THE WRITING LAB

...FROM THE EDITOR...

For many of us December means some quiet time to relax and celebrate holidays. Closing our doors during the holiday season also allows us to gain some distance from our work so that when we return next month, we will feel not only refreshed but ready to reinvigorate our work. Toward that end, the articles in this month's issue return us to some basic questions we continue to ask ourselves. What does it really mean to collaborate? As Francie Jeffery describes her experience with engaging students in a project, she invites us to think about how we collaborate with others when we ask for help. Kathleen Welsch returns us to the question of the role of tutoring for "correctness," and Janet Reit engages us in thinking about how we listen—actively listen, that is.

Robert Dornsife continues this thread by reflecting on what writing centers cannot and should not do; Barbara Szubinska and Sherry Robinson share with us the results of their center's self-study, and Rachel Perkes reports on what she learned when asking the question "How old is your writing center?" Perennial questions, but still valid ones.

Best wishes for the happiest of holidays, a time of rest, and—somehow—of peace in these most profoundly troubled times.

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Participating in student projects: Confessions of a client

All of us deal with marketing our centers: with gauging student awareness of our services, advertising the kinds of assistance we offer, and maintaining and/or increasing student use of our services. And, of course, being busy, we all want to get the greatest return for the work involved in doing these things. Thus, this past fall, I approached the professor who teaches a marketing research class when several previous writing center "campaigns" seemed to have little effect, and I faced the fact that for any marketing to be effective, I needed to better understand my market.

Though selling the writing center can hardly compete with marketing the newest brew pub, we are on campus. I was elated to learn early in September that a group had decided to take the center on as a client. We set the first meeting, and before the group came I made some notes and collected some useful statistics. A quick round of introductions was followed by their request for me to describe the services of the center and explain the problem I

wanted the group to tackle. Such talk absorbed most of the hour we had scheduled, and as it ended, they readied their backpacks to leave, saying they'd be in touch. Six weeks later the group returned with a survey, a return most likely prompted by my worried e-mail to their professor the week before. No contact with the group had begun to make me nervous about the students' interest in the project. What if they just slapped the survey together? What if they put something out connected to the writing center with—

gasp—typos? We spent another hour together editing the survey, and again they scattered to their separate classes. I never saw them again. And the result of their semester's work? A huge disappointment.

Though I was told I would be expected to attend a class presentation of the group's findings, I was not invited and never discovered whether they fulfilled this part of the assignment or not. The report was dropped off in the center with not even a post-it to guide its way into my office. When I did get a chance to peruse the presentation of their research, I found it disappointingly thin. The survey population was small, producing data of questionable value, and the report's overall lack of substance undermined my confidence in the validity of any of the findings.

I later found out that the students made a D- on the report, which at first made me feel better; at least this level of work wasn't being seen as acceptable by my colleague in the business department. But the thought of that D made me feel bad for the students. I was disappointed in their effort, but I knew I had played a role in their project. I had to consider how well—or poorly—I had done my part.

This semester, I have had a chance to take such a measure. A group of students from the same professor's spring marketing class came by early in January to ask me if they could take the writing center on as a client. I said yes, thinking that perhaps we could both do it better this time.

Before the second project commenced, I reconsidered my part in the first project and how well I had facilitated the students' work. I don't mean, though, that I began thinking about how to be a better marketing professor. I simply examined what went wrong for me in the project and how I might have been a better client. I concluded that the goals for the project generated during our first meeting created prob-

lems from the very beginning. The goals were:

- To determine why students do or do not attend the writing center
- To determine how to increase exposure and use of the writing center
- To determine how effective the advertising has been for the writing center
- To describe who the users and non-users are by age, classification, major, and other demographics.

I remember coming up with these goals and feeling elated that the student group would be helping me find out all these things. But while I definitely wanted information about all this, I overlooked the questions embedded in these goals—how many are there and how complex. Like a too-huge thesis that invites a writer to wander around in confusion, the project's goals were too far-reaching. I let what I needed done (and done fast) overshadow the size of a project that students in a beginning marketing class could actually handle. While I know for a fact that their instructor takes much of the blame for not overseeing their work better, I can't ignore that at the time I was a client, I was—I am— a teacher too.

True collaboration with this group would have been for me to help these students as they struggled with learning about manageable workloads, task breakdowns, and time management. Noting their frustration at finding a time for a second meeting, I could have helped them figure out how to communicate with each other—in the writing center we help students every day with setting up e-mail distribution lists. And I know now I could have done more than nudge them to bring their report to the center. (They didn't.) Better would have been to insist that they set up a time to meet with a writing assistant—even if only once— to read a draft of their report and get feedback about its presentation. Looking back, I think we would have all benefited more from the project if I had invested more in their learning.

The second project has given me the opportunity to make that adjustment. And it's working, or rather I am—working with students, being part of the team. In a planning meeting, the group worried about how they were going to create a TV spot for the campus television channel. An interview with the station director had produced information but obviously not enough. *Why don't I just call him*? I interrupted. *I know him and he won't mind helping us figure out how much time we need to plan for*. I wasn't doing the job for them; they had already done some legwork. I was simply saving time, making use of a contact, and helping to move the work along. The project won't be completed until the end of the semester, but I feel good about it even now and know, whatever the product, that students are learning from the process.

The various ways I can participate in that learning process has been brought home to me by a third project I became involved in this semester. Needing a logo design for the center (for all that print material the marketing team is planning), I contacted a colleague in the Art Department who teaches graphic design. I had visited with her before about the class and knew that students took on such projects. The timing was just right; in fact, a community client had called at the last minute and dropped out of a time slot. It could be mine.

It seemed an altogether different kind of project from the ones done by the business students. I can hardly draw a stick figure, so I knew there was little I could do with the project after my initial meeting with the class. Or so I thought until the project began to have its difficulties.

When I returned from the follow-up meeting in which the art students had presented their designs to me, I taped up all the logos on a wall in the center. *Look them over and tell me what you think*, I e-mailed all the writing assis-

tants. They admired the talent yet worried that they had been left out of the designs*: There are pencils and paper and computers, but where's the human element? Another one e-mailed back What about us? And yet another responded Where are we in any of those designs?*

I delayed a response to the art class until an e-mail from their instructor brought a gentle query about our selection. Faced with having to communicate to the students what didn't work for us about the designs, I felt placed once again in an outsider's role of client, critic.

But I can't draw, I argued with myself, *I'm a writing teacher.*

So write them, the conversation continued. *And have them write back.*

While the actual writing component I was able to insert in the project turned out a bit differently from my initial idea, I was able to exchange e-mail with two students in the class. I believe that my nudge to write became a way for these students to both explore their thinking about why they liked such design work and convey the thoughts and feelings such work provoked. Reading their messages, I had to believe that they wouldn't have been prompted to articulate these things had I not issued an invitation for the class to do so.

Mail from one student noted her thoughts about the relationship between client and designer and why she thought the client's visit with the class was important: *The students have to ask questions because they are the ones doing the work,* she explained. *It makes us work a little harder and it is very rewarding to be 'chosen' out of a whole class full of different ideas*. She also had some good advice: *Maybe it would be helpful for the client to list the things that are most important to their business—prioritize the aspects of the writing center.*

My e-mail reply gave me the chance to "think back" to the student as I commented on her observations and pointed out to her how she had captured for me an important difference in taking on an assignment for a client. In my response, I could demonstrate the value of this student's experience and how her sharing this with me had enlarged my own understanding.

With a second student, our e-mail exchange allowed me to nudge the student to think more specifically, clarifying for the both of us what was appealing about working with a real client as opposed to completing a teacher-designed assignment. The student's first response to my question about working with a client was brief: *Having clients now, in class, helps me learn how to work with that client and become familiar with people in general,* she wrote. When I queried her in my reply about the specific kinds of things she was learning to do or think about, she wrote back in more detail. *Working with a client,* she explained, *is working beneath the surface to really "touch base" with the colors, images, words, or ideas of the client . . . I am learning to ask questions, like, how big is this supposed to be, or how many colors do you want in your design, or who's the audience?*

Though neither is a lengthy piece of writing, merely the fact that these students wrote in an art class is, for me, satisfying enough. Still, what writing helps them say persuades me that if I'm to become a client for student projects, I must consider not just what I will get from the project, but what I can give. And each of these messages serves as a reminder that my investment in a student project is not only for what I can teach students but for what I can learn from them as well.

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The writing conference and "correction" interference

The most basic tenet of writing center practice is that we are invested in writing as the development of individual writers, not the production of clean, correct papers. We state this clearly in training sessions, have consultants read about it in Stephen North's essay and articles from *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, establish policy, instruct consultants to inform students of it when they arrive asking for proofreading and editing services, and discuss strategies for implementing it. At meetings, the staff members themselves talk about their frustrations with faculty who send students to the center to be "fixed" and students who resist and resent that they can't drop off an assignment and pick it up later. And yet—in actual, daily practice, the magnetic pull of correction is a powerful force that still manages to hold peer consultants in its grasp despite their training and ability to articulate theory and policy.

I became aware of this discrepancy when I asked students to write me "Dear Director" letters at various points throughout the year. The letters were my way of staying in touch with individual concerns, needs, and triumphs of a fairly large student staff. As I began to read the letters, I was taken aback by the variety of ways that a preoccupation with correction created interference—a type of "static"—in writing conferences:

- attention to lower order, mechanical concerns over higher order concerns;
- limited definitions for understanding one's work as a consultant;
- anxiety over how the work of a consultant will be perceived by professors if papers are not per-

fect (read as correct);
- responsibility for meeting the academic community's expectation that a consultant exhibit the ability to correct essays, as well as the consultant's expectation that she attempt to "clean" essays even when the student writer is clearly unengaged in that minimal of an outcome.

While the temptation exists to dismiss the way in which consultants reveal the power of correction in their letters as still another example of the well known adage that peer consultants tend to focus on error, or that their references are simply a choice of language and not actual practice, I would argue otherwise. The point is language, for how we name ourselves and our work does shape our perceptions and our practices. If our aim is for consultants to transform into practice the basic tenet that the work of a writing center is to make better writers, not better papers, we need to attend to the variety of ways a philosophy of correction interferes with the exchange between a student writer and a peer consultant.

I want to begin with two excerpts from Katie's letters because she represents the struggles of a novice writing consultant as she puts theory to practice for the first time. Besides participating in all of our consultant training, Katie (a sophomore consultant) had also been a student in my College Writing II class, so she had a semester's worth of writing experience focused on higher order concerns and rhetorical strategies. Listen to how Katie describes a problematic tutorial with a student writer who requested assistance on a revision:

I became worried because his

paper sounded so good and I had to rack my brain trying to think of areas that he could improve. We worked on his conclusion for awhile and I helped him correct run-on sentences but that was the extent of the tutoring. . . . I was unable to give him a major revision to do, but I simply could not find anything to correct.

What strikes me about this letter is that in spite of all her training and staff meeting exposure to strategies for making better writers—not better papers, it's evident that the magnetic pull of "correction" has its hold on Katie—so much so that she's "worried" about finding nothing to correct and identifying areas to improve. Her comments imply that she perceives her responsibility as a writing consultant in terms of correction. Since there's nothing to correct or improve, she assumes she hasn't much to offer when in fact she does. She and the writer could have talked about his process, what worked, why it worked, and what his concerns were. As his reader she could have offered him the opportunity for a reader's reaction to his work as a writer and reinforced his good writing practices.

As Katie worked to develop her expertise as a consultant over the course of the year, she began to try out new strategies for working with writers, especially moving them to become more independent. In the following excerpt from her second letter she describes a "walking away" strategy that places more responsibility on writers to apply what they are learning:

I would explain to them what I thought needed to be changed and would have them talk to

me about what they thought about it. At this point, I used the technique of leaving students alone to work on corrections while I left the cubicle. . . . I would leave them alone for varying amounts of time, depending on the corrections that needed to be made.

It's evident that Katie is progressing. She has moved to having writers voice their thoughts and is taking some of the pressure off herself to have all the answers. What I can't help but notice, though, is how this work is still imagined in terms of corrections. She offers suggestions for changes, asks writers for their input, and then leaves them to make the corrections alone rather than taking that burden on herself. Katie's letters reveal that while she can *say* she is committed to making better writers, the reality of thinking about and naming her work in those terms does not come easily. Her newly acquired perspective on writing as a critical thought process is no match for her deeply ingrained habit of thinking about writing in terms of correcting errors.

Now if Katie represented new consultants only, I'd read such letters as lack of experience. But when a graduate student (with prior writing center experience) who was my assistant director can't resist the magnetic pull of correction, I have to acknowledge that I'm in the presence of a bigger issue. Besides her prior experience, Kelly had participated in our workshops on strategies for writers with learning disabilities and was present when the director of the Student Support Service came to discuss identifying characteristics of learning disabilities. Yet during the course of reading a student's first draft, one of Kelly's letters reveals that she engaged a writer in correcting error even though the student's stated request for assistance addressed issues of content, and Kelly acknowledges that her decision goes against her training as a consultant:

I *know* that we are not supposed to focus on grammar, but in my opinion, she had so many errors in her paper that I found it very distracting. When I tried to explain some of these errors to her, she looked blank. . . . I noticed that unlike many students I work with, she didn't seem to pick up on these errors that she read. When she did pick up on certain mistakes, it seemed to take a long time for her to figure the correction out.

It is not the student who is consumed with the issue of correction here, but the consultant. It is she who finds the errors "distracting." Kelly's need to clean things up supercedes the student's higher order concern for content and blinds her to what this student's errors might reveal about the needs of the writer. Her description of the student's response to a lesson on error is filled with red flags that Kelly should recognize (based on her training) as characteristics of a student with a learning problem: the numerous errors, blank stare, inability to pick up on error, and slowness to comprehend the suggested corrections. And there are still more signs of the learning problem in Kelly's later description of the student's higher order concerns: the writer doesn't have a conclusion because she isn't certain how to write one, and "she had a hard time talking about her thesis statement [or] telling what her paper was about." This description of a learning problem is verified by the writer's positive response on the report form to whether she is a "Student Support Service" user. Yet even with all this evidence before her, Kelly finds herself in the paralyzing grasp of error correction as indicated by her final comment: "I wasn't sure where I should have gone with this consult." What should be clear, we would assume of an experienced and

well trained consultant, is that correcting error would be the last place to go when faced with so many higher order concerns.

The static of correction also interferes with how consultants perceive their work even when they are consciously engaged in strategies to make better writers, not better papers. This is most apparent in Bethany's reflection on her third semester as a graduate peer consultant in the center. Bethany, probably more than anyone else on staff, was aware and capable of naming her dilemmas as a peer consultant. As an undergraduate she never took a composition course, never examined her own writing process, and never had to talk about writing until thrown into her assistantship in the writing center. She struggled heroically in her first year to develop an awareness of and language for talking about writing. This is what she writes in one of her letters:

I am still very confused by consults. Basically, because I have to assess a situation and give very specific kinds of support. I'm more of a problem-solving kind of person, and I think it is a bad thing to sit in a consult and think in terms of problems. I like to do consults where I like to be concerned or interested in the thought process, but those instances are very rare because I tend to see everything in terms of problems. I wish I could pull papers apart more and see what's going on in them . . . . I need to find better ways to get people to talk to me about their papers, because I already know I talk too much in consults.

Bethany loves reading writers, and I think that comes through in her letter when she tells how she's "interested in the thought process" and wishes she

could "pull papers apart more and see what's going on in them." Certainly, one could imagine that this is just the type of work suited to a consultant who describes herself as "more of a problem-solving kind of person"; it is also an appropriate strategy for productive use of a one-to-one conference. But Bethany sees problem-solving as a "bad thing" since she wishes she didn't see everything in terms of problems. I would say that this negative interpretation of "think[ing] in terms of problems" is evidence of correction interference. That is, it has more to do with years of hearing writing problems defined in terms of error and correction than in terms of rhetorical decision-making or idea development. The latter is what Bethany wants and knows should happen when working with a writer. Her desire to "find better ways to get people to talk to [her] about their papers" tells us that. Yet after three semesters of practice, she still finds herself puzzling over how to imagine her "problem-solving" ability as a positive quality—as the source of an engaging discussion about the thought processes and rhetorical decisions of writers.

Creating interference in the conversation between student writer and peer consultant or in the way the consultant perceives her role are only a few ways correction disrupts a writing conference. A consultant's preoccupation with correction is, without a doubt, a source of performance anxiety which—from my staff's letters—is an ever-present undercurrent shaping the direction of their conferences as well as their perceptions of themselves. Only two consultants express this anxiety directly: Julie—who writes, "I am afraid that if I did send [the student] away without finding a problem, a professor will find something wrong and I will look incompetent." Jamie's choice of language is telling. "Problems" are imagined as mistakes as indicated by the concern that the professor will find something "wrong," and it won't be the student who will look "incompetent" due to the incorrectness but the

consultant. Ellen, on the other hand, with her dry wit spoofs her fears about not being the perfect consultant as she writes:

> Oh my God, this professor is going to see my name on the [report form] and think I'm a horrible, horrible consultant and tell all the people I work with not to let me do any more consultations and then everyone will talk about me and I'll get fired.

Many members of academic communities (including the consultants themselves) place a burden of responsibility on writing center consultants for "cleanliness" (read as correctness) in writing. So when a student who has received writing center assistance turns in a piece of writing that has not been "corrected," it is perceived more as a direct reflection on a consultant's incompetency rather than the offending student writer's. Student writers frequently come to a writing center with the expectation that consultants are "experts" who will tell them how to correct their papers, and faculty frequently send student writers to a writing center to be corrected. And when the end product that a student hands in reveals imperfection, the response is too often expressed as outrage at the ineptness of the writing center staff. "All I got was a C on this paper; you didn't help me at all!" students will gripe at a consultant. "I can't believe this student took her paper to the writing center; look at the errors. I thought they corrected things like that over there," a faculty member will complain to a colleague. A peer consultant's preoccupation with correction is a direct reflection of her academic community's values. She's well aware of her peers and professors' values regarding correct writing and how readily they will attribute her performance as a consultant to students' continued writing imperfections.

The connection between performance anxiety and a peer consultant's

preoccupation with correction most commonly manifests itself in descriptions of conferences where the writer is disengaged, resistant, unwilling to do more than sit, and the consultant attempts the Herculean task of moving the session forward single-handedly. For if the writer leaves without some sort of correction or improvement in the product, consultants worry that it will be them who appears lacking, not the student writer. Let's look at some examples:

> *Lynn*: [She] would occasionally give me a blank stare, and if I asked her to clarify something, she seemed to have trouble doing so. . . . I suppose it was clear that she wasn't putting that much serious effort into the consultation. It did not seem to me that she was very willing to change or work with what she had written, and was somewhat resistant to my suggestions.

> *Bethany*: I was having trouble with her subject matter, but the worst part of the consult for me was that she . . . didn't seem willing to try anything to work on what she had brought to the center.

> *Liang*: I feel as if it was I who do not know how to write this essay. . . . she is just sitting there and looking at me and waiting for my answer.

> *Hillary*: When I asked questions about the assignment, he gave minimal answers. This made it difficult for me to choose a strategy. I didn't know where we were supposed to be going with the paper.

All of these observations of resistant/ unengaged writers are embedded in descriptions of productive and smart strategies for opening conversations with writers about their work. Yet there is no sharing of responsibility by either party: we see students sitting there waiting for answers and consultants shouldering the burden of the ses-

sion—attempting, almost, to move the dead weight of the writer forward through the sheer force of their own energy. As I read these letters I ask myself, how can they so aptly describe the problem and still not see it? One answer is correction interference and the performance anxiety it produces. Since all a professor knows about a student's writing conference from the report form is that the student did go to the writing center, the fear is that a professor will see the consultant's name, think her incompetent (or worse, think the entire staff is!), and never know of the student's reluctance to work with the consultant.

As I look at these descriptions I know my consultants are tenacious in their efforts with writers because they're committed to their work, but they are also anxious about how that work will be perceived. The fact that a conference should at the very least be a 50-50 sharing of responsibility is not always so easy for them to remember when so much appears to hang in the balance: the paper is due soon, the

writer needs so much assistance, and the consultant doesn't want to appear incompetent. Leaving a student to work independently for a few minutes on a specific task is not an alternative that immediately comes to mind in such situations, either, because it looks like an abdication of responsibility on the part of the consultant rather than a strategy for creating shared responsibility. So while Ellen may be spoofing her fears, she articulates a truth about the connection between correction and performance anxiety that other consultants usually mask as frustration when faced with writers who expect them to provide answers and faculty who assume that writing can be easily corrected.

The personal, sometimes candid, and earnest voices in these "Dear Director" letters initially surprised me in their revelation of what could be read as unlearned lessons about the most basic tenet of writing center practice—make better writers, not better papers. As I read them, however, I became increasingly aware of how their thinking

about writing is so deeply ingrained with the concept of correctness—so much so that it produces constant interference on a number of levels. Their reflections on negotiating the practice and politics of peer consultant work provide me with a powerful reminder of the complex terrain they must learn to traverse as they enter the world of the writing center discourse community. Like any discourse, it's one thing to know the terms and another to apply them. The varied forms of correction interference in this process reminds me that my staff and I need to talk about correction as more than an issue of addressing sentence level errors. A staff meeting or workshop where we discuss the influence of "correctness" in their work and perceptions of themselves as consultants may not rid them of the interference, but it may raise their awareness of when and why they feel restricted by it.

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

Feb. 22-23, 2002: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Clear Lake, TX
   Contact: Chloe Diepenbrock, Box 77, University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2700 Bay Area Blvd. Houston, TX 77058. Phone: 281-283-3356 (office); 281-283-3360 (fax); e-mail: Diepenbrock@cl.uh.edu.

March 1, 2002: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Hayward, CA
   Contact: Cindy Hicks: phone: 510-723-7151; e-mail: chicks@clpccd.cc.ca.us. Conference Web site: <http://chabotde.clpccd.cc.ca.us/users/ydominguez/NCWCA/index.html>

April 4-6, 2002: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Canton, Ohio
   Contact: Jay D. Sloan, Kent State University-Stark Campus, 6000 Frank Ave. N.W., Canton, OH 44720-7599. E-mail: jsloan@stark.kent.edu; phone: 330-244-3458; fax: 330-494-1621.

April 11-13, 2002: International Writing Centers Association, in Savannah, GA
   Contact: Donna Sewell, Dept. of English, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, GA 31698. Phone: 229-333-5946; fax: 229-259-5529; e-mail: dsewell@valdosta.edu.

April 19-20, 2002: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Smithfield, RI
   Contact: J.P. Nadeau (jnadeau@bryant.edu) or Sue Dinitz <sdinitz@zoo.uvm.edu>. Conference Web site: <http://web.bryant.edu/~ace/WrtCtr/NEWCA.htm>.

April 27, 2002: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Wye Mills, MD
   Contact: Cathy Sewell, The Writing Center, PO Box 8, Wye Mills, MD 21673. Phone: 410-822-5400,ext. 1-368; fax: 410-827-5235; e-mail: csewell@Chesapeake.edu

ꚌUTORS' COLUMN

The tuned-in tutor: A most active listener

Have you noticed how some words just seem to pop up all over the place after you become aware of their existence? They can be quite ordinary words, the kind you take for granted and generally ignore, or they can be new to your lexicon. In either case, their emergence in your consciousness may change the way you think about them; at least that is what happened to me. One day, while I was reading a book on how to tutor writing, I noticed the author's use of the word "listen." He strongly recommended to tutors that they listen attentively, but he did not go on to explain exactly what he meant by that phrase. His assumptions about the reader's understanding piqued my curiosity and caused me to wonder, for perhaps the first time, what listening is all about.

My budding interest inspired me to look for discussions and definitions of listening in everything else I read. I wanted to know how writing tutors stay tuned in to their students during dull sessions (yes, we all have them), and how attentive listening helps tutors to respond calmly and effectively during difficult ones (yes, we have these too). I hoped to find advice on when attentive listening is especially important, what to listen for, and perhaps a few techniques for improving my listening skills. However, nothing I read yielded anything more specific than constant reminders to listen.

After several months, I came to expect frequent references to listening in almost every book and article I picked up. Listening cropped up in strategies for helping students organize and develop their ideas. I'm sure I found it in discussions about how to help students edit and polish their papers. It was often presented to writing tutors as an admonition to Listen to Your Students! This prompted me to reflect upon my pre-tutoring years when I worked with students as both teacher and librarian. Then I was expected to take the initiative, plan ahead, and set directions. As a writing tutor, I was learning a subtler approach, one that felt almost passive to me at first. I began to wonder if more attentive listening would activate my tutoring and give me a greater sense of participation during my sessions. To find out, I embarked on a self-study of my own listening habits.

One of the first things I learned was this: when I consciously chose to listen attentively, I felt less passive and more engaged in my tutoring. I noticed too that my mind wandered more when my student was either very quiet, without much to say, or quite loquacious to the point of distraction. On the other hand, I found it easy to listen attentively to students who were interesting conversationalists and good listeners themselves. In addition, I observed that many students exhibited either reticence or talkativeness within the first few minutes of their session. Paying attention to these cues helped me to focus my attention and adjust my efforts towards students whose verbal behaviors might otherwise distract me.

The next step in my self-study was to pay closer attention to what actually happened when I listened attentively and purposefully to my students. I had figured out when this was difficult for me, but I still did not know exactly what I should be listening for. To answer this part of my question, I went to the library for some serious browsing in books on communication theory. That was where I discovered that "active listening" is the official term for attentive listening, a term that has a specific meaning and relates to a specific set of skills. The definition of "active listening" that I liked the best was written by Carl R. Rogers and Richard E. Farson:

> Just what does active listening entail, then? Basically, it requires that we get inside the speaker, that we grasp, *from his point of view*, just what it is he is communicating to us. More than that, we must convey to the speaker that we are seeing things from his point of view. To listen actively, then, means that there are several things we must do:
>
> • **Listen for Total Meaning**. Any message a person tries to get across usually has two components: the *content* of the message and the *feeling* or attitude underlying this content. Both are important, both give the message *meaning*. It is this total meaning of the message that we try to understand. . . .
>
> • **Respond to Feelings**. In some instances, the content is far less important than the feeling which underlies it. To catch the full flavor or meaning of the message one must respond particularly to the feeling component. . . .There are various shadings of these components in the meaning of any message. Each time the listener must try to remain sensitive to the total meaning the message has to the speaker. What is he trying to tell me? What does this mean to him? How does he see this situation?

• **Note All Cues**. Not all communication is verbal. The speaker's words alone don't tell us everything he is communicating. And hence, truly sensitive listening requires that we become aware of several kinds of communication besides verbal. The way in which a speaker hesitates in his speech can tell us much about his feelings. So too can the inflection of his voice. He may stress certain points loudly and clearly, and may mumble others. We should also note such things as the person's facial expressions, body posture, hand movements, eye movements, and breathing. All these help to convey his total message. (154-155)

With these ideas in mind, I began listening to and observing my students more carefully. I found that active listening really helped me to hear more clearly what they were saying about their writing assignments, their courses, and themselves. When I noticed that feelings were the dominant element in what a student was saying, I acknowledged them. If a student seemed anxious about her paper, I asked her why. I tried to listen for the less obvious meanings behind her statements, and made an effort to notice whether her facial expressions and body language matched what she was saying.

Active listening also helped me to engage in more productive conversations with both my reticent and loquacious students, the ones who seriously challenge my listening abilities. When one of my more talkative students scheduled a session just to work on organizing his thoughts and

ideas, I knew we would have to break through his rambling conversational style before we could work on the task at hand. Sure enough, in the middle of a sentence about something else, he was reminded of his favorite essayist, and off he went. Two months earlier, his free associations might have overwhelmed my ability to pay attention, but this time I was still listening. As he talked, I thought I heard an essay being composed. My observation prompted me to suggest the essay as a form, which might suit him, and provide the structure he was seeking. A similar situation arose with a more reticent student who presented me with the text of his assigned reading and said, "I have no idea whatsoever how to write this up as a white paper." He folded his arms across his chest, and looked at me in total silence. What I thought I heard behind his defeatist tone was the cry of someone who either did not understand, or had simply forgotten about his original assignment. As it turned out, that is where we found the direction he needed to complete his white paper. Two months earlier I might have been more inclined to focus on his general air of defeat, and less likely to listen beyond it for a concrete solution.

Awareness of my students' verbal behaviors and my own listening habits further sensitized me to the outside influences that play a role in how well I listen. Distracting noises, uncomfortable furniture, other people at the next table, even my own thoughts interrupted my attention from time to time. To deal with these and other yet-to-be-discovered distractions, I needed to establish a certain listening mind set before each session. I accomplish this when I am able to arrive a little early at the Writing Center. I give myself time

to quell the rush of arrival, to find a comfortable chair at the table, and to arrange books and papers before my sessions begin. Once a session has started, I pay close attention to my student by making a conscious effort to bring my attention back to her every time a distraction begins to interfere with my ability to listen.

Writing tutors have only to reflect upon how much they have appreciated being listened to in the past to imagine the benefit to their own students when they assume the role of active listener. It goes without saying that your undivided attention will be one of your student's basic expectations, but only you know just how undivided it really is. The next time you are working with a student, try listening even more attentively than you ordinarily do. See what happens. See if it makes a difference. For me, attentive listening still requires practice. There has been some backsliding from time to time, I confess. However, I have learned that when I make a genuine effort to tune out everything but what my student is saying, I feel good about the session, even if it turns out to be less than memorable in other ways.

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Delimiting the writing center

That writing centers reflect the trends of their campuses is no surprise. We can outline the recent history of writing centers roughly as follows: in the 1970s, we had the Shaughnessy-esque obligations of accommodating students for whom so-called "standard English"—and "standard academics" in general—were new, frightening, and politically charged. Such an acclimation required writing center pedagogies to negotiate primarily with clients "as individuals," since the professional expectations that tether the tutor to the student were mostly self-evident: professors wanted students whose writing reflected standard academic practice. Thus, the writing center could in a sense have an "agenda" that operated in and of itself—that did not necessarily seek to ascertain the nuances of what each individual professor sought. A similar dynamic existed when the writing center became a site for ESL students. Here again, although the individual assignments and so forth were certainly a part of any tutorial, the writing center's mission was relatively independent: The writing center was to develop facility with standard American English. In this essay I argue that the "standard English" generation of the writing center has passed.

I am not suggesting that a large part of what writing centers do does not involve "standard English" issues. That would be wrong. Nor do I seek, of course, to diminish in any way the obligation that we need to continue to feel toward students who seek assistance along these lines. Instead I want to argue for certain considerations that accompany the writing center's newest defining roles.

Writing centers today exist primarily to accommodate the changing academic role of "writing" as it crosses disciplinary lines. In anticipation of a continued evolution in this direction, I want to offer four things that writing centers cannot, or should not, do.

1. Writing centers cannot take the place of professorial understanding of what writing does to study and thought.

In the past, when tutorial services were primarily engaged by humanities disciplines, "writing" itself was, arguably, more of an "understood" phenomenon. As especially the hard sciences work to come to terms with what writing is—how it functions within an understanding of a discipline—we must at once welcome and cherish such difficult work and try to "guide" it in a way that gives writing its due. At the same time, we must understand both the differences and similarities between what the "humanities" seek from writing and what the hard sciences might seek. The balance here is a difficult one, and takes into account some of the following dynamics.

First, just as we decline the student suggestion that she "drop of the paper and pick its corrected version up later in the afternoon," so should we in a larger sense decline to be the place where "we handle all of the concerns that accompany any writing task." In other words, we should reject any notion that we exist somehow "independent" of the sciences yet can meet all their expectations as a result of our knowing what needs to be known about writing. We do know that we know all too little when it comes to certain scientific rhetorics. So, from the beginning, we are doomed to disappoint everyone involved if we position ourselves in too authoritative a posture. We are doomed largely because we are not qualified.

But I think more prevalently, we are doomed because the craft we love so much—writing—is not being allowed an "organic" interdisciplinary role. We should be careful not to allow writing to continue to exist as an "ornament" or as some sort of foreign "accessory." I need to be very careful in terms of my "tone" here: Were I required to include quantum physics as part of my writing class, the results may very well be far worse than the quantum physics teacher's inclusion of writing. Indeed, in a similar situation I would strive to emulate the good will and ability that have been demonstrated by the scientists in this regard. Still, though, in this case I think writing center tutors may have more experience with the relation between writing and its discipline.

The writing center staff needs to reinforce in every scientific tutorial—and in the instructor notification forms, etc.—the conviction that writing is not something that occurs "in addition to" the curriculum, but is instead a means by which students come to a fuller understanding of the discipline itself. Not an accessory or an ornament, writing can be as central to an understanding of science as any experiment, collection of data, or graph.

I will not here go into a step-by-step template as to how we might accomplish this lofty goal, in part because I do not know. But I think I can suggest that we enter each such tutorial with a spirit of integration—aware that we are fighting the misconception of ornament and ready to tailor our pedagogies to offer a different perspective. Between the tutorials, the students, the instructor notification forms, and the teacher, in time our pedagogies might begin to effect a cultural shift.

2. Writing centers cannot tolerate misinformation as to what transpires within tutorials.

Perhaps it is the rarity of the following comment that makes it that much

more striking: "My professor says that we are not allowed to go to the writing center." What does such a comment on the part of a professor mean? Why, given the absence of any supporting evidence of any sort, might a professor feel comfortable issuing such a decree?

I think the answers to these questions stem from the same place as was the source in my previous point: to the extent that the possibility of teaching writing is considered limited, the pedagogy involved in such an endeavor might very well need to be "mystified" somehow—and, in the confusion that accompanies mystification, the concept of "plagiarism" is an easy answer. In other words, to the professor for whom teaching writing is an impossibility or a foreign idea, the idea that all others who might teach writing are left to do the writing rather than teaching the writing is an easy way out. Therefore, it only follows that "my professor says we are not allowed to go to the writing center."

In response, then, part of what we need to do is to publicize and demystify what it means to teach writing—and what it means to tutor a writing student. The site for such demystification is the instructor notification mechanism. Because the professor who forbids her students from coming to the writing center will not, naturally, be receiving any notification forms, the best we can hope for is to create a demystified climate of understanding that surrounds the wary professor and hope that the climate eventually influences her.

Specifically, we must be as exact as possible in delineating what transpired within the tutorial. For example:

"Through reading her own paper aloud, Mary recognized many of the areas that required attention. I stressed to Mary that she needed to focus on transitions, and had her compose two transitions which we then discussed,"

etc. Only through delineating our pedagogies can we begin to demystify them, and again the instructor notification form and our attention to it are our primary resources in this regard.

3. Writing center staffs must be "varied," that is, staffs must consist of tutors with expressly different strengths. Therefore, we cannot get by with some sort of generic template as we consider tutor qualifications.

In the past, I think we might have felt comfortable assessing a tutor's strengths in a singular sort of monolithic way. "So and so is a good tutor," implying an across-the-board-all-encompassing-sort-of-tutorial goodness. Certainly there are elements that all good pedagogies share. Tutors on any given staff need to recognize their own strengths and the strengths of their colleagues in order to best match a student with a tutor. Previously, "admitting" that any tutor is a better tutor than I am in any given way might have been uncomfortable because it might have implied a deficit on my part. But as the needs we serve become increasingly varied and compartmentalized, so too might we respond by an honest assessment of who might best do what. These need not be formal "specialties" but should instead be "understandings" among the staff. For example, when I have a so-called "non-traditional" or "returning ed" student, I know that such a student might feel more comfortable with a tutor with more years of experience than I or our peer tutors have. Or, I might call on, for example, a given tutor's success with such students and more fully place my faith in his abilities than in my own. With any luck, I too may have a few areas in which my colleagues can celebrate my competence.

In any case, part of our plan has to be to function differently as different parts of the overall cooperative effort. In order to do this, we must be as peda-

gogically aware of one another as possible: paying attention to our colleagues' tutorials; listening to what our students say about our colleagues; observing what sort of student seems to choose what sort of tutor especially when such regular patterns emerge. From our pedagogically-aware mosaic, we offer a greater probability that a "piece" of our mosaic will better match a "piece" of a student's mosaic.

4. Writing centers should not lose sight of their foundational identity as living, breathing facets of their English departments.

In many programs, though, thanks to the excellence of my colleagues, not in my own, the "English major" is a course of study that can bear little resemblance to a career—to a lifestyle—in English. In this way, English majors as curricular phenomena are often frauds. The writing center functions within a department (and beyond) as a daily living example of one of the things that English departments—their faculty and their students—are supposed to engage in: teaching students how to write and read, and all of the critical skills attendant to these.

While the university at large continues to discover the virtues of the writing center, we must at once celebrate and encourage that discovery and proudly remain centered in our native homes—the English departments that have fought for and nurtured our existence. I think our students and faculty benefit from being close to—even amid—a space that is defined by the energy level produced by tutors and students grappling and struggling and sometimes succeeding. And I think that writing centers benefit from such a placement as well, a placement that I hope can be strengthened by paying attention to the arguments sketched here.

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Revising a writing center: A self-study

In *Writing Centers in Context*, Joyce Kinkead and Jeanette Harris acknowledge that a successful writing center will almost certainly respond "effectively to the challenges and conditions of the school in which it exists—its context" (xv). With that in mind, we base the information we share here on our context—the Writing/Reading Center at Eastern Kentucky University. Success for us, like many writing centers, has resulted from a clear sense of mission, a willingness to adapt to the needs of our university and its student population, and a creative approach to various problems that arise. Recently, Eastern's Writing Center experienced a dramatic increase in use by students, most notably those working in disciplines other than English. This growth has occurred, in part, because of our determination to create a welcoming space in which students throughout our university can obtain meaningful guidance in composition, reading, and literature. To create this student-oriented culture, we focused on three primary areas: upgrading our facility, cultivating our staff, and furthering our professionalism.

The task of upgrading our facility began early in the fall semester when the tutorial part of our center underwent extensive redecoration. The cluttered and dreary room—with towering bookshelves that blocked one window—produced a climate antagonistic to our methods, which emphasize individualized and accessible guidance. Our first priority, then, was to establish a congruity between our tutoring methods and the tutoring space. Because we recognized the link between the success of our services and the learning environment, we focused on arranging the furniture to create an openness and to emphasize natural light, the refreshing effect of which has been well documented. We also added plants, art, and curtains in order to establish a warm, inviting environment where clients would feel relaxed but ready to work. These decorations have helped to build a student-centered culture that is less sanitized and more soothing. While the focus on "creature comforts" may make writing center scholars such as Elizabeth Boquet uncomfortable (469, 473), we have found that within our context, re-evaluating the environment has had a tangible impact on our usage. The number of tutoring sessions increased by approximately forty percent from previous years' average. Moreover, several students have been overheard praising the new climate. Likewise faculty members have noticed the transformation. A survey of English department faculty revealed that fifty-six percent of respondents considered learning environment an important factor in academic achievement; at the same time, sixty-seven percent noted an improvement in our learning environment and rated it high. While the change in the center's learning environment is not the sole reason for the increase in student usage, it has contributed to its overall growth.

One final step in producing the desired learning environment was to utilize individual tutoring tables where students would feel more private and where resources were more accessible. We replaced large rectangular tables with smaller round tables. This enhanced a sense of true collaboration, allowed groups of two rather than four, and eliminated barriers, perceived or real, between the tutor and the client. In addition, we placed commonly used resources—a dictionary, thesaurus, handbook, and style manual—at each table. This virtually eliminated the need for tutors to leave the table to consult these resources. Furthermore, making these resources so accessible provides an opportunity for tutors to model when and how to utilize them.

In addition to changing the physical environment, we enhanced staff training in order to better meet the needs of our clients. First, we have begun utilizing authentic student papers from former Eastern students rather than sample papers from tutoring manuals. This allowed our staff to see the types of papers they may actually encounter in our center. Second, we have provided a thorough explanation of the content and requirements of freshman composition classes at our university since a large percentage of student papers we see are for these classes, and since our graduate assistants teach developmental composition and may not be aware of the content of the other composition classes. Third, we require new tutors during their first week on the job to observe actual sessions by experienced tutors. Finally, we have enlisted the support of the English department faculty, who have volunteered for training staff or for actual service in the tutorial center.

One of the very important ways we strive toward success is the professionalism of our staff. Indeed, we firmly believe in their credentials as writing tutors, yet we must make sure that clients are being served with at least the same level of professionalism they would expect at a successful business. Most importantly, they must feel they are at the focus of what is going on at the center. A recent self-study by Marriott Hotels revealed that clients develop an opinion about the culture of an institution or business and the quality of its service during their first ten minutes of contact with that service (Peters 280); therefore, Marriott reorganized its check-in procedure so that

one attendant greets the guests, checks them in and walks them and their luggage to the room. The new system provides Marriott's customers with very personal and competent service. Likewise, at EKU's writing center, we are very aware of what happens during our initial contact with the clients and make every effort to convey the message that we offer a genuinely friendly and personal service.

As we are trying to establish and maintain a successful writing center, we keep in mind the goals we set for ourselves: we try to increase the overall number of students who seek our services; we encourage and monitor the number of return visits, for these serve as an indication of whether students found our services beneficial; finally, we are interested in faculty responses as to the effectiveness of our services. For example, we composed a survey, administered through the institutional research department of the university, to study faculty needs as well as responses to the quality of tutoring at the writing center.

One of the fundamental steps in improving client relations and building morale of the staff is to approach one's own service via outsiders' eyes, as business customer relations experts (Peters, Blanchard, LeBoeuf, Peppers and Rogers) suggest. This applies both to the policies and procedures and to the people skills of the staff. Often times, our tutors come with outstanding academic credentials, yet they lack experience in working with people. They may have never worked in a situation where one is constantly involved with the public; they may have never seen developmental writing; or they may consider the graduate assistantship or work study position a time to sit and study. Such expectations may lead to frustration and poor service. Therefore, in our training we focus quite specifically on the fact that working at the center is a job. We further impress upon our staff that at EKU's writing center all our energy is directed at delivering personal help with writing, one client at a time. Although we do not have big slogans posted on the walls, clients are our sole reason for being at the center. Their needs fuel our jobs. This means that all clients are greeted with a genuine smile, and, even though we do not use that terminology, we act like Disney "cast members" (LeBoeuf 54); we do consider ourselves "on stage" when our doors open. In other words, we are aware of the messages we send to others about our attitude toward them personally and about our attitude toward our jobs. Faculty noted this awareness, as sixty-six percent of those surveyed rated the attitude of our staff as high.

We try to keep in mind that 97% of customers in any business and/or institution are quite easily satisfied. They do, however, shy away from situations where their vulnerability might be abused or where they might encounter indifference. Clients of writing centers constitute a very easily discouraged audience due to their lack of confidence and doubts about overall scholastic aptitude; thus, we have complemented changes in our physical environment with re-evaluating our language. More specifically, we suggest to our staff as well as model ourselves the choices of language that highlight the positive as well as project our genuine willingness to help students become better writers. We especially like to hear "I'll be happy to" since it emphasizes our eagerness to help and leads to constructive outcomes. For example, since one of our goals is helping students improve as writers and not just helping them improve papers at hand, we often say, "I'll be happy to show you how to do this yourself." This small precious phrase transforms the message into a positive one.

We also review our policies and procedures in order to assure that they do not hinder the tutoring process and do not discourage students from seeking assistance. For example, even though we monitor attendance at the center, we do not ask students to sign in. Not only do we consider this a bad way to greet a client since it communicates that our paperwork is more important than our clients, we find that most often the students cannot wait to tell us about the assignment or the difficulties they had with the assignment. It is, therefore, imperative to allow them to talk rather than to cut them off by pointing to the clipboard and demanding they sign in. Instead, we invite the students to sit down and ask them to tell us about their assignments. After the initial contact has been established, we reach for our "Tutorial Session Summary" and explain to the students the purpose of the sheet as a record of their tutorial. We make every effort not to call it a "form"; we also emphasize that the summary serves mostly them, and should they want, they are free to present it to their teacher as a record of the session. All this focuses on the student as the one in control of the piece of paper, thus making it personal and non-threatening. We also present the students with the original of the summary. Not only is it easier to read, it shows respect toward the students as the focus of our operation. The copy left at the center provides us with all the information necessary for the record keeping. We have, then, satisfied our needs, the students' and their teachers', yet we accomplish it in a manner that never puts record keeping in front of the students' needs, nor does it interrupt communication between the student and the tutor.

Finally, we maintain professionalism and personal service by building and cultivating the environment where our tutors feel proud of working at the center. Our improved physical environment, the record keeping that fades into the background of the conversation as well as the appointment cards and other promotional materials make our staff feel a part of a thriving service that we all deeply care about. Our staff feel that the surroundings and the emphasis on personal and professional service contribute to the effort they put

into every session as well as the satisfaction they derive from tutoring.

In our effort to attract students, we have not only enhanced our facility and refined our methods; we have enlivened our promotion of the center by creating an orientation to our services on PowerPoint. This presentation, which takes about twenty to thirty minutes, provides the necessary information to students while at the same time keeping their interest. Instructors allow us to use class time to introduce students to the Writing/Reading Center, and we find that about twenty-five percent of students who are familiarized in this way come to the center at least once.

The overall effect of our changes has been a newly energized attitude which has resulted in a growth in the number of students using our services. In fact, we have noted an approximate forty percent increase in one-to-one tutoring last fall from the previous fall semes-ter. Moreover, our records indicate that forty percent of students who use the writing center, use it more than once. We recognize that numbers alone do not indicate success, and as Nancy Grimm argues, "writing centers need to undertake an ongoing effort to justify their practice theoretically rather than numerically" (534). Nevertheless, we believe that the numerical growth, especially that of repeated visits, combined with faculty trust, as revealed in our survey, is indicative of the effectiveness of our methods and of our desire to extend our reach. From our perspective, university services, such as the writing center, are often in competition with themselves. Therefore, they need to constantly scrutinize the quality of the services they render on their own and with the help of students and faculty.

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Northern California Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
March 1, 2002
Hayward, CA
"Many Voices: Integrating Conversations of the Academy in the Center"
Keynote speaker: Francisco X. Alarcon

Proposals on any aspect of writing center practice and/or theory are welcomed. Registration and proposal submission details are available on-line at http://chabotde.clpccd.cc.ca.us/users/ydominguez/NCWCA/index.html. Program chair Cindy Hicks can be reached by phone: 510-723-7151 and e-mail: chicks@clpccd.cc.ca.us. Proposal deadline: December 21, 2001.

Kellogg Institute to be held in June

The Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators will hold its twenty-third annual training program from June 29-July 26, at Appalachian State University. For further information write or call Coordinator, Kellogg Institute, ASU Box 32098, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608-2098, phone: 828-262-3057, website: www.ncde.appstate.edu.

NEW WCJ editors

As the current editors of The *Writing Center Journal,* Al DeCiccio and I are pleased to announce that the next editors will be Neal Lerner and Beth Boquet. Their participation in the writing center community, their scholarship, applications and letters of support from their schools ensure us that the journal will be in good hands. Please join us in congratulating them for taking on in 2002-03 this important work for us all.

Joan Mullin, WCJ Co-editor
University of Toledo
Toledo, Ohio

How old is your writing center?
(A preliminary look at the history of writing center development)

"How old are you?" or "When were you born?" are questions that usually yield concrete answers, until you ask them of a writing center director. Then, "institutional memory" kicks in, along with dusty archives, to produce more abstract results. An assignment to write a local history of our writing center to celebrate its 25th anniversary prompted me to post a query on the WCenter listserv. I asked subscribers what year their writing centers were established because I was trying to determine if our center was considered young, middle aged, or old.

As it turns out, after receiving more than 100 responses via email, reconstructing writing center history is a challenge because centers have both informal (unofficial) and formal (official) openings. These dual openings are a result of writing center growth and development over the years. Or, as some respondents humorously put it, "growing pains" and "troubled childhoods." For example, a writing center might begin with only part-time tutoring in a windowless basement, move to a computer lab, add professional consultants, then open as a formal writing center complete with windows, and ultimately establish an online presence. It appears that, historically, writing centers began one way, joined up with another service, and grew into something else . . . what we might call "growth spurts."

Having said that, for the purpose of my informal survey via the listserv, I accepted the first date given as the basis of inception for a writing center. The following are the age results based on 107 responses received. Here's the breakdown of number of writing centers established in each decade:
- 1940s-1; 1950s-1; 1960s-2; 1970s-25; 1980s-30; 1990s-35; 2000s-13 and counting.

Here's the breakdown in percentage of their respective ages:
- 1% are 60+ years old; 1% are 50+ years old; 2% are 40+ years old; 23% are 30+ years old; 28% are 20+ years old; 33% are 10+ years old; and 12% and counting are 1+ years old.

Of interest, the "ancient" award goes to the University of New Hampshire, whose writing center has existed since 1941; the "fetal" award goes to North West Arkansas Community College, whose writing center was scheduled to be born in Fall 2001. That's a 60-year spread between the oldest and youngest writing center.

Looking at 60 years of writing center history, it is apparent that, age wise, writing centers are a relatively young, yet growing population. Numbers have been modestly increasing each decade. Out of curiosity, I also looked at the locations of writing centers responding to my query to see if there was any correlation between age and geography in the development of writing centers. Specifically, I looked at each of the five regions of the United States. The following are geographic results based on the 107 responses received. Here's the breakdown of writing center locations by decade:
- 1940s - 1 Northeast
- 1950s - 1 Midwest
- 1960s - 2 Midwest
- 1970s - 8 Northeast, 7 Midwest, 5 Southeast, 4 West, 1 Southwest
- 1980s - 9 Northeast, 7 West, 6 Midwest, 5 Southeast, 3 Southwest
- 1990s - 10 Southeast, 8 Northeast, 7 West, 5 Midwest, 4 Southwest; (1 British Columbia)
- 2000s - 6 Southeast, 4 Midwest, 2 West, 1 Southwest

Here's the breakdown of number of writing centers established in each of the five regions of the United States:
- Northeast-26
- Southeast-26
- Midwest-25
- West-20
- Southwest-9
- British Columbia-1

Here's the current breakdown of U.S. states with five or more writing centers:
- California-10
- Arkansas-8
- Texas-8
- Maryland-8
- Missouri-8
- Pennsylvania-6
- Massachusetts-5.

The geographic pattern of writing center development seems to be that writing centers began in the Northeast and Midwest and then spread out fairly evenly among the regions, with the exception of the Southwest, during the '70s, '80s and '90s. The '00s are too early to call.

Obviously, these survey results are not scientific, as not every writing center in the country was contacted. However, the information could serve as a springboard for further inquiry. With extensive data and intensive research, more conclusive patterns of development could be discerned. As to my original query, it appears that writing centers are in all stages of development: some are babies, some are in their terrible twos, some are preadolescent, some are teens, some are young adults, some are middle aged, and a few are old. However, most of us (33%) currently are adolescent . . . in years, that is, not in maturity.

Rachel Perkes
Del Mar College
Corpus Christi, TX

Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
April 27, 2002
Wye Mills, MD 21679
Keynote Speaker: Christine Lincoln

Proposals are invited for presentations (20 minutes), workshops (60 minutes); roundtable or panel discussions (60 minutes); poster presentations (easels and tables provided for displays). Please submit, in triplicate, a one-page abstract with a coversheet including the type of presentation, names and addresses (including e-mail addresses) of presenters, and a two- to three-sentence informative description. Send proposals by February 1, 2002 to Cathy Sewell, Conference Chairman, The Writing Center, PO Box 8, Wye Mills, MD 21673. Phone: 410-822-5400, ext. 1-368; fax: 410-827-5235; e-mail: csewell@Chesapeake.edu

Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference

Call for Proposals
April 19-20, 2002
Salt Lake City
"The Idea of the Writing Center"

Proposals for individual or group presentations are invited. Guidelines for proposals are available on the conference Web site: <http://www.slcc.edu/wc/rmptc9/index.html>. Deadline for submissions is January 31, 2002. For more information, contact Clint Gardner, phone: 801-957-4893; e-mail: gardnecl@slcc.edu.

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