THE WRITING LAB

...FROM THE EDITOR...

This month's newsletter is filled with useful, thoughtful essays on topics of interest to tutors, directors, and teachers of writing: information about working with the learning disabled (Christine Hamel), a way to create comfort zones for writers (Ralph Wahlstrom), students' need to think about audience (Bryan Householder), perspectives on collaboration (Molly Wingate and Kate Pratt), and strategies for meaningful evaluation (Barbara Jensen). We might reasonably expect books on teaching writing to consider our work as also relevant to classroom teachers.

Thus, I wondered if two books recently sent to the newsletter for possible review might include scholarship from the world of writing centers. *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere*, edited by Christian Weisser (Southern Illinois Press), focuses on the "public sphere" of writing but includes no discussion of similar writing center work (e.g., through the kinds of public writing students bring to us, our outreach work, or OWLs). *Professing in the Contact Zone: Bringing Theory and Practice Together*, edited by Janice Wolff (NCTE), does, though, reprint Carol Severino's "Writing Centers as Linguistic Contact Zones and Borderlands." Ya' win some, ya' lose some.

Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Learning disabilities in the writing center: Challenging our perspectives?

> The greatest need for growth in composition studies lies now in the ways we create meaning beyond what is currently considered knowledge. (Brand & Graves 5)

A thought experiment

I am the Writing Skills Coordinator at the Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques (SALT) Center at the University of Arizona (UA); SALT is an academic support program for students with learning disabilities (LD). My background is a mixed one: I have two Master's degrees, one in Cultural Studies, the other in Rhetoric and Composition; I have taught first-year composition here at UA; I have worked as a co-coordinator of the UA's Writing Center; I have tutored students with learning disabilities. I consider myself a compositionist who has ended up in the field of learning disabilities services not by design, but by necessity (I had enough experience with students with LD to land a job I needed once I was done with my graduate work). Loving writing, and the teaching of writing, I came to my current position

assuming I would be doing much as I had when I was in a FYC classroom: I would be working with students' ideas, helping them to develop critical thinking skills and to express themselves in academia.

But the position has asked me to do much more than that, and demanded a commitment from me I did not expect. Everyday I see how discouraged most students with LD are about writing. They learn very young not to put their thoughts on

paper, as that often leads to frustration and/or ridicule. The scars born of these negative experiences stay with them forever—they build walls against writing out of fear and hurt, and often extend this fear to *any* personal expression, since they come to believe the social stricture that writing is the paragon of personal expression. If students with LD actually get to the college level (and many do not), they bring these scars with them; these scars then interfere with our abilities to help these students. How many students have scars great enough that they never even make it to our colleges and universities, to our composition classrooms and writing centers? How can we begin to change the culture of schooling such that more and more of these students are able to persist in their post-secondary careers?

Because of the tremendous effects of these scars, I ask you to participate in a thought experiment. I call on us to imagine what could happen if we recast the expressive attempts of students with LD in a positive light: what are the implications of learning to see and deal with LDs not as disabilities, but as different processing and expressive modes? When we take on this viewpoint, we see that writers with LD challenge both the primacy of writing as knowledge expression and production, and our ideas of what it is to own written texts. These students literally challenge all of us in education to rethink our definitions of intelligence and literacy, and our ideas about what constitutes valid processing and expression of knowledge; we have to stretch our vision of composition to include more than written texts. My experience with writing centers tells me that these entities are uniquely qualified to pursue this challenge, to experiment with this unsanctioned viewpoint, due to their positions in the post-secondary setting and their established approaches to students and learning. Students with LD push writing centers to pursue the implications of their mis-

sions, and to begin effecting this thought experiment in the reality of higher education.

The problem

Ask any student with LD, and she will tell you that it is difficult to always be the one who has to compensate in order to get her ideas heard—and that when she does, even then she is heard only in compromised formats. Yet if we pursue the implications of my thought experiment, and we were also all prepared to learn to communicate with and through a myriad of modes (including the old standby, the linear, printed text), then everyone would be free to explore the modes that best suit them, while still providing everyone with the basic skills to communicate with each other.

Traditional teaching styles and assignments tend toward linearity, but human thought processes are associative (Speziale and La France 32); and interestingly, not just the processes of those with LD, but everyone's. Those who are successful in school learn to alter how they process, and express their command of, information; they learn to think the way school asks them to. Some choose not to do this—others, like our writers with LD, simply cannot even make that choice. James Clifford explains that writing conventions are presented to students as choices they can decide to make as they compose, and are often relegated to being mere style choices about how to organize their thoughts. But, he says, form is much more than a mere style choice, it "is also an attitude toward reality; it is rhetorical power, a way to shape experience, and as such it constructs subjects who assume that knowledge can be demonstrated merely by asserting a strong thesis and supporting it with three concrete points" (43). So universities teach our students to value and pursue a certain way of thinking, a particular mode of knowledge expression and production, regardless of that mode's compatibility with the students' own intellectual strengths; success results only for those who can conform to these demands.

Those who are not successful, who cannot conform, get classified very quickly by their schools. The labels stick, and begin to form the students so identified. And this is how, according to Marie Clay, children learn to be learning disabled. They "adjust to the demands of [their] programme and different programmes bias children's response patterns in different ways" (163). So if students do not fit into the mainstream mode of expressing and processing knowledge in school early on, they quickly move into another realm, that of being disabled rather than simply (or not so simply) different. That label then becomes who they are and how they see themselves (171) —disabled, needing to be fixed, valued for how well they "compensate" and subsequently "fit in" with mainstream schooling demands.

Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede write that "our society locates power, authority, authenticity, and property in an autonomous, masculine self" (234). What this means for writers with LD is that they can never fully engage with that power, authority, authenticity, or property. Writers with LD often simply cannot function in written language alone (they require dictation services, proofreaders, extensive help with moving their thoughts from, say, a visual form to the written one), and thus by the current rules, cannot ever "own" the written texts they manage to produce after as much as three times the labor a non-LD student would put in. Further, when these students do manage to get a paper written, the work is often less than what most professors would consider "A" quality, due to the difficulties of translating their ideas into the medium of written, linear text. And when, as one researcher notes, "the ability to express oneself in writing clearly and precisely is considered by some faculty to be synonymous with the Bachelor's degree" (Vogel qtd. in Scott 170), students who require the work of another to make their papers "clear and precise" are in grave

danger of being seen as cheaters, pretenders, plagiarizers.

Much recent theorizing has promoted the idea that the educational system, one of our society's most powerful institutions, works to produce citizens who fit into the existing economic and social structure. Because of this, we must "broaden the perspective from which we view LD by stressing that individual differences in learning must be understood as embedded within larger cultural and social contexts" (Stanovich 288). Students with LD challenge us to see our schools as constructed, not natural, and thus as validating a certain type of learner. Originally, "the concept of LD was 'embraced as a reform measure because, unlike other critiques made during the 1960s, it was not a call for fundamental changes in schools and society'" (288). LD has been medicalized, written off as a "brain malfunction" and thus not a threat to the status quo of our schooling methods. Legislation was passed to ensure that students with LD received the compensatory measures they needed to survive the current schooling environment. But this medicalization of LD may not be correct, and even if it is, it may not be relevant to how we treat our students with LD.

Compositionist Patricia A. Dunn enters the debate here, raising a political challenge to both LD specialists and the writing community. Students with LD are not so radically different from the rest of us. All of us who have worked with students one-on-one on papers for classes across the disciplines *know* that not everyone is adept with written, linear text forms. What schools demand of students is a specialized type of intelligence, only one of several (there are at least seven according to Howard Gardner). Humans have myriad ways of processing and expressing knowledge, and yet we are all expected to learn to produce one certain type of text in the academy.

Students with LD are often just a bit further removed from being able to adapt than non-LD students. What this means is that we can *all* benefit from an expansion of acceptable modes. What this also means is that schooling needs to reconsider why it has made one particular type of expression primary, and to begin to revise what text forms are acceptable for students to produce as they gain knowledge and make meaning within academia.

Many may balk at considering such a drastic change in our conception of LD (and the implications that change has for our conceptions of intelligence and its various modes of expression) when we do not truly know what causes LD. Many may advocate waiting until the research proves conclusively where LD comes from before we act. Dunn acknowledges that we do not know enough currently to settle the debate on what causes LD. But frankly, says Dunn, we do not need to. What we know is enough. And what do we know? First, that there are people out there who "have almost inexplicable difficulties processing written language, resulting in unsuccessful experiences in an educational system that is based almost exclusively on books and writing. Second, [that] students treated as inferior beings often will simply fulfill low expectations" (199). We are losing the contributions these students could be making to our classrooms, our universities, and our society because we persist in the belief that everyone learns and expresses that learning in the same way. Dunn explains that just as other voices and their ways of knowing have begun to be recognized recently – women, minorities – so must the voices of those with LD be recognized. Not labeled, but truly *seen*. She writes that

> [b]efore learning disabled people can be heard, they must be recognized—not as *dis*abled but as *abled* in ways they and we must discover. It is partially the over-emphasis on linguistics-based

knowledge that has resulted in these students being labeled LD in the first place; if we open the curriculum to a wider spectrum of ways of knowing, these students can become re-abled. . . . [I]t is interesting to consider the ironic possibility that we might be harming our best young minds by forcing them to a way of thinking far more limited or two dimensional than what they do naturally. (200)

Dunn points out that "[r]egardless of theoretical persuasion, most of us recognize knowledge as not limited to textual, logical, fully conscious thought. It is naïve and inaccurate to believe that all ways of knowing may only be represented intellectually" (3). As such, she continues, "[q]uestions about writing need to be recast, with ideas regarding what it means to compose solicited from people with a variety of learning styles" (201). Other ways of expressing ideas, critiques, and insights need to be explored. We need to ask if writing can be good when the author relies more heavily than others on editors and proofreaders (because we all know that we all do indeed use these services widely). We need to ask if the university's brand of writing is the only way to express knowledge, to create meaning. We need to ask if writing is indeed thinking for everyone, as we compositionists so often seem to believe. And where better to begin asking these questions than in the writing center, where these types of questions are already part of the fabric of the environment?

The role of writing centers

Writing centers already challenge how writing gets done in higher education, so they are a wonderful place to move beyond traditional ideas of what knowledge production and processing have to look like and to introduce the idea of alternative intelligences. The kinds of collaboration writing centers can engage in opens up spaces to vali-

date oral and visual and kinesthetic modes of expression. People like Tom MacLennan have laid the groundwork for this type of questioning of the status quo, raising the idea of multiple modes of processing and expression in tutor training philosophies and methods. All of us, he writes, need to and can become aware of our processing/expressive styles. Further, we are all capable of finding ways to negotiate among them—we do this when we train our tutors in our writing centers in different learning styles and strategies. He explains that,

> [f]irst, all people perceive and order the universe in particular ways. Second, our individual "mind style" depends on how we employ…the four basic mediation channels: Concrete Sequential . . ., Abstract Sequential . . ., Abstract Random . . ., and Concrete Random. . . . Third, each person has the same basic mediation abilities at his/her disposal, making it possible for anyone to understand and relate to individuals and environments on common ground if we choose. Fourth, beyond the basic amount of mediation abilities, most of us function best by favoring the one or two channels which make us different and special. Fifth, what makes perfect sense to me, because of my own individual inclinations, may be totally useless to someone else. Sixth, we can either be broadminded and acknowledge and honor strengths and weaknesses in ourselves and others, or narrow-minded and attend to one point of view. (123)

The type of open-mindedness MacLennan calls for shows us how writing center collaborations with students with LD offer spaces for exploring views of intelligence and expressive modes that can re-able students with LD. We need to pursue moments for his "genuine dialogue" so that we can encounter each other fully and validate and work with each other's

styles. Andrea Lunsford's third type of writing center—not a storehouse of knowledge, not a garret for individual genius to come forth, but a place of collaboration—already challenges the definitions of texts as needing to be autonomous to be valid. This claim speaks directly to one issue writers with LD confront us with: if a student cannot proofread her own work, is it still hers? The implications of such a challenge are huge: if one reality of what is authoritative and valid can be challenged, why not another? Why must a written, linear text be the revered mode of expression and knowledge production in universities if even the notion of a single-authored text as somehow more authoritative is being questioned? Do not students with LD ask us to work in and validate other modes on scales that reach well beyond our writing center doors?

The charge

The writing centers that can ask these questions—and propose answers—are those that Christina Murphy would call "radical." Radical writing centers "should serve as advocates for literacy by respecting and encouraging multiple literacies rather than enforcing only one definition of literacy" (280). Because writing centers are places where LDs can be seen as differences, not disabilities, we can thus go beyond merely compensating for them (which takes us away from the inferiority and "fix yourself" complexes), and focus on incorporating the unique perspectives and styles of students with LD into our classrooms, our schools, our society (Bertamus 18).

Murphy sees writing centers as concerned constantly and simultaneously with two types of knowledge, the technical/practical and the emancipatory. This dual focus on negotiating and critiquing the status quo leads to the potential for a Freirean "capacity for transcendence" (283). Murphy explains that "[t]he potential writing centers have to transform the rhetorical com-

munities of college and university campuses by extending and redefining the dialogue on literacy represents their most significant power and makes them agencies for change within academics" (285). Because writing centers focus on individuals, and are pledged to serve a widely varied writing population, they can offer an alternative to normative educational assessments and labels. In their very mission statements, tutor training programs, and daily operations, most writing centers lay the groundwork for pursuing the challenge writers with LD present to us as regards the primacy and function of the autonomous, linear, written text in the academy. Unfortunately, the idea of the natural superiority of this form is still deeply embedded in the minds of many people, and deviation from it is seen as incompetent work at best, plagiarism at worst. Writing centers know better. We can meet this challenge, and begin to create spaces in the academy and society for the voices of our students with LD.

Christine M. Hamel
University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ

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A gorilla/(guerrilla) in the writing center

In 1994 I was invited to visit a growing, successful Midwestern university. I was an enthusiastic, hopeful candidate for the writing center director's job, a new position for a new writing center. I was ABD (Almost Bloody Done!) in rhetoric and composition, I was impressed with the university, and I was excited at the prospect of becoming a real faculty member of a real university. Mostly, I was thrilled at the prospect of creating a writing center from the ground up.

The interview went well. I had directed federal programs for disadvantaged students for nearly fifteen years, had run a writing center at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, and had taught English and writing extensively — from a Michigan prison, to a top American university, to the oil fields of northern China. My soon-to-be Ph.D. status would confirm my credibility as a writing and writing center professional. Then, of course, I ran into the flaw in my new-found confidence.

After a delightful, relaxed lunch at the campus restaurant, overlooking the rolling acres of university golf course, an entourage of students, English faculty, and one impeccably groomed administrator guided me across campus to the new Humanities building, one of several shining new structures on the university's expansive grounds. Proudly, they ushered me into a huge white room, florescent lights overhead, and shining chrome-edged study carrels and room dividers arranged efficiently throughout. My hosts were proud of the new writing center they had created. It was modern, equipped with computers and learning software, and it was beautiful, right down to the inspirational artwork the administration had ordered for the walls. A sick lump formed in my stomach, and I did what I always do at such inopportune moments: I expressed my opinion.

By the time the interview ended, my hosts were, at least metaphorically, waving their hands frantically before their faces, in an attempt to ward off the terrifying images of anarchy I had described. What could I possibly have said that so troubled my would-be benefactors? I don't remember specifically, but I am keenly aware that the place I described to them, my own vision of a student-centered writing center, contrasts sharply with the shiny new facility I visited that day.

When you first enter my writing center, you are struck by a tangible sense of chaos. The décor, more reminiscent of a low-rent coffee house than an office or classroom, is furnished with several small, round tables and unmatched chairs, a torn lounge-chair, and a relatively small, seventies-green, moth-eaten couch. On the walls, in need of paint, are hung faded posters of Che Guevara, Mao, and Stevie Ray Vaughn, and two paintings by student artists, both painfully introspective, neither particularly good. You think, "Students decorated this place." A bulletin board displays multicolored flyers, and the writing on a small chalk board announces an upcoming ESL writing workshop. Once you've adjusted to the second-hand Hunter Thompson chic, you begin to notice the activity.

At one table, a pair of students huddle together talking excitedly, perhaps a bit too loudly, their eyes shifting alternately from one another to the page before them. At another, several students are discussing a writing assignment, jotting down ideas, agreeing, disagreeing, agreeing. . . . One student, clearly exhausted from hours of intense scholarship, is slumped low in a comfortable chair at the back of the center, his mouth open, his eyes closed. Yet another scans the selection of books on the scuffed gray metal bookshelves against the nearest wall. In a moment, a woman student eases past you and asks one of the study group, "Can I get some help with my paper?"

The sleeping scholar stirs, his eyes snap open. "I'll take a look," he says. He jumps up, yawns, pours a cup of coffee from the pot in the corner, and turns to the student. Smiling, he says, "I'm Antoine." "Coffee?" he asks. She shakes her head and follows him to the vacant table. He asks her name and says, "First, Jill, let me get some information about you." When Jill has filled out a short contact form, a surprisingly awake Antoine says, "Okay. Show me what you're working on." In a moment, they are talking, sometimes in animated tones, sometimes quietly, thoughtfully. Jill talks, jots down a line, nods, shakes her head, disagrees, agrees, understands, questions while Antoine talks, points, questions, nods, listens, talks, and listens some more. Eventually, Jill arranges another session and leaves to be replaced by Brian who says he can't figure out what to write about for his technical writing class.

It goes on like this all afternoon. Students come and go, tutors and student writers. A couple of English professors stop in to talk about an assignment. People talk, write, read, drink coffee and tea, doze — and they talk some more. About 3:00 o'clock, six students trickle in, each carrying a photocopy of an article I'd passed out the week before, and settle themselves comfortably

around the room. Two of the three working tutors say goodbye to the student writers they've been conferencing with and join the rest. The third continues working with an especially panicky-looking student for another fifteen minutes before joining the group. Nearly everybody grabs a cup of coffee, and Mina has brought a box of donut holes to pass around. I join them, take the last of the coffee, and ask, to everyone but nobody in particular, "Has anything come up this week?" It's a nonspecific question that, they know, invites them to raise issues, concerns, and victories of the past week. We end up talking about a student with a learning disability. Everyone has ideas about how to deal with the student's writing problems, and we agree to try and bring in the campus LD specialist for the next meeting. I also make a note to pull up some material on tutoring learning disabled students. Next, Andrea says she's tired of the artwork and would like to bring in some posters from a local theatre company. Everyone agrees, and David and Maria volunteer to dig up some other artwork as well. Eventually we get around to discussing the article I had given them the week before, Diana George and Diane Shoos' "Issues of Subjectivity and Resistance." After nearly an hour of give and take, we've

concluded that George and Shoos are on to something that is important to writing center practice, that we must be open to each student's subjectivity—as Antoine put it, "Just because I don't agree with a writer's point of view, that doesn't make her wrong." It's nearly five o'clock. Most meetings last an hour, but the article elicited more debate than usual. I pass out copies of Nancy Grimm's "Rearticulating the Work of the Writing Center" for our next meeting's discussion. Somebody rinses out the coffee pot while someone else collects empty cans for the recycling bin (it'll pay for a pizza party later in the semester), and we all go to our respective homes for the weekend.

My writing center isn't especially revolutionary, at least not in the radical sense. It is, however, a place where students create an environment, where ideas and dialogue matter more than appearance and technology, where teaching is learning and learning is the result of teaching. My writing center is populated by people who are willing to look at themselves and who at least try to see the individual in each writer. The tutors are writing experts only insofar as students can be experts, but the best of them (most) are open to the needs of their peers, and they are willing to learn. Through their experience

as tutors, they are, at times, the embodiment of Paulo Freire's teacher/learner. They begin believing that they will come to know the answers, and they learn that answers are rarely so easily gotten, and that they come through dialogue and study. My writing center isn't built with chrome and computers. It's built with conversation, study, hard work, and understanding.

Oh, and by the way, I didn't get the Big Midwestern U. job.

Ralph L. Wahlstrom
State University College at Buffalo
Buffalo, NY

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Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar

Mini-Course and Conference on Grammar and Meaning
Mini-Course: July 10-11
   Yorktown, NY
Annual Conference: July 12-13
   Fishkill, NY
Keynote Speaker: Rei Noguchi

The mini-course is for teachers at the elementary, middle, high school, and college levels who would like to learn how to integrate grammar instruction with reading, writing, speaking, and understanding other languages. (One graduate credit; 15 inservice credit hours). The conference welcomes papers on a wide variety of topics. For further information, contact Amy Benjamin, 2002 Conference Chair: e-mail: MrsBenj@aol.com; phone: 845-896-6474.

TUTORS' COLUMN

Audience: Getting student writers to see past the professor

Often as tutors we are faced with many problems with which we may have a hard time relating. In most situations, students who work in the writing lab are above average writers and, usually, have had little or no difficulty with the craft throughout their lifetime. However, we must try to convey what we know to be true of writing in a way that will help the student most. Throughout my experience as a tutor, I have found one aspect of student writing that is almost always overlooked by both the student and the professor: audience. It seems such a simple concept. When a paper is written, it is intended for a larger audience than just the teacher. The majority of students view their audience as just the opposite, solely the teacher. It is at this point that most college students make the biggest mistake in their writing approach. If we, as tutors, can encourage students to view their writing as a form of communication and show them that they are not just writing to the professor but also to a larger group, students will become more impassioned about their writing and, therefore, their writing will be of a much higher quality.

The first step towards showing students that their writing can be influential and important is to show students the value of making the work their own. When people feel a sense of ownership over something, they will try extremely hard to make sure that it succeeds. This human characteristic also carries over to writing. Without exception, writing that contains passion and feeling is much better than writing that is contrived and forced. It is necessary to show students how professors try to make the writing assignments as vague as possible in order to allow the stu-dents latitude in their chosen topics. Professors know that when students are forced to write about a certain topic they will most often receive below average papers. Therefore, most questions and assignments are created so that the student can relate it in some way to their interest, and consequently give them a greater sense of ownership.

Along with showing students how they can make the assignment theirs, a tutor must be willing to work with the student and determine what they want to say. At this point the writing tutor becomes more of a sounding board than an educator. It is vitally important that the tutor allows students to work at their own pace and in their own way. Just as each person's personality is different, so too is each person's writing style. At this juncture the tutor must remain open and willing to help students all the while remaining separated from the creativity that is taking place to ensure that the student's paper does not become the tutor's paper.

Once it has been determined what is going to be discussed and what is going to be said, it is necessary that an intended audience be discovered. Many students view their intended audience as the teacher who assigned the work. This makes sense, given their formal education to this point. Unfortunately, in high school, students are often taught that papers they write are to be focused on what the teacher wants to hear. They are given little if any latitude for self-exploration. This ideal of what papers are supposed to look like carries on with them to college, and they have a hard time breaking this habit. Most college professors, espe-cially English professors, are interested in what the writer has to say. They want to hear an original view on a topic, not the same facts repeated over and over through each and every paper.

What we, as tutors, need to show a student is just how important and influential his or her writing can be. For example, a male student, Tom, recently visited the writing lab and brought with him a paper about the Muslim religion. I asked Tom what kinds of issues he was having with the paper, and he replied that his main concern was that he was having a hard time meeting the minimum requirement of five pages for the paper. When I asked him who the paper's intended audience was, he looked at me with a quizzical look and said it was the professor. However, what he had written was not appropriate for his audience. His paper was a general background on the religion and its traditions, in short, facts the professor would already be aware of. At this point Tom had two options. Either the student could revise the paper to fit his audience or he could focus more on what audience his paper was for. Not surprisingly, Tom chose the second option. Tom decided that his paper was more of an informative paper guided towards people uneducated about the Muslim religion. Once he had that focus, he found areas that needed to be expanded upon to help accommodate that audience. Some things he had been able to assume the teacher knew he now had to explain. This helped solve the problem of meeting the minimum length issue Tom was so worried about.

Once the audience is determined, it also may be helpful to discuss the dif-

ferent types of papers and forms of writing that may be most accepted by different groups of people. Just as writers wouldn't wear a basketball jersey to the opera, they also wouldn't write a business memo if they were analyzing perception and truth in Wallace Stevens' poetry. It is important for students to realize the different types of papers and when to use them. Once again, in high school students are taught mainly to use the five-paragraph essay for the majority of their papers. While this form has its positive attributes, it is not always appropriate for the situation.

Through the analysis of audience, most problems students have with writing can be solved. It will not only help clarify what is expected of them, but will also help encourage confidence in their writing process. Once the student understands the idea of audience, all other aspects of the process will fall into place. They will understand what they want to say, how they want to say it, and how they need to say it. However, the most important of those aspects is that it will be what they WANT to say, not what they have to say. And that, as most educators would agree, is the main ingredient to good writing: passion about the topic.

Bryan Householder, Peer Tutor
University of Findlay
Findlay, OH

"Appraising for praising"

Near the end of the semester, tutors enrolled in both classes are asked to read over the objectives for the classes, something they were asked to do at the beginning of the semester as well. I ask for journal entries from them, and I tell them that their feedback is very valuable to me in helping me improve the class for the next semester's tutors. In this way, tutors not only feel they are assessing their progress but also know they are leaving a legacy behind. In this entry, tutors list the objectives they believe they met and the objectives they believe they did not meet. They also tell me what they feel *they* could have done, if anything, to meet the goals they missed and what *I* could have done, if anything, to help them help themselves. As tutors appraise their performance in the classes as well as the classes themselves, I have the opportunity to reflect on my students' perceptions of their own practices and behaviors and the classes as they did or did not meet their needs and expectations. Through these assessments, I can also observe my students' perceptions of me, my teaching strategies and my methods. I enjoy seeing what the tutors learned throughout the semester and feel pleased to see that most, if not all, are proud of themselves for meeting the objectives they set out to meet. I also enjoy reading the suggestions tutors have for improving the classes. I have implemented many of these suggestions. These are some of my favorite journal entries; I always learn something from these entries.

While credit tutors are busy "appraising for praising" during class meetings, in journal entries, and through the assessment forms we have in the Writing Center, paid tutors are not forgotten. Certainly they too fill out the *Tutor Report* forms and ask their students to fill out the *Tutor Assessment* forms, but they also fill out weekly forms, a *Paid Tutor Meeting Note Card*, before their individual weekly meetings with me. These forms ask mentors and paid tutors to tell me about

- their biggest success
- their most pressing concern or problem
- what they did about this concern or problem
- something they learned or relearned in the WC this week
- something they wish they had learned
- the session in which they felt most engaged and why
- the session in which they believe their student was most engaged and why
- any concerns they have about their team members
- three things they are thankful for or pleased about regarding the WC this week.

Paid tutors have these forms filled out before our meetings and bring them to the meetings. Fruitful discussions about tutoring practices and behaviors have resulted from ideas noted on these forms. These forms are sometimes shared with several tutors, and suggestions tutors make for improvements are often implemented.

An interesting follow up to Lester Faigley's study would have been to investigate whether or not completing the *Process Logs* themselves had any effect on his student participants as writers. I strongly suspect it did. Perhaps this strong suspicion has simmered within me for years and finally burst forth to permeate most of my teaching practices and even color my teaching philosophy. After all, what good is it to do something well if we don't know we've done it, no one tells us it's of value, and we can't repeat it? And how can we know something isn't working, why it isn't working, and how to fix it if we don't examine it? Whether we are working in a writing center, a composition classroom, or a fast-food drive-in restaurant, it seems to me that if improvement and growth are our goals, then continuing to develop and implement methods for "appraising for praising" is one of our major strategies for effecting these goals.

Barbara Jensen
Modesto Junior College
Modesto, CA

Work Cited
Faigley, Lester, Roger Cherry, David Joliffe, and Anna Skinner. *Assessing Writers' Knowledge of Processes of Composing*. Norwood: Ablex, 1985.

Writing center collaborations: Principles in action everywhere

Collaborating on all aspects of the writing center seems a natural outgrowth of a collaborative approach to teaching writing. But more than just fun, fast and "natural," collaboration can greatly enhance the success of a writing center, especially when based on a set of philosophical principles. Ann Berthoff makes the point that because writing and teaching writing are concerned with the making of meaning, they are philosophical endeavors. The most useful philosophical endeavors are guided by a coherent set of assumptions or principles. The idea of collaboration informs the philosophical endeavor of teaching writing at most writing centers. Applying a coherent set of principles to the idea of collaboration makes it more useful. In our case, applying the principles of collaboration lead to a more effective writing center and better relations with the faculty and the college as a whole.

The following statements form the backbone of the collaborative philosophy used at the Colorado College Writing Center:

- All people are equal
- All people deserve respect
- All people are teachers and learners

These principles come into play at all levels of the Writing Center's operation and have further reaching effects than we ever dreamed.

As a foundation for collaboration, these principles help to assure that we work together despite our obvious differences in institutional power. The director has power because of pay, age, education, and experience. The tutors have power because they have the experience of currently writing for classes, they know the student culture, they are similar to our clients in age and interest, and they are fresh and energetic about tutoring. While it seems obvious that without a director there is no writing center, it is equally true, in our case, that without peer tutors there would be no writing center. We need each other to meet our mission of helping writers.

As the Writing Center director, I use these principles when working with my staff. The tutors are remarkable assets, if asked, so I put to them questions of training tutors, providing services, and administering the center. The tutors help get the word out about the job, read applications, interview candidates, and decide who gets in the training course. Two tutors help me teach the course each year. Once everyone is on staff, the tutors collaborate on continuing training by presenting workshops at weekly staff meetings. For example, our creative writers might give a talk about tutoring short stories or our web guru might help us use the World Wide Web better.

When it came to evaluating our services, I realized that I needed the tutors' input. We now think together about evaluating our services—what and how to evaluate. When we wanted to figure out how to survey people who don't use the writing center, it was a tutor's idea to hand out candy bars at the moment the survey was to be filled out. It worked; we got some useful ideas.

We even started collaborating on staff evaluations. Because the evaluation process includes looking at a "trouble spot" in a videotaped session, it made sense to get a few tutors together to collaborate on possible solutions.

Each tutor's point of view adds to the mix of ideas for avoiding the problem or improving the situation. So after private evaluation meetings between me and the peer tutor where we discuss personal goals and the expectations of the job, I get a few tutors together to review each other's taped tutoring sessions. We also look at a tape of me tutoring. We use these tapes as self-evaluation tools and as points of learning and collaboration.

More than pleased with how the principles helped improve "in-house" collaborations, we started applying them to our collaborations with faculty members. Some instructors bring their assignments to the writing center for response and guidance from the tutors. Tutors also visit classes to explain the services of the Writing Center and to help me give workshops on brainstorming or revising. A few tutors act as special liaisons to classes, giving feedback to instructors on their assignments, bringing their assignments to the writing center, and tutoring some of the students in the class.

The tutors also collaborate with the faculty as members of the All College Committee on Student Writing. This committee oversees the Writing Program and the Writing Center. Accustomed to working with our principles, the tutors freely offer their opinions to the committee and speak of their experiences as students and as tutors. The tutors' collaborations have proven to be an invaluable resource because the tutors are most successful at convincing a faculty member to teach empha-

sis in writing courses. When a student suggests to a faculty member that it would be great if he or she offered a course as emphasis in writing, the student gets a warmer response than an administrator would. Tutors, therefore, help to shape the whole program.

The vital collaboration the tutors have with the Writing Program is their actual tutoring of student writers. The peer tutors are a part of how student writing improves on our campus. In these most crucial collaborations, the principles serve as guides. So far, this discussion has been from the perspective of a director; what follows is the view of an undergraduate peer tutor.

A peer tutor's perspective

As a tutor and recent co-teacher of the tutor training course, I see how those principles take shape in the experience of tutors. When I contemplate my experience, I believe our writing center is a cohesive and positive unit because, from the beginning, the three principles of collaboration are clearly at the core of all aspects of our center.

The first time these principles came into play for me was when I took our tutor training course. From day one on, a strong collaborative base was established. The first concept emphasized in class was that, in our writing center, all people are equal and everyone will get along. This is not to say that we are a faceless mass. Each person is treated as an individual with worthwhile thoughts and experiences to offer. However, it was clear from the first time that Molly addressed us that sustained conflicts among staff members are unacceptable. While we expect disagreement, we will also strive to resolve conflicts.

The fact that tutors trained us was essential in bringing this point home. Lisa and Chad, the two senior peer tutors, split the teaching task with Molly. They did a fabulous job of covering the necessary grammar rules and writing center principles while still integrating their own experiences. The presence of

Lisa, Chad, and Molly allowed us to get a feel for three varied points of view. Each one of them clearly adhered to the same basic set of rules, but they took those and added their own style. The best thing about this first phase of the training course was that we emerged feeling collaboration was normal and natural. And with this belief planted in our minds, we moved into the second half of the training class. The first half gave us a set of principles and guidelines, and the second half allowed us to develop and personalize our own styles.

Our teachers never told us what to do while in sessions; they simply presented us with a variety of philosophical outlooks, provided practice sessions, and let us go from there. For example, after reading one scenario about a tutor who helped a writer by showing her how to analyze her topic, Amy, a fellow trainee and honor council member, said the way the situation was handled made her feel uncomfortable. Amy said she felt that the amount of help given pushed the limits of our campus-wide honor code. Colorado College has a student-enforced honor code in which everyone includes on every paper the phrase "I received no unauthorized help with this assignment" or "Honor Code Upheld," and then they sign it. I did not see any problem with the way the tutoring situation was handled. I think the writer learned a skill that she can use in her next paper, and that is a successful session. We had a lively discussion involving several points of view. The valuable lesson we took away from the discussion is that it is okay for two tutors to handle a situation in two different ways. We are a center based on principles, not rules. Different tutors will approach situations in various manners, and either way can work.

In practical terms, this can be broken down into the tutor-to-tutor relationship and the tutor-to-writer relationship. Each job I have had has made it clearer to me that the camaraderie of a

staff is key to the overall success of the facility. Dissidence quickly leaks outside of inner staff workings and inhibits interaction with clients. The tutor-to-tutor bond at out center is sound. We all get along because we all want to be there. Our staff comes from diverse political, economic, and racial backgrounds. In addition, we have majors ranging from chemistry to political science to English. Each of us brings a fresh perspective to every paper. Despite our diverse interests, we are able to respect each other's differences and are able to learn from one another. In addition, when discussing problem situations at meetings, our eclectic staff gives valuable input based on alternate perspectives. The principles of collaboration encourage us to have these valuable conversations.

The positive tutor-to-tutor relationship provides a strong base for each of us, making the tutor-to-writer relationship that much easier to handle. Toward the end of the course, we talked a lot about the responsibility of being a tutor with regard to other students, the faculty and the campus as a whole. This seemed big, but not as big as the tutoring philosophy that had been instilled in us. This firm base made the initial tutoring experiences less nerve racking because our principles placed us on an equal level with the writers. For example, my first tutoring sessions occurred at the end of my freshman year. The second appointment I ever had was with a senior completing her senior thesis. We both laughed at my freshman standing, but then turned to the project and got a lot of quality work done.

Tutoring sessions are intense. If I didn't see a higher philosophical purpose and have philosophical principles to fall back on, I would have a hard time making it through many sessions. Since I have started tutoring, I have dealt with situations ranging from flustered first years to strung-out senior thesis writers. Of course there will always be the students who come in ex-

pecting a "fix it" shop or are just plain apathetic. However, I feel very capable of using our principles to develop a relationship that will turn the session around. Recently I tutored a student who regularly did not use verbs in his sentences. That was not the least of his problems, but I had to start there. Initially the session was painfully frustrating, but by the end, I felt he had an increased understanding of verbs. Then I referred him to Emily, our professional staff member who works with struggling students. He came in for a series of appointments and is doing well. I was able to collaborate with him to the best of my ability and then point him in the right direction.

So for me being part of the writing center is significant in several ways. First of all, I have a job where I actually want to go to work. When I talk to other tutors, I find that they share this sentiment. And on a more personal level, the Colorado College Writing Center is a strong base in my liberal arts experience. I'm also finding that it will be a strong base in my post-college work experience. I haven't just learned job skills, I've gained life skills. I feel that entering the real world with these principles in hand gives me an edge. I have collaborated with peer tutors and writers, with my supervisor, and with members of the greater college community. This many-leveled application of collaboration principles will be helpful in whatever I end up choosing as a career, whether I enter corporate America or the non-profit sector.

The director's conclusions

In addition to the benefits for tutors, we think that the Writing Center benefits mightily from using these principles as guides for collaboration. We get a staff that is informed and invested in the writing center philosophy and practice. We have genuinely interesting staff meetings where people play by the same rules and feel free to share

their insights. We have a high level of trust among us, all of us.

The layers upon layers of collaboration at the writing center fit particularly well in our context. Ours is a college utterly dedicated to the ideals of a liberal arts education. Having a set of principles, augmented with skills, knowledge, and experiences, allows the tutors to rely on (and develop) their critical thinking skills as they work. The principles have application in every collaborative situation because they are guidelines for generalists. We have no recipes or formulae, just principles to help make determinations about what to do on an intellectual playing field circumscribed by our honor code. With the principles — all people are equal – all people deserve respect – all people are teachers and learners — we wade into the murky depths of brainstorming, decoding arcane style manuals, and helping a faculty member rewrite an assignment.

The college also benefits from our collaborations because the tutors learn about being good citizens of our small, academic community. In staff meetings, we discuss when we think we are a little close to breaking a principle or when we aren't sure where the principles are leading us. We concern ourselves with the immediate situation of the writer who says she needs an "A" on this paper or she loses her scholarship, and we also talk about what it means to be seen as so powerful that we could "save" someone's educational career. What does it mean to the writer, the tutor, the Center, the Program, the College? In these discussions, we treat each other well, but we go after the tough questions, and we learn about problem solving and resolving differences in a peaceful manner.

By pointing out that writing center practice is informed by philosophy, we hope that we have helped writing cen-

ters to expand their collaborations and their successes. We also hope to have added to the ways writing centers can assert that peer tutoring is educationally and intellectually sound. The next time a writing center with peer tutors is assailed as a fix it shop or has its funding threatened, we hope that the director and tutors will explain the principles informing their work and list the far reaching positive effects of their program.

For beginning programs, these principles can serve as guideposts as the director worries about the practical matters of space, time, and money. For all us, these principles can serve as touchstones for evaluating our practices – specific moments as well as the whole enterprise. Like most writing center directors, Molly files an annual report with lots of numbers and analysis. She tells everyone on campus how busy we have been and what good work we do. But for us, the real test of whether or not the writing center is successful comes when we evaluate our practice in terms of our principles.

Molly Wingate and Kate Pratt
The Colorado College
Colorado Springs CO

Work Cited
Berthoff, Ann. *Reclaiming the Imagination: Philosophical Perspectives for Writers and Teachers of Writing*. Boynton/Cook: Portsmouth, NH, 1984.

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

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. Web
site: <http://iwca.syr.edu/conference>.

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

April 27, 2002: Southern California Writing Centers
Association, in Northridge, CA
Contact: Irene L. Clark, English Department,
California State University, Northridge, 18111
Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA, 91330-9248. Phone:
818 677-3414; e-mail: irene.clark@csun.edu; fax:
818-677-3872. Conference Web site: <http://
www.csun.edu/~nlw9004/index.html>.

October 25-27: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in
Lawrence, KS
Contact: Michele Eodice (michele@ku.edu) or Cinda
Coggins (CCoggins66@aol.com). Conference Web
site: < http://www.writing.ku.edu/ncptw-mwca>.

Writing Coordinator
Knox College

GENERAL POSITION DESCRIPTION:

With the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning,
the Writing Coordinator coordinates the daily activities, opera-
tion, and development of the Center, including assistance in the
recruitment, training, supervision, evaluation, and CRLA certi-
fication of student peer tutors. The Writing Coordinator offers
one-to-one and group tutorial instruction in English composi-
tion, may teach and design courses, and assists the Director in
consultation with the faculty and staff to improve writing-
across-the-curriculum. Full-time, twelve-month appointment;
start date: August 1, 2002.

QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED:

M.A. preferred in English, Composition and Rhetoric, or
closely related equivalent; experience teaching composition at
the post-secondary level; fluency in contemporary theories of
composition and rhetoric; proficiency in Microsoft Office; ex-
ceptionally strong oral and written communication skills; and
the ability to work well with a variety of constituencies in a
small college environment.

QUALIFICATIONS DESIRED:

Prior experience working in academic support services at the
post-secondary level; demonstrated experience with
College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) tu-
tor certification; prior administrative experience devel-
oping programs; experience teaching reading, learning,
time management, test taking, and study skills; familiar-
ity with business and/or technical writing; outstanding
organizational skills; demonstrated knowledge and ap-
plication of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of
1973; experience developing and maintaining html web
site; experience as an instructor of ESL; demonstrated
research skills; ability to remain effective in a challeng-
ing work environment; and a good sense of humor!

APPLICATION:

Send resume, appropriate college and graduate school
transcripts, the names of and contact information for
five persons who can speak directly to your ability to
undertake the Writing Coordinator position, and a letter
elaborating upon your qualifications for this position to:
Dr. John Haslem, Director
Center for Teaching and Learning, K-77
Knox College
Galesburg, IL 61401

Composition Studies

Composition Studies, first published as *Freshman English News* in 1972, is the oldest independent scholarly journal in rhetoric and composition. *CS* 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* also includes book reviews and lengthy review essays, written by rhetoric and composition's leading authors, of current scholarly books in the field.

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Peter Vandenberg, Editor
Composition Studies
DePaul University
Department of English
802 W. Belden Avenue
Chicago, IL 60614
composition_studies@depaul.edu

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Writing Center Coordinator
Saint Joseph College

An excellent opportunity to coordinate writing tutorial services, assist with the College's writing assessment program, provide tutorial services for writing across the curriculum, conduct workshops, design instructional materials, and act as a liaison with faculty regarding students' academic needs is available in this full-time, 10-month position, with an option for summer work. Starting Fall 2002.

A Master's degree in English or related field, tutoring experience at the college level, experience teaching college composition or a similar course, and background in composition and rhetoric will be required along with excellent writing, oral, computer, and interpersonal skills.

Letters of application and resumes should be sent to Writing Center Coordinator, c/o Human Resources, Saint Joseph College, 1678 Asylum Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06117.

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"Appraising for praising": A teaching strategy that works

One teaching strategy I've found very useful when working with tutors in the Modesto Junior College Writing Center is something I call "appraising for praising." This strategy involves helping tutors reflect on their performance in order to improve their tutoring practices and professional behavior. With improvement comes both extrinsic and intrinsic praise. The seed of this strategy may have been planted when I explored Lester Faigley's *Process Logs* during my graduate studies. Through a series of *Process Logs*, Faigley examined and assessed the writing processes of developmental and experienced writers by asking these writers to define and describe in writing their tasks and their practices through each stage of the writing process. Although in our tutorial projects classes tutors and I have always orally discussed their tutoring strategies and practices, I've begun to follow Faigley and use a written form of reporting. I am finding that these written reports are not only more thorough but also often inspire more significant oral discussions in class. Through these various written reports, I am able to examine the tutoring processes of our tutors, but I believe it is more important for the tutors themselves to dissect their performances. Appraising their own practices and behaviors in written form has had an effect on the tutors whom I guide. I, too, reflect on my teaching and leadership practices and find that doing so has often been the catalyst for my own improvement.

I may be taking the approach of "appraising for praising" to an extreme, but I know this is one way to help tutors clearly see what they are doing, keep doing what works, and modify what doesn't work. Moreover, observing and reflecting on their work in or-der to do better work earns tutors self-respect and praise from others, two dividends most people value. Tutors begin the semester by assessing their current skills and abilities and projecting their expectations in a mission statement they know is not graded and is intended for their own benefit. This statement allows tutors to define and determine not only what they expect from themselves but also what they hope to gain from working in the Writing Center throughout the semester. We share these mission statements as a group, individually if the tutor prefers. Sharing mission statements, whether in a group or personally with me, opens the door for further discussion. This discussion affords tutors the opportunity to reflect on the following:

- practices they believe they will carry out
- unrealistic expectations they may have of themselves
- a realistic target to aim for
- a chance to see that they are not alone in their feelings, hopes, and expectations

In effect, they are not out in the canoe paddling alone. Sharing mission statements is also a way to begin building the team that is so essential to our interdependent writing community. At the end of the semester, tutors re-read their mission statements and add a final short paragraph explaining whether or not they met their own expectations and whether or not they gained what they wanted from their writing center experience. Most often they are pleased and proud that they achieved or even overshot their own expectations.

We have other more immediate ways for tutors to appraise their tutoring techniques, strategies, and behaviors.

These methods include the *Tutor Report* forms and *Tutor Assessment* forms filled out at the end of each tutoring session. Tutors and students fill out a *Tutor Report* form at the end of each tutoring session. On this form, the tutor and student specifically name what was covered in the session. Asking the student to discuss the session with the tutor and name and write down specifics covered is a way of getting the student to define and describe what he/she perceived and observed in his/her paper. Additionally, the student notes what he/she plans to do to improve the next draft of the paper. This process allows the tutor to see what, if anything, the student is taking away from the session. Tutors report to me that they feel rewarded when they know their students do come away from a session knowing more than they did when the session began. However, when the tutor sees a form with only a few vague notations or comments, he/she knows more discussion and interaction probably should have occurred during the session. Thus, the *Tutor Report* form is a way to check for learning on the student's part and for delivery of information or assistance on the tutor's part.

Also at the end of each tutoring session, tutors invite students to fill out a *Tutor Assessment* form. The tutor notes his/her name at the top of the form and then gives the form to the student. Without the help of the tutor, the student responds to specific open-ended questions about the session. These anonymous forms let tutors know what their students are learning about in tutoring sessions, how their students are perceiving the tutors' attitudes and approaches, and whether or not students are finding the Center a place they want to return to for help. I read all forms at the end of the day and then

distribute them to the tutors named on the forms. Often I attach a note of praise to each packet. Once in a while the forms will alert me to a problem I may not have observed otherwise, and I can discuss this problem privately with the tutor. Tutors find these forms helpful in letting them know what is working and what isn't. Occasionally, tutors share an especially good assessment with fellow tutors. Sharing these forms helps tutors learn from each other. As tutors become more familiar with their team members, this sharing becomes more frequent.

Midway through the semester, all Writing Center staff members are asked to fill out a *Staff Assessment Questionnaire* form. Staff members in our writing center include credit tutors enrolled in our first-semester tutorial projects class, advanced tutors enrolled in our tutor-mentor class, paid non-credit tutors, receptionists, and computer lab assistants. This assessment form was designed to help me see how these staff members appraise their own practices and professional behaviors. Additionally, the questionnaire serves as a reminder or way for staff members to reflect on what they *are* and *aren't* or *should* and *shouldn't* be doing. Tutors and staff members know there is no grade for turning in this form nor a negative consequence for openly admitting any problem area. In fact, I commend them for bringing a problem into the open and commend them even more if they can come up with a way to solve the problem. On these forms, I get an array of responses:

> "• I'm proud of myself; I haven't been absent once!"
> • "I have turned in the most *Tutor Report* forms so far. If I keep this up, I'll win the certificate at the end of the semester!"
> • "My attitude is pretty good. I try to smile and be helpful even when I'm stressed and tired."
> • "I know I'm supposed to let the

Team Leader know when I need to take a break, but I have just been forgetting to do this lately. I'll try to remember from now on. This questionnaire is a good reminder."
• "I forgot that points are taken off for late journal entries. I guess I'm missing a few points. I'll be sure to get my journals in on time from now on."
• "We lose points for missing the Friday class!?"

At the end of the questionnaire, paid staff members are asked to rank themselves on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), and credit tutors and mentors are asked to estimate their grade. Then they are asked to write a brief explanation for the reason they gave themselves the ranking or grade they did. Interestingly, they have all been pretty honest and accurate so far, sometimes more accurate than I.

THE WRITING LAB
N E W S L E T T E R

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

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