemberton's Ethics Column examines the spectrum of student personalities we will be interacting with.

The rest of the newsletter contains news about conferences; a report from Al DeCiccio, NWCA president; announcements; and a ballot to select new NWCA Executive Board members.

I suggest you refill your coffee cup, find a quiet tutoring table to retreat to, and enjoy the valuable insights you'll find in this issue.

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

The writing center as managerial site

We writing center folk may not be accustomed, or even quite comfortable, thinking about the writing center as a multi-dimensional site of management. In this essay I'd like to speculate about who and what is managed and why it is useful to think of the writing center, its mission, and its director this way. My aim is to demystify the concept of management as it applies to writing and especially writing centers. Management need not be a dirty word for those of us who make our livings in the writing business.

Our word *manage* derives from the Latin, *manus*, hand. To manage is to have in hand, as it were. However, this does not mean hierarchically to hold, control, or limit. To manage is more properly to guide, direct, empower, nurture, or to teach. In early modern Europe the *manage*, forerunner of present day dressage, was a way to teach a horse to realize its full potential by learning discipline and self-control, to increase its courage and confidence. The metaphor of horsemanship and horse training as teaching goes back, of course, to Plato's *Republic*.

It has always seemed to me that what we do in the writing center is to help

writers learn to direct their impulses and manage their anxieties so that they can negotiate assignments and think and write clearly. This usually translates into "success." Our aim is to help students/writers learn to manage their own thought and creative processes. This is also what management is all about. It is the efficient organization of work processes. Although it is not by a long shot all we do, we teach what amounts to forms of self-management and rational decision making. Isn't this what the familiar strategies of inven-

tion, planning, implementation, and evaluation (revision and proofreading) are? We help writers manage on many levels at once—psychoanalytic, institutional, discursive, and cultural. The bottom line in the "business of writing," as in other "economic" domains, is productivity and customer satisfaction. Here the customer is first the student/writer and second the audience he/she is writing for. We help writers exercise a modicum of control—or what Foucault calls "care"—over what we all realize is fundamentally mysterious and unmanageable—thought itself. Nevertheless, our guiding assumption is that learning to manage words is learning (ideologically) to manage or take "care of the self." To paraphrase Peter Elbow, if writing is power, it is clearly an instrument of management. Elbow himself implies as much in the subtitle to *Writing with Power,* which is *Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process*. To master something does not mean to exert full control over it. It means to understand the limits of control; that is to know when and how to channel, direct, and manage forces much larger than we are. Management is knowing when and why to "go with the flow," as it were.

Although there is much more to be said about writing and rhetoric as essentially managerial technologies, I'd like to focus the rest of this brief essay on the writing center director as manager. What does it mean to think of ourselves this way? What are the features of "good" or effective writing center management? And finally, are we adequately prepared by our educations to become effective managers?

If we think about what we do everyday, and our role within the university, there can be no doubt that we are in fact managers. We are responsible for a facility or unit within a larger complex. We are decision makers. We hire and occasionally have to fire. We train and empower employees. We teach. We budget. We struggle to balance a variety of resources—human, print,

and computer. We keep statistics and write annual reports. We deal with complaints. We "sell" our service through public relations (posters, bookmarks, workshops, etc.). We engage in outreach projects. We deliver a service and are in a sense part of a "service industry." We measure our success in part by the number of repeat customers we have.

We are academic middle managers par excellence, positioned between dean or provost and an often recalcitrant English department. As a result, the successful and surviving writing center director must be someone with very strong interpersonal communication skills needed to navigate this treacherous middle ground. He/she must know how effectively to talk to people both above and below him/her within the institutional pecking order, all the while silently decrying the existence of such a structure. It is important to know how and when to be assertive without stepping on toes. We need to know how and when to coach, to cheer, to facilitate, to coordinate, to direct, and hopefully to lead.

What makes a successful writing center manager? In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey outlines the following general characteristics of an effective manager which I believe we can usefully relate to writing centers.

1. "Be proactive." Anticipate possible problems such as budget shortfalls or inappropriate tutor conduct. Don't just react. Create policies for possible contingencies. Communicate these to everyone in the center. Cultivate relationships—especially with sympathetic administrators and senior faculty across the university that may prove helpful in a pinch. This is not a Machiavellian tactic. It is just proactive networking.

2. "Begin with the end in mind." Have a vision of the paradigm through which you would like the writing cen-

ter and yourself to be perceived by colleagues, students, and the institution. Be patient. It takes a few years to shift a local paradigm, say from "grammar ghetto" to "Burkean parlor." It is important to keep this in mind at every moment—in every tutorial, in every staff meeting, in every budget request. Try not to lose sight of the "big picture."

3. "Put first things first." Remember that the writing center is indeed a "service." It is first and foremost about people, about writers, not mere grammatical correctness or placating those who insist on seeing us as grammar and punctuation doctors. It is not "about" record keeping or statistics per se, although without the latter we cannot compete for funds or function very well. By the same token, it is important not to become "servile," seeking to please for its own sake. This reduces the writing center to a second order "fix-it shop" or clinic role we have all been fighting for years.

4. "Think win/win." Although it is often easy to do, avoid thinking in terms of us versus them, especially with respect to those unsympathetic to our true mission. Try to make everyone feel good about what they are doing or have to do. Sharing "ownership" of the center with as many people as possible enhances commitment and loyalty. Inviting guest faculty to make presentations and give WAC workshops is one way to accomplish this. Delegate responsibility whenever possible and try to foster a horizontal rather than vertical organization. Learn to "let go" of authority. Isn't this what we often advocate to novice writers who are "blocking"?

5. "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Learn creatively to listen to what people—administrators, colleagues, tutors, students— say. Always try to see things from the other person's point of view before offering your solutions, no matter how correct you know you are.

6. "Synergize." Remember that the whole is larger than the sum of its parts. The writing center as a concept is much more than the collection of all the tutors and computers and software. As a "safe" place to share one's writing it necessarily takes on a nurturing and even spiritual dimension. It is a place for taking risks. Obviously this cannot be quantified, and it is imperative therefore to develop some ethnographic evaluation techniques (e.g., testimonials, student/faculty questionnaires) to "measure" the center's effectiveness.

7. "Sharpen the saw." Keep a balance between the physical, socio/emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of the managerial enterprise. Good writing center management typically amounts to such a balancing act. In this way the process of managing, not unlike the process of writing itself, becomes a process of learning. Keeping the saw sharp means allowing all four of these components to inform and continually renew management practice.

In *Managing as a Performing Art*, Peter Vaill describes the process of managing as the negotiation of "permanent white water" (2), a struggle against forever unresolved turbulence and uncertainty. Sounds like a writing center, doesn't it? Vaill goes on to delineate what he identifies as seven key myths or misconceptions about the role of the manager (11-14). All seven nicely complement Covey's points, are fairly self-explanatory and relevant to the writing center:

1. "The myth of a single person called "the manager" or "the leader." The writing center director needs to be a team player. He/she plays on a faculty team with the Director of Composition/Writing, other writing teachers and relevant administrators, and on the tutoring team he/she "captains" in the center. The business of writing is definitely a collaborative effort.

2. "The myth that what the leader leads and the manager manages is a single, freestanding organization." The writing center, especially as linked to a WAC program, needs to be seen as serving the entire university community. It is important that no single department or academic discipline be seen to dominate or call all the shots.

3. "The myth of control through a pyramid chain of command." The director is only as effective as those with whom he/she surrounds him/herself. This is why it is important to delegate responsibility, to empower assistants and student tutors in order to foster as much as possible a horizontal structure of authority.

4. "The myth of the organization as pure instrument for the attainment of official objectives." The center needs to be a safe place for writers to take risks. It is important therefore that it not be perceived as merely an extension of the traditional composition class, in which the tutors serve as unofficial teaching assistants for the classroom professor.

5. "The myth of the irrelevance of culture." The mission and local ethos of every institution is different, and writing center tutoring methods, procedures, and policies need to be suited to particular situations. For example, in some schools the faculty may expect regular feedback from the center about how students are developing, and in other schools this kind of accountability may not be necessary or even desired. The size of the ESL program at a given school also will effect tutoring styles.

6. "The myth of a product as the organization's primary output." The writing center exists to assist writers. What the center hopefully produces more than anything else is increased competence and especially "playful" confidence to manage a variety of writing situations.

7. "The myth of rational analysis as the chief means of understanding and directing the organization." There is a definite rational component to what the center offers. For example, we afford writers an opportunity to enhance their repertoire of rhetorical strategies so that they know they have more choices. On the other hand, often what we do is just "be there," sometimes just to listen and nod.

I wonder how many writing center directors come to their first job adequately prepared to manage. We know all about theories of tutoring, the history of rhetoric and composition but often little about the essential managerial component of what we are expected to do within the institution. There has been an unfortunate bias in the humanities, where most composition programs are housed, against acknowledging the appropriateness of the managerial metaphor for writing as well as writing center directing. This is ironic considering that becoming a writing center director and/or writing program administrator, a professional middle manager, is what many in composition studies aspire to. It is generally considered, in fact, the mark of a successful career. Yet how many of us have ever studied management or organizational behavior as part of our formal graduate educations? At least one course or practicum in theory and practice of management should form part of the required curriculum for those pursuing graduate degrees, and especially doctorates, in composition studies. The more we know about the institutional "white water" we will encounter as writing center directors, the wider our own range of choices will be, and the greater chance we have to hit the ground running.

In sum, we can become more effective managers on all levels if we embrace the idea that writing and rhetoric are indeed forms of management and management is essentially rhetorical and pedagogical in nature.

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Southeastern Writing Center Association

Call for Papers
February 3-6, 1999
Charleston, SC
"Conversations about Teaching and Writing: Where Are We After Two Decades?"

Proposals may be faxed or mailed by November 15, 1998, to Tom Waldrep, Director, The Writing Center, The Medical University of South Carolina, AA 113 Harper Student Center, 45 Courtenay Street, Charleston, SC 29401. Fax: 843-792-9179, e-mail: motenb@musc.edu. The cut-off date for registration at these rates is January 3, 1999.

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Nov. 6-8, 1998
Plattsburgh, NY
"Writers as Readers: Readers as Writers"

Registration materials will be available in September. Contact Mary Dossin, Claude Clark Learning Center, 101 Broad St., Plattsburgh State University, Plattsburgh, NY 12901-2681. Phone: 518-564-6138; e-mail: dossinmm@splava.cc.plattsburgh.edu; Web site: http://www.plattsburgh.edu/cas

Writing center outreach programs: Shaping a collaborative role

First-year students at the University of Wyoming are required to take a one-credit orientation course as part of University Studies, a general studies program. One of the purposes of this course, University Studies 1000 (UNST 1000), is to introduce students to campus resources. As a major resource on campus, the Writing Center has had significant and direct involvement in the design, evaluation, and continuing development of this course. In return, the Writing Center has experienced a major impact from the increased requests by the instructors of this course for specific classroom assistance. At times this impact has threatened to overwhelm us, but we have learned to positively manage our own destiny by developing policies and procedures consistent with the collaborative philosophy of writing centers.

Instructors of UNST 1000 seek Writing Center involvement in their classes for excellent reasons. Although several pages in the required textbook describe the theory and practice of the Writing Center, instructors who desire a more lasting impact on their students schedule an actual visit to the Writing Center for an introduction to its services by a Writing Center consultant. In addition, many instructors incorporate writing assignments into their classes. The UNST 1000 course coordinator encourages active learning through writing assignments such as journals and short response papers. Furthermore, instructors know that many students will not take the required one semester of first-year composition until their second semester. To ensure that students experience college writing in the first semester, they often require writing that will be graded for content and form. In fact, writing assignments,

both informal and formal, frequently comprise the bulk of the graded assignments for the course. As a consequence of the high profile that writing takes in this course, instructors seek additional Writing Center assistance, both in the design of the writing assignments and in the presentation and teaching of writing in their classrooms.

When the Writing Center started to offer the variety of outreach presentations and workshops requested by UNST 1000 instructors, problems surfaced that we now know correlate with the assumption that we were presenting guest lectures. Although the instructors themselves seemed satisfied with our guest appearances in their classrooms, the Writing Center consultants frequently reported negative results. The students seemed bored. The presentations that the Writing Center consultants so carefully designed in retrospect seemed disembodied, unconnected to anything else going on in the course. The Writing Center consultants felt that instructors expected them to "cover" writing instruction in the one day devoted to this topic. Sometimes the instructors introduced the Writing Center guest as the "expert" on writing; sometimes they announced that the Writing Center consultant would "entertain" the class. On some occasions, the instructors scheduled two guest speakers for the day without informing the Writing Center. The instructors themselves often appeared bored and disengaged. Some disappeared into the hall during the presentation or announced ahead of time that they would not show up at all. Others sat in the back of the room, grading assignments, preparing lectures, and even conferencing with students. After an accumulation of these kinds of experiences, we realized that we should

either cease offering Writing Center outreach programs altogether or change our approach.

To confirm our support of writing for first-year students, we opted for the latter, and we can now report a higher success rate for our UNST 1000 outreach program. Our first step in designing a new approach was to clarify what we could offer instructors to help them decide whether or not to request Writing Center involvement. We defined specific outreach activities to help faculty see how a Writing Center consultant could enhance rather than appropriate the teaching of writing in the course. We designed a brochure to advertise our outreach programs in such a way that faculty who want Writing Center involvement can participate in determining their specific needs and work with the Writing Center to create a presentation or a workshop. Our second, subsequent step was to insist that every presentation be designed and delivered in collaboration with the instructor of the course. We developed procedures to ensure that faculty will be centrally involved. Through this approach, we have been able to both assist faculty with the design of their writing assignments and advise students on producing more satisfactory writing.

In defining our outreach policy, we narrowed our offerings to introductions, presentations, and workshops. To prevent interchangeable use of these terms, our brochure defines each and clarifies how instructors might use them. When faculty call to request an outreach program, we now have a common language to help focus their needs.

We define an *introduction* as a fifteen-minute talk, usually held in the

Writing Center, that familiarizes students and instructors with Writing Center services and resources. The introduction is a popular choice for UNST 1000 instructors, and we are happy to give these upon request, since they constitute such good advertising for the one-on-one services of the Writing Center.

A *presentation* is a collaborative effort between instructors and our Writing Center which focuses on writing assignments or questions specific to the class. Instructors work with the Writing Center to design presentations that help prepare students for writing assigned in the course, including journals, response essays, evaluations, memos, persuasive letters, and reports. By offering presentations about these specific types of writing, the Writing Center has helped to define the role of writing in the course. In helping to prepare these presentations, faculty have learned, for instance, that the kinds of writing assignments they might assign have very different purposes and that they require very different kinds of evaluation criteria.

Like presentations, *workshops* are collaborative efforts between instructors and the Writing Center. We recommend workshops when students are engaged in the writing process and are ready to share their writing with peers in the classroom. A Writing Center consultant attends and co-directs a workshop with the instructor of the class; the content may involve focusing and developing ideas, supporting ideas, seeking audience response, and editing drafts. Many of the faculty and staff who teach UNST 1000 (usually as volunteers and as overloads) do not have significant time for preparation and grading of writing assignments. They often have little experience in teaching, specifically in the teaching of writing. The co-directed workshops thus help faculty to think about how to teach writing as well as help students to learn how to write.

To foster collaboration and to eliminate some of the problems of being a guest in the classroom, we have created a questionnaire to accompany the brochure. The questionnaire is either sent to instructors for completion or completed over the telephone in conference with the Writing Center consultant who will conduct the presentation or workshop. Focusing on purpose, specific goals, Writing Center participation, and structure, the questionnaire asks the following key questions:

What specific assignment in your class will this presentation/workshop address?

How would you like this presentation/workshop to help you implement this assignment?

What new understanding of the writing assignment would you like students to gain from this presentation/workshop?

What role will the Writing Center consultant play in the presentation/workshop—e.g., facilitator, moderator?

What introductory information will be necessary? Who will present it?

What activities will participants engage in, and what will be the end product of the presentation/workshop?

The development of these outreach materials now enables us to be more effective, active participants in the course. Every spring, when faculty for the upcoming fall UNST 1000 courses meet for orientation and training, we present our brochure and questionnaire, and we highlight some of the successful writing assignments developed by instructors. We also have conducted workshops devoted to the evaluation of writing during which instructors discuss the relationship between an assignment and its evaluation. If instructors value highly

emotive writing, we suggest that they assign journals, a genre which typically values expression over effective communication to an academic audience, and we also suggest that they avoid grading these journals on an A - F basis. If instructors want students to learn to write an essay, we suggest that they create a multi-step process in the classroom, and we encourage a Writing Center presentation or workshop as part of that process.

To illustrate the positive outcomes of our new policies and procedures, we offer this example of a collaborative workshop we created for a seasoned instructor of the course. This instructor has always enthusiastically supported the Writing Center and typically requests some kind of Writing Center presentation because he wants his students not only to write but to improve their writing. Despite his enthusiasm, during our presentations in past years he exhibited many of the problematic behaviors we listed above. This year, we tried our new approach by developing a collaborative workshop. In response to the questionnaire, he specified two goals: (1) he wanted students to see exactly what happens during a one-to-one Writing Center conference; (2) he expressed frustration with the response essays his students write—they contain far too much description and far too little reaction or analysis. In order to help this instructor assume more responsibility for the teaching of writing, one of us, Diane, requested his direct involvement in the workshop. In compliance, he brought to the class session a memo which he had written. As we would do with any Writing Center client, Diane asked him to read the memo out loud. After reading several sentences, he began to comment on their tedious length. This observation, as well as his concern with tone and audience, provided the focus for a ten-minute Writing Center conference.

After this live demonstration of a writing conference, Diane distributed a double-column journal to students,

asking them first to describe what they had just seen. After discussing their descriptions, students then wrote reactions in the second column. Comparing the two, the students were able to distinguish description from reaction. The instructor participated in this discussion by stressing several times that he was expecting students to develop their response papers from reactions (column two) rather than from description.

This successful Writing Center workshop, defined as such by its interactive nature, reflects two important changes in the instructor's attitudes toward writing and Writing Center involvement in his course: he genuinely wanted to introduce students to the Writing Center, and he wanted to improve the quality of writing in the course. During the 50-minute workshop, the instructor was centrally involved in the activities. The students watched him take risks by exposing his own writing to public scrutiny, and they learned the difference between description and reaction by responding to his risk.

Admittedly, our efforts to shape outreach programs have not completely eliminated problems. We still struggle with faculty who call at the last minute to say that they will be absent from class, leaving us to do more than facilitate writing in the course. They still make scheduling mistakes and ask us, in front of class, to cut short our presentation in order to make room for "an important guest speaker." There are those who undermine our efforts by announcing during a presentation that students need not take what we are saying "too seriously." We now know that next time, next year, we can rely on our strengths and on our commitment to collaboration to help minimize the problems.

Diane LeBlanc and Jane Nelson
University of Wyoming
Laramie, WY

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Composition Studies

Freshman English News

Composition Studies, first published as *Freshman English News* in 1972, is the oldest independent scholarly journal in rhetoric and composition. *CS/FEN* publishes essays on theories of composition and rhetoric, the teaching and administration of writing and rhetoric at all post-secondary levels, and disciplinary/institutional issues of interest to the field's teacher-scholars. Each issue includes Course Designs, an innovative feature on curricular development in writing and rhetoric of interest to teachers at all post-secondary levels. *CS/FEN* also includes lengthy review essays, written by rhetoric and composition's leading authors, of current scholarly books in the field.

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MWCA Seeks Executive Board Members

The Midwest Writing Centers Association invites those interested to apply for a three-year term on the Executive Board. There are two position openings for 1998-2001. A more complete description of the advantages and responsibilities of membership on the MWCA Executive Board, as well as application information, is available from Susan Callaway, Writing Center, University of St. Thomas, 2115 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105-1096. Phone: 612-962-5602; e-mail: sjcallaway @stthomas.edu. Applications are due October 16, 1998. Elections will be held at the MWCA Annual Conference in Milwaukee, WI.

Ballot: Elections for NWCA Executive Board

Dear Member of NWCA: We need to elect one community college representative and two at-large members to the NWCA Executive Board. The terms are two years, to begin at the business meeting at NCTE in November. Please note that you must be a member of NWCA to vote. Please use the exact name you find on the newsletter when you cast your ballot, either by surface mail or e-mail. Candidates are listed here.   -Paula Gillespie, NWCA Secretary

Cindy Johanek: I started as a peer tutor at St. Cloud State in 1986 and later directed the Writing Center at Ball State (1992-96). I have served on the MWCA Board (1989-91), the ECWCA Board (since 1993), and am currently treasurer of ECWCA. I have published in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *Computers and Composition*, and have presented at numerous writing center and composition conferences. I have recently completed my doctorate at Ball State (dissertation, "A Contextualist Research Paradigm for Rhetoric and Composition"). My main interests include tutor training, basic writing, and research methodology. More info: http://www.bsu.edu/classes/ johanek/home101.htm

Kurt Kearcher: For over five years, I have proudly identified myself as a member of the writing center community, working to develop and promote its theories, philosophies, and practices. I am currently the manager of The Writing Center and coordinator of the WAC program at Owens Community College. I have presented at NWCA and ECWCA conferences on the topics of writing center practices, professionalism, and research. I have also produced publications on peer response and writing center technology. I am completing my Ph.D. in English from the University of Toledo with an emphasis in composition and a minor in instructional design and technology.

Ellen Mohr has been the Director of the Johnson County Community College Writing Center and taught freshman composition courses since 1983. Before taking that post, Mohr taught English in the secondary school system. Mohr has been a frequent presenter at national and local writing center conferences. She has served on the Midwest Writing Center Association Board as their chairperson and has hosted several of their conferences in the Kansas City area. Mohr has had several articles published in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, a research project published in ERIC, and has contributed to the Kinkead and Harris book, *Writing Centers in Context*, and to Eric Hobson's new book, *Wiring the Writing Center*.

Jon Olson is an Assistant Professor at Penn State, directs the Center for Excellence in Writing which contains three programs: a Writing Center, a WAC Program, and the Graduate Communications Enhancement Program. He received a rhet/comp Ph.D. in 1989; has taught writing courses at the community college and university levels; has published in several journals and collections including *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *Writing Center Resource Manual*; and serves on the steering committee of the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing. His current interests include exploring student-centered assessment research in writing centers, developing a writing-centered WAC program, and

writing about the rhetoric of kindness in tutorials.

Bruce Pegg received his BA from Loughborough University in England and his MA from SUNY Brockport where he served as a tutor in their writing center. Currently, he is the director of Colgate University's Writing Center which he designed and implemented in 1992. Known to the writing center community through his work maintaining the NWCA web site, his interests include online pedagogy and writing center administration. He is the author of "UnfURLed: 20 Writing Centers to Visit on the Information Superhighway," an essay in Eric Hobson's forthcoming collection *Wiring the Writing Center,* and has recently presented papers at CCCC and NWCA.

Mark Shadle: BA, The Colorado College. Ph.D., University of Iowa. Directed Eastern Oregon University Writing Lab and taught tutor-training and full range of English-Writing courses for the last decade. Involvement with writing centers and composition at research university, community colleges and adult ed. programs. Past President/host of Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association Conference. Former Pacific Northwest representative to NWCA Board, and keynote speaker for Rocky Mt. Writing Centers Conference. Presentations on writing centers at NWCA, CCCC, MLA, Pacific Coast,

Rocky Mt. and Young Rhetoricians' conferences. Publications on writing centers in counseling journals and two new writing center anthologies. Oregon Writing Project presenter/fellow.

Jo Koster Tarvers directs the Writing Center at Winthrop University and has previously worked in a number of corporate writing centers. Along with Dennis Paoli and Marcia Silver, she is working on the framework for a national system of writing center accreditation. Among her publications is

Teaching in Progress: Theories, Practices, Scenarios, 5th ed. (Longman 1997); her current research is involved with the way writing center administrators interact with other faculty and administrators across the curriculum.

Marcy Trianosky has been director of the Writing Center for five years at Hollins College, a small liberal arts college for women in southwestern Virginia. The intimate environment of a small college allows her to work closely with

faculty and students to provide writing center services that fit the college's needs. In addition to hiring, training and supervising peer tutors, Marcy functions as an advisor to faculty in the development of writing intensive courses across the disciplines, offering support and guidance in the form of workshops, classroom presentations, and one-to-one meetings. Marcy teaches two writing courses each year in addition to a tutor training course. She is a member of the Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Assoc., NCTE and WPA.

Please send your completed ballot to Paula Gillespie, Dept. of English, Marquette University, PO Box 1881, Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881. If it is more convenient for you, you may cast an e-mail ballot. Simply send me your choices at the following: paula.gillespie@marquette.edu   **DEADLINE: October 1, 1998**

Feel free to make a photocopy of the following ballot and send the copy to me so that you don't have to cut up your newsletter.

Your name and address [exactly as it appears on the *Newsletter* label]: _____

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Community College Representative. (Please vote for one.)

_____ Kurt Kearcher

_____ Ellen Mohr

At-Large Representative (Please vote for two.)

_____ Cindy Johanek

_____ Jon Olson

_____ Bruce Pegg

_____ Mark Shadle

_____ Jo Koster Tarvers

_____ Marcy Trianosky

*W*RITING CENTER ETHICS

Tutorial ethics: Student personalities

Students—just like tutors and everyone else—come in different shapes and different sizes, and they all have their own distinct, individual personalities. Most of the time these personalities cause no problems for tutors or conferences. Students are usually friendly, generally receptive to critiques, frequently animated and engaged in discussions of their papers, occasionally anxious or nervous, and almost always pleased to be getting help with their writing. They work well with tutors, and tutors work well with them. Given the diversity of cultures, backgrounds, experiences, and educational histories among students who visit writing centers, we should probably be pleasantly surprised that most tutorial conferences go as smoothly as they so often do.

But they don't always. Sometimes the student who brings a paper into the writing center displays a personality type or emotional problem that upsets the whole flow of the conference session, almost from the very start. On occasion, these problems can be relatively mild and tied directly to the writing task that the student is facing, such as breaking into tears over a severe case of writer's block or because of harsh instructor comments on a previous draft (Taylor; George). In such cases, the problems can usually be handled successfully by a sympathetic tutor, a handy box of Kleenex, and a constant emphasis on the positive aspects of his or her writing. On other occasions, the problems may be more pronounced, more upsetting, and beyond the capacity—or responsibility—of the tutor to handle. Though the types of bizarre behaviors that students (or tutors!) have displayed at one time or another in conferences are many, a few of the more common extremes are possible to identify, I think.

Many writing center scholars have written about the "types" of problem students tutors are likely to see. David Taylor refers to "I'm-too-cool-to-care" students and "apathetic" students; Deborah Larson trains her tutors to respond to angry, rebellious, insecure, confused, and confident students; and William O. Shakespeare considers the agendas that normal learners, hostile learners, apathetic learners, and manipulative learners bring to writing conferences. Though these are all useful categories and representative of many behavioral patterns which exhibit themselves in conferences, I would like to address such patterns here as paired opposites, extreme positions on the same emotional spectrum, with most students falling somewhere in the middle (and therefore within the "normal" range of behavior that tutors have little difficulty handling). In taking this approach, then, I will merely identify some of the characteristics that seem to represent typical conference behaviors for these students. I do this for the purposes of discussion and preparation, and do not intend to unthinkingly oversimplify the complexity of students or conferences. I merely ask you to consider, when reading these lists, how the behaviors attributable to students of each type might impact the manner in which tutors respond to them.

Aggressive/Passive

Aggressive students can be aggressive in several ways. They can be loud, obnoxious, or demanding in conferences. They can be verbally or—in some extreme cases—physically abusive. They may demand appointments at certain times, demand specific tutors, demand that tutors rewrite parts of their papers, or demand that the tutors do exactly what they want them to do.

While nearly all students bring some agenda for what they would like to accomplish to the tutorial conference, aggressive students are forceful about pursuing that agenda, even when it conflicts with the policies of the writing center. When tutors resist aggressive students, these students can become angry and react in any one of a number of unpleasant ways.

Passive students, on the other hand, tend to be almost completely unresponsive in conferences. They may say very little about their papers and be unwilling to contribute to conversations or answer specific questions. Rather than trying to come up with ideas of their own, they may say, "I don't know. What do you think I should do?" Some students act passively because they resent the whole idea of coming to the writing center for help. (This most often occurs with students who have been sent to the writing center by instructors [Shakespeare 12; Healy 5].) Other students are passive by nature and have a hard time interacting with other people, especially strange tutors in an unfamiliar environment like the writing center (Yardas; Croft). Still other students will become passive in writing conferences because they are very insecure about their writing or English speaking skills and don't want to be made to feel foolish by saying something "dumb." What strategies are likely to work best with these students? When should we push, and when should we coax?

Resistant/Dependent

Resistant students are closely related to aggressive students in the sense that many of them enter the writing center with strong expectations or agendas for what they want to get accomplished. They differ from aggressive students in

that they do not so much push their own agendas as they refuse to follow the agendas being set by the tutors. Resistant students tend to be very argumentative in conferences, disputing virtually everything the tutor says or questioning every comment the tutor makes. Tutors quickly sense that little headway is being made in the conference as discussions are getting sidetracked constantly and arguments about relatively minor points are consuming large amounts of time. While tutors would be quick to assert that they truly enjoy conferences where students ask questions, the questions asked by resistant students seem prompted by defensiveness or a love of Sophistic argument rather than a true spirit of inquiry. How firm should we be with these students? How strongly should we try to push our own agendas, and at what point should we just shrug our shoulders and tell the student, "It doesn't seem like we're making much progress here; maybe we should just end the conference"?

Dependent students are, in like fashion, related to passive students in their general reluctance to contribute much to tutorial conferences. They do not respond well to specific questions about how to improve their papers, and they are unwilling to venture suggestions or ideas of their own. They differ from passive students in that they are extremely solicitous of the tutors' suggestions and opinions in conferences. They slavishly transcribe everything the tutors say about their papers and every recommendation or suggestion the tutors make, and they often make multiple appointments in the writing center to talk about the same draft of the same paper. Dependent students can become dependent upon a single tutor, or they can become dependent on the writing center as a whole (Pemberton; Walker). While we encourage students to make good use of the writing center and come in for help as often as they feel it is necessary, sooner or later students reach a point where one more conference on the

same paper is just not going to do them any more good. How do we determine when that point is reached, and how can we justify turning a student away—dependent or not—when we have conference times available?

Euphoric/Depressed

Euphoric students—I hesitate to use the term "bubbly" here, though that's how they often strike me—can be lots of fun to work with in tutorials. They're pleased about their writing, appreciative that a wonderful place like the writing center exists, enjoyable to talk to (in small doses), happy to be in school, and marvelously forthcoming about their personal lives. They're also terribly unfocused. Getting these students to stay on track in a writing conference is like trying to catch a breeze with a butterfly net. It seems to be little more than an exercise in futility. What strategies will work here? How firm must tutors be in keeping students focused on their papers? When does an interesting line of talk become an irrelevant tangent and a waste of time?

Depressed students are, of course, just the opposite of euphoric students, and they are far less fun to work with. Many students are dissatisfied with their writing abilities, their drafts, and their paper grades, but truly depressed students can often see no hope of improvement either. The problems they experience with their writing are many times symptomatic of other problems in their lives, and writing conferences merely become another link in the whole miserable chain. Depressed students often struggle with severe writing anxiety, a problem which only compounds their depression, and tutors who work with these students have their work cut out for them indeed (see, for example, Ware). What are the responsibilities for tutors who work with depressed students? How much should they try to pull the students out of their depression? How persistent should they be in keeping the focus in the conference on the student paper?

Should they suggest that the student seek counseling? Do tutors need special training to deal with depressed students? When should the tutor become concerned that the depression a student shows might be a sign of something more serious?

Me Too

I suppose the one thing that strikes me looking over the above list of emotional "extremes" is how often I've found myself exhibiting these behaviors at one time or another in my life. I daresay we have all had days when we felt aggressive, passive, euphoric, or depressed, and I think we must caution ourselves not to classify our students' occasional behaviors in conferences as innate personality traits. Sometimes people just have bad days, and sometimes a good experience in the writing center with a sympathetic, attentive tutor can help things get much better.

<div align="right">

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

Sept. 25-26: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in Pullman, WA
Contact: Lisa Johnson-Shull, WSU Writing Center, Avery Hall 451, Pullman, WA 99164-5046; phone: 509-335-7695; fax: 509-335-2582; e-mail: ljohnson@mail.wsu.edu

Oct. 8-10: Rockey Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Salt Lake City, UT
Contact: Jane Nelson, U. of Wyoming Writing Center, Center for Teaching Excellence, Coe Library, Laramie, WY 828071; phone: 307-766-5004; fax: 307-766-4822; e-mail: jnelson@uwyo.edu.

Oct. 23-24: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Milwaukee, WI
Contact: Allison James, Hawley Academic Resource Center, Simpson College, 701 North C St., Indianola, IA 50125; phone: 515-961-1524; fax: 515-961-1363; e-mail: james@storm.simpson.edu

Feb. 3-6: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Charleston, SC
Contact: Tom Waldrep, Director, The Writing Center, The Medical University of South Carolina, AA 113 Harper Student Center, 45 Courtenay Street, Charleston, SC 29401. Fax: 843-792-9179; e-mail: motenb@musc.edu.

April 15-18: National Writing Centers Association, in Bloomington, IN
Contact: Ray Smith, Campus Writing Program, Franklin 008, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405; phone: 812-855-4928; e-mail: wrsmith@indiana.edu; http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/ecwca.

National Writing Across the Curriculum Conference

Call for Papers
June 3-5, 1999
Ithaca, New York
"Multiple Intelligences"

For guidelines for proposals for individual talks, panels, or poster sessions, contact the following: WAC 1999 Conference, John S. Knight Writing Program, Cornell University, 159 Goldwin Smith Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-3201; phone: 607-255-2955; fax: 607-255-2956; e-mail: wac99-conf@cornell.edu; Web site: www.arts.cornell.edu/jskwp/wac99.html   Deadline for proposals: 10/1/98; notification of acceptance: 1/99.

Conference on the Teaching of Writing

October 16, 1998
Fall River, MA
"Learning to Write/Writing to Learn"

For conference information, contact Jerry LePage, Chair, Conference on the Teaching of Writing, Bristol Community College, 777 Elsbree St., Fall River, MA 02720. Phone: 508-678-2811, ext. 2282 or 2127; fax: 508-676-7146; e-mail: glepage@bristol.mass.edu

TUTORS' COLUMN

Taking a second first glance

I am labeled a "nontraditional student" by administrative definition, meaning I have been out of high school for *a long time*. I have been in the army and worked in the business sector. One of the methods I acquired in the army to quickly evaluate the effectiveness of a unit was, simply put, merely to stand back and watch *how* the individual soldiers worked together. Interviewing individual tutors, while extremely interesting, would not have allowed me to see the wondrous transformation these tutors undergo forming the "body and soul" or "unit" of a writing center. Take an hour or two, like I did, sit back, watch and listen to the music of tutorial sessions. Attend the concert as tutors perform the prelude, introducing themselves, asking questions about concerns, probing, and finding which chords must be played to assist puzzled students. Slowly, almost casually, the tutors orchestrate their sessions, guiding their students to attempt new levels of thought, of understanding the hidden symphony which is writing. At one table sits "Maria," her student an older gentleman from China who brought an extra copy of his essay out of respect for the tutor. At another table resides "Kitty" and a middle-aged female student sitting very erect and distant from her, in obvious discomfort at being in the center. At a corner table nestles "Maggie" and a puzzled looking teenage male student who just isn't "getting" the assignment requirements. Then, there is "Michele" and a young lady in her twenties struggling to understand the notes of a take-home written exam. The prelude is over and the writing center reverberates with a concert of melodious noise that permeates the air.

Over the rising tones of the center can be heard Maria and her student discussing, in halting English, his essay which deals with a long ago vision of love and devotion. A brief frown of concern crosses Kitty's face as she realizes her student is too tense to really benefit from her expertise. She pauses, leans back in her chair, shoves the paper aside and starts talking to the student about any topic but the paper. Michele and her student are past the reading of the paper and discussing minute details of the student's assignment and how her paper does or does not address those issues. Maggie is talking earnestly, quietly to her student as he struggles with the concept of audience; the expression on his face clearly telling Maggie he just hasn't quite "got it" yet. The telephone rings, seeming to underscore the muffled, yet crystal clear conversations occurring around the room, and another tutor can be heard, "University Writing Center, this is Emily. How may I help you?"

Soon, the brief interlude is over, and Kitty can be heard asking her student about the student's problems. Quickly, Kitty's student describes how difficult it is being a mother and a student. Kitty, also a mother, relates the problems she had returning to school. Within a few minutes, Kitty's student is no longer sitting stiffly erect but has relaxed and is leaning forward as Kitty casually conducts the conversation back to the students paper. Maria, accompanied by the mirthful chuckles of her student, can be heard laughing in the background providing a soft duet to the symphony. Maria is using a thoughtful blend of humor and encouragement to immerse her student in the tutorial movement. Michele's session

is running into problems. Her student is insisting Michele "tell her what kind of grade" the paper may earn. Michele is very polite, but very firm when she informs the student the question "makes me feel uncomfortable." The student is persistent—as is Michele who artfully flips the sheet back to the score of "does your paper fulfill the assignment?" Michelle has put the burden of evaluating the paper in the student's lap where it rightfully belongs. Back in the corner Maggie and her student are really getting animated. Suddenly, Maggie breaks out into a broad grin, and can be heard exclaiming: "Yes, you've got it!" The shy young man grins and Maggie has a look of pure joy from the small triumph of his learning. The phone rings once more as the chorus of tutoring reaches a crescendo about the room.

Soon the allotted time for the tutoring sessions has expired and an observer can hear each tutor quickly recapping the session and asking the student to make another appointment as the symphony enters its final movement. Maggie is beside herself with the joy of having "reached" her student. Kitty is pleased she was able to relax her student and accomplish some "hard" work with a reluctant tutee. Maria isn't so sure her session went well but hopes it did despite the language problems. She is still buzzing about the wonderful story of love and devotion her student was trying to relate. Michele seems affected by her session and soon huddles with other tutors to discuss her concerns. All agree she did the correct thing and congratulate her on being professional. For a few brief moments, these tutors stand around and talk about how each of

their sessions progressed, exchanging triumphs as well as problems, dissecting each session to improve those sessions that will surely follow. A mixture of concern and joy are the magical notes that, when played in the writing center, transform individual tutors from solo musicians into the finely tuned orchestra that performs daily at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis.

Ahhh, you mutter, what can a mere fledgling tutor truly understand about the daily life in a writing center? Perhaps, having never worked in one before, my innocence and enthusiasm allowed me to see the true beauty of the hidden symphony performing every half-hour! I challenge all tutors, both veteran and novice, to take an hour or two and look once more, for the first

time. Close your eyes and discern with your ears the melodies of care and help reverberating, spinning, and coalescing into an extraordinary concert.

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Observations from the writing center

Over the course of the eight months that I have spent working in the Gordon College Academic Support Center as a writing tutor, I have noticed many things about instruction in the writing process. Through what I would have to call a process of trial and error (although I hope there has not been *too* much error involved), I have been able to find out what kinds of feedback work, and what kinds are relatively useless.

When I give suggestions to different writers, and ask them if they understand, the responses of all are generally the same: "yes." But I can usually tell by looking at their faces whether or not they really know what I'm saying. Eyes cast to the floor, gazing off into space or staring blankly at me usually indicate a lack of understanding, and it is at these times that I need to further clarify myself.

I can also tell by the facial expressions and body language of the students not only if they understand what I have said, but also if they have found my suggestions to actually be helpful. A puzzled look or an unenthusiastic "uh huh" on the part of the students usually mean that I need to do more work to make sure I am helping them.

These two items, clarity and helpfulness, have been what I have focused on in making my suggestions to students. If the things I tell a student are not presented in a way the student can understand— and can not later be used to improve that student's paper— then I have failed in my job as a tutor.

It is with these two crucial items in mind that I present the top five things I have learned in my experiences up to this point:

1. Ask writers what they think.

This has been perhaps the most productive method of helping someone with a paper that I have used so far. The first question I usually ask is "what do you like about your paper," followed by "what do you think needs work?" It may come as a bit of a surprise, but the writers almost always have answers for those questions. And I have found that 90% of the time, they are thinking exactly the same way that I am. This is a good thing.

Most of these students do have a clue about writing, and most know the difference between good and bad papers. But it has been reinforced in their minds over the years that only a select few can write well and that they, the

average students, can not possibly know much about writing. But I have found that to be highly incorrect. The majority of these writers already have an idea about what in their paper is good or bad, but this will most likely not come out unless the tutor takes the first step by asking for the writers' opinions.

2. Concentrate on the positive.

I have found, both with the students in the center and in my own writing, that looking primarily at what works in the piece of writing is far more helpful than looking at what doesn't work. Telling students "this is good" or "I like this part" sends them the message that they are capable of doing good work. It is sad but true that most of the students who come to the center do not believe this to be the case.

This also shows the students what they can do more of to make the rest of the paper as good as the part that has been pointed out. It gives them something concrete to work with. Knowing that "this anecdote backs up your point," or "this quote makes the person seem real," or "this information really helped me to understand" shows the students not only what is good about the particular piece of writing, but

what they might be able to use in future pieces of writing as well. Students will remember positive feedback, while negative feedback might be rejected because of its unpleasant nature.

When negatives in the students' writing must be addressed (and they usually must be), the fact that they also know what they are doing right, as well as what they need to work on, makes them more eager to change their work. But when the negative is focused on more than the positive, it just makes students want to give up on the whole thing. When that happens, a tutor has failed.

3. Be specific.

I have learned not to give vague suggestions, such as "clarify" or "expand" or ''fix this." When I say these things, I know exactly what I have in mind for the writer of the piece, but the writer most likely has no idea. These suggestions need to be made in a more specific context, such as "clarify why it made you mad when your brother decided to move to California," or "expand on this story where you tell about the first time you fell in love." Specific advice and directions are much more helpful to a writer than general ones which could mean just about anything.

If the writer does not know how to go about fixing or expanding on something in the paper, it is my job to help come up with some ideas. Brainstorming is often very helpful in getting writers going when they are stuck. If I leave the writer in the dark as to how to clarify or expand or fix something, then that person is no better off than when we started. It is the job of the tutor to be specific.

4. In the early stages, concentrate more on content than on grammar/syntax.

Before the technical stuff is worked out, it is important to make sure that the writer has a quality piece of writing. Making sure that "its" is used correctly, or that all punctuation is correct, is fine, and indeed important, but those kinds of things should be the last steps in the writing process. The primary focus of the tutoring process should be to make sure the writer' s topic and organization are good, not to make sure every comma is in the right place or that "affect" and "effect" are used correctly. It does no good, for example, to spend time fixing the spelling of a paragraph which will later be cut out of the paper. It is only when all of the ideas are in place that this type of editing should be done.

5. Don't do the writers' work for them.

It is very tempting for me to just start re writing or editing a part of someone's paper myself. But while this may make for a better paper, it does not help the writer of the paper to improve at all. It is also not ethically right. It is fine for suggestions to come from the tutor, but it must be left to the writers to do the actual writing and revising. Only then will they become better writers.

It is fine, for example, for a tutor to fix writers' spelling and grammar mistakes or help to improve the syntactic quality of a paper. But the tutor must not just go through and fix everything. The objective of all tutors is for the writers they are helping to become better in the long run. So when fixing things in a paper, the tutor needs to accompany the correction with explanation and instruction. The "how" and "why" of correction can not be overlooked by tutors as steps on the way toward the long-term goal of improved writing by students.

These five ideas have all become standard procedure for me as I have spent more and more time helping students with their writing. I believe that I am much better prepared to help a student going into a tutoring session now than I was eight months ago. I hope that you will all find these suggestions to be as helpful as I have.

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Wenham, MA

NWCA News from Al DeCiccio, President

It seems as if just yesterday I was wishing you a summer full of much-deserved reflection and relaxation. It seems much too soon to be welcoming you to a new academic year. Yet, here we are about to face 1998-1999. Given the late spring and summer publications in *The Writing Lab Newsletter* and in *The Writing Center Journal* as well as some of the WCenter posts this summer—plagiarism and intellectual property; writing center liminality; what

we should call ourselves; generalist and specialist tutors; conference summaries; software programs for writers and for record keeping in the writing center—we seem to be more engaged than ever in the issues of our field. From my perspective, such engagement will be necessary this year as we bring to conclusion several pending issues and as we plan NWCA's presence at NCTE and at CCCC, and as

we plan the Annual NWCA Conference.

First, while we tried, the Executive Board did not succeed in holding regularly scheduled MUD meetings this summer to conduct NWCA business. However, the Board is working to resolve the issues involving accreditation so that you may have an informed and balanced proposal to consider soon. At the NCTE Convention in Nashville this coming November 19-24, NWCA will again host an Active Writing Center. Also at NCTE, on November 21, NWCA will hold its business meeting; among the agenda items will be the transfer of the presidency from my hands to the very capable hands of Eric Hobson. At the time of my writing this column, I have not heard officially of NWCA's place on the program for the CCCC Convention. I do know that Neal Lerner submitted a proposal for a pre-convention workshop in the tradition he started at last year's CCCC Convention and that Michael Pemberton worked on the NWCA Special Interest Group session. As far as the NWCA Conference scheduled for Bloomington, Indiana, next April 15-18, there will be a flurry of activity in the upcoming weeks to put together the program. I am indebted to Ray Smith and his colleagues who will help us to offer another outstanding conference.

It will be a busy year for the NWCA membership and the Executive Board. Plans for the International NWCA Conference will be forthcoming, as will be plans for increasing the NWCA membership. Until my term ends, I will keep you apprised of these plans and of other issues; I will urge Eric Hobson to continue writing the column when he assumes the presidency.

There is one action you can take now before your schedule becomes too crowded. We are scheduled to present the NWCA Outstanding Service Award at the Annual NWCA Conference in Bloomington. NWCA members may submit nominations to Eric Hobson by December 1. Nominations should be accompanied by a description of the individual's contributions and by an explanation of why the nominated person, in particular, should be recognized for his or her contributions. Include in your nominating letter the names of three other people in the writing center community who would support your nomination. You may send your nomination to Eric Hobson, Associate Professor of Humanities, Albany College of Pharmacy, 106 New Scotland Avenue, Albany, NY 12208; email: hobsone@panther.acp.edu.

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