THE WRITING LAB

NEWSLETTER

...FROM THE EDITOR...

If mid-winter, post-holiday blahs have descended upon you and you feel in need of some uplifting reading, turn immediately to Michele Douglass's essay. It's a superb tribute to all that she learned as a tutor and a very useful document for those intent on convincing their institutions that tutoring can be a major educational (and sometimes life-changing) experience for students. And if any of your ex-tutors come back to express their gratitude to you for their time in the center, please encourage them to share their thoughts and insights with the rest of us who read the *Writing Lab Newsletter*.

Also in this issue, you'll find three reviews of Beth Boquet's *Noise from the Center*, reviews written by three important voices in the field. Their responses to Boquet's book make us more aware of how reviews can also be important scholarly essays that contribute to our understanding of our work and our goals. You'll also find Margaret Garner and Carolyn Young's essay on training tutors to work with ESL students and Kelly Knickmeier's essay on acknowledging differences in writing processes in tutorials.

Indeed, a lot of great reading! Enjoy.

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

More than verbs and tenses: The many facets of ESL conferencing

Working with English as a Second Language (ESL) students, University of Wyoming writing center tutors have discovered that many aspects are involved with ESL conferencing. One of the most challenging facets is dealing with the stress that ESL students bring with them to a writing center conference when they are, for the most part, unfamiliar with two areas of our academic culture: the discourse of their field and the discourse of the writing center. Specifically, most ESL students lack an understanding of the expectations of U.S. academic audiences and of their academic discipline's use of sources. In addition, they do not understand the specialized strategies and language that writing center tutors use when trying to help them succeed in their new academic environment. In this paper, we discuss how we prepare writing center tutors to deal with more than just verbs and tenses with their ESL clientele. To help ESL students in both areas of the academic culture, we encourage our tutors to be aware of the obvious differences between the rhetorical style of the client's culture and

our academic culture's expectations. In addition, understanding and explaining differences in cultural styles establishes some common ground about writing that will build trust in the tutor-client relationship and alleviate stress during writing center conferences.

When undergraduate and graduate ESL students enter the University of Wyoming, they are generally unfamiliar with the discourse of their field, particularly the expectations of a U.S. academic audience. Although many have studied the basic concepts of their

field and of the English language in their native countries, their written skills in English are often not acceptable in the new academic environment. Sometimes these students resent having to work at writing for a new audience and defend their own style of writing. This attitude is common among upper division students who come to finish their degree in a specific program, consider their skills generally proficient, and just want to focus on writing in their field.

When ESL students are defensive about their writing, our tutors talk to them about reader expectations. Explaining the different effects that reader-responsible prose and writer-responsible prose have on audiences can help. Students from Asian countries like China, Japan, and Korea and from Arabic-speaking countries are used to writing for a reader-responsible audience, readers who are responsible for making sense of the writing. These countries' homogeneous populations make it possible for readers to share a writer's values and traditions, making it easier for them to understand what the writer is saying. Their culture discourages questioning authority and asserting individuality. As a result, ESL writers from these countries often lack assertive theses and specific, factual support in their writing, two elements U.S. academic audiences expect.

It helps ESL writers to understand why U.S. audiences consider writer-responsible prose more persuasive and that an academic audience holds writers responsible for making their writing clear. Because U.S. academic readers are diverse and heterogeneous, a U.S. academic writer must give a direct statement of purpose, provide transitions, and open and close in a conventional way. If these conventions are absent, the reader struggles to get the meaning of the piece of writing.

Understanding the similarities and differences between U.S. academic discourse and the rhetoric of other cultures also helps us deal with cases of

plagiarism, particularly when the ESL students misunderstand how and when to cite sources and how to use quotations. Most writing tutors can assume (although sometimes incorrectly) that U.S. students understand plagiarism at this point in their academic careers; we conference with them with that assumption. However, we cannot do so with ESL students. The concept of plagiarism differs among cultures. For example, in Asian countries, students often use information from other sources in their writing without documentation because they assume the readers will know the sources. This practice, however, is not appropriate for U.S. academic writing.

One of our tutors faced a tense moment when he questioned a young woman from China about discrepancies in her sentence style. When asked if she had taken certain passages from other authors, the student gave a puzzled look. When asked again, she said, "They say just what I think. They say it better." When she was told that sources needed to be shown, she looked dazed. The tutor then explained the concept and procedure of documentation. As writing center tutors, we not only need to inform our ESL students about citation, but we also have to be aware that this new-to-them, rather complicated system will probably frustrate them so we need to go slowly and make the task of citation seem approachable.

Besides familiarizing ESL students with the preferences of academic prose and the expectations of its readers, we have to remember that writing center discourse may be unfamiliar to them as well. To establish effective tutor-client rapport, we need to introduce ESL clientele to writing center culture carefully, and that requires that we understand what we do and why. We should explain any specialized language we use when talking about writing. We should be sure ESL students understand not only the language but also the kind of questioning and other strategies we might use, such as asking them to read aloud.

One successful series of conferences was with an older Taiwanese woman in the field of international studies. She had learned how to benefit from an efficient conference. She brought only a section of her long master's thesis each time, had specific questions marked in the margins, and immediately began to read aloud. Knowing she had article problems, she would pause slightly before the appropriate nouns trying out an *a* or a *the* until the tutor could confirm which one was the right article.

Another of our clients forced us to bend our rules of the traditional conference. This young woman from China wanted only to practice her oral English so that she could qualify for a teaching assistantship. She made an appointment every day and wanted to have conversations about a topic (whether about math or where to get her car fixed). Feeling that she didn't understand our writing center culture or protocol and not wanting to turn her away, we made up assignments for her so that we had some way to discuss concepts of written language and rhetoric with her. We arranged for her to give an oral presentation on Chinese opera, which happened to be her passion, to a music appreciation class. Then we talked about introductions, development, and closure, and we finally helped her with paragraph development and sentence structure, which ultimately improved her oral grammar.

Establishing common ground and gaining the trust of our ESL clients means we often have to start conferencing at their level and not ours. For many ESL students the principles of academic rhetoric are still quite abstract. Therefore, they are unable to ask the larger questions about their writing because they do not yet know the language. However, ESL students are comfortable with the language of grammar because most have learned English in their native countries and have been taught English through translation and grammar. When they come to the writing center, they most often ask for help with

grammar because that is the language they know. In our experience, we have found that talking about the more concrete issues of grammar can help an ESL writer come to understand the more global or abstract issues that their writing should address.

Writing center tutors need to consider the stress under which ESL students are writing and the effects of that stress. Entering the university environment and meeting the new demands of U.S. academic discourse can produce academic pressure on our ESL clientele. When they come to the writing center upset, worried, or just frustrated, these attitudes, in turn, put pressure on our tutors.

ESL students usually have high expectations of success, put on them by themselves and others. They often have limited time to succeed. In addition, their teachers and advisors sometimes do not understand their English and may assume the students are not very bright or are not trying. Older ESL students expect to be treated as mature adults, and sometimes they are not. Some think they have higher levels of ability in English than they have. In their native countries they may have been praised for their English skills, but in the U.S., the skills are not that effective. These circumstances can cause resistant students.

The University of Wyoming had a special program for Taiwanese students in which they attained a master's degree in one year before returning home to their jobs. During the year they took many classes and were expected to do well, all the while grappling with English and the U.S. academic culture. When they made appointments with the writing center, these students tended to get frustrated because they wanted us to go faster. They wanted appointments every day (or several times a day), and they wanted us to do more of their work. In this case, we needed to understand their frustration but hold firm with our policies. We continued to conduct con-

ferences at a pace at which these students could learn. We stuck to our limit of one appointment per day in order to accommodate other writing center clientele, and we encouraged these students to work on revision rather than do it ourselves.

The pressure on ESL students puts pressure on tutors also. Tutors frequently wonder if they are proceeding correctly, doing too much, doing too little. Sometimes they are made to feel guilty by students urging the tutors to do more to help. Tutors may become resentful of these ESL students because of the pressure they assert and the slow pace they require. Sometimes tutors may be manipulated to do more by the students, and then they thrash themselves for allowing that to happen.

What can we do to override this pressure? Talking among ourselves and supporting each other in this situation help a great deal. In addition, our training program for new writing center staff and interns includes this aspect of tutoring. With the student interns, the writing center instructor spends a lot of time talking and working with the special facets of ESL conferencing, and we have had good results from that training. The new tutors learn how relationships we have with our ESL students and our native speakers differ. If we work with particular ESL students for a number of conferences, we usually establish a mutually satisfying conferencing relationship where we know what they want and they know how we work. We were pleased when one of our student interns was upset because she thought one of the faculty tutors was being too directive with an ESL student. That meant she understood the line to be drawn between too much help and enough help. We work with these student interns and new staff members about having self-confidence in working with ESL students. That self- confidence helps us be consistent and feel good about what we do.

Because many ESL students come into our academic environment having

learned rhetorical styles different from those expected in academic discourse, teachers and tutors must be able to articulate those differences in hopes of teaching these ESL writers new persuasive strategies. They also need to convey understanding about the pressure the ESL students face in U.S. academia. To achieve effective writing center conferencing, tutors must understand more than just verbs and tenses.

Margaret Garner and Carolyn Young
University of Wyoming
Laramie, WY

Writing Center Director MiraCosta Community College

Tenure-track position starting July 1, 2003. The Director will establish and oversee a new Writing Center in the recently completed Library and Information Hub;will lead and supervise the functions of the Writing Center; promote writing across the curriculum to enhance student learning; develop and present writing-to-learn workshops for students, faculty, and staff; hire and train peer tutors to assist students in their writing assignments for all classes; and research and implement computerized materials on writing. Closing date 2/5/03. For application, job announcement, and salary information, visit the Web site <www.miracosta.edu/info/admin/HR/jobs>. Or call job line 760-795-6868 or toll free 1-888-201-8480, ext. 6868. Or leave request by e-mail jobs@miracosta.edu   EOE

Summer Institute for Writing Center Directors

IWCA is very pleased to announce the first annual week-long summer institute for writing center directors and other writing center professionals. As president of IWCA, I am thrilled to be a co-chair along with Brad Hughes of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where the institute will take place, July 27 (an evening welcome and reception), through Friday, August 1, 2003.

The idea first occurred to me after I attended the WPA summer workshop two years ago with Krista Ratcliffe, our incoming WPA. I loved the workshop and learned a great deal, but what I found most valuable was an enhanced sense of the way composition and other writing programs can work in collaboration with writing centers. I felt keenly the commonalities we share with WPAs (and we are indeed writing program administrators ourselves) but at the same time, I was very aware of the different emphases of our programs, as well as the different material conditions under which we work. I was also well aware that new directors most often work in isolation, without a community of peers to consult and without mentoring; they often begin the job with little or no formal training. The idea of holding our own workshop began to take shape.

I soon found, to my delight, that I was by no means the first to see a need for such a thing. The IWCA board was positive and enthusiastic, and Mickey Harris brought it to my attention that Brad Hughes had long hoped to be involved with such a summer experience for writing center people. As Brad and I discussed the possibilities, we found that we shared many ideas about how it could be organized and run, and Brad expressed an interest in hosting it at Madison. Jo Tarvers had also been thinking on similar lines and organized a post-convention workshop after the Savannah IWCA conference.

An active, productive advisory board also furnished us with institute leaders: Muriel Harris of Purdue University, Jon Olson (Penn State University Park), Neal Lerner (MIT), Pam Childers (The McCallie School), James Inman (University of South Florida), and Jill Pennington (Lansing Community College). These leaders come from schools of various sizes and writing centers of different types; they are people who can serve as experienced mentors not only to university writing center directors, but to secondary and middle school as well as community college staffers. Topics will include models and missions for writing centers, writing center literature and research, tutor selection and training, technology and writing centers, OWLs, assessment, facilities and space needs, funding and budgeting, communication with faculty and administrators, record-keeping, and other issues and questions that participants bring to the institute.

Madison is my alma mater, and I can't think of a more vibrant, lively place to hold the first institute. It will be held in a state-of-the-art lakeside conference facility that's just a short block from UW's impressive writing center, from the student union, from the library, and from State Street, an eclectic, exciting pedestrian mall that connects the university with the State Capitol. Brad and his colleagues, Terry Maggio and Melissa Tedrowe, along with many others at Madison, have worked hard to make this an exciting, productive week; they have arranged for graduate or continuing education (CEU) credits and for child care.

Full information about the institute can be found at <www.wisc.edu/writing/institute>; online registration is available. To assure a high-quality experience, we have restricted its size to forty registrants. The institute is filling fast, so if you want to join us for an intense week of presentations, informal discussions, and breakout groups covering a range of writing-centered topics, please act quickly to secure funding and assure yourself a place.

Book Review

Boquet, Elizabeth. *Noise from the Writing Center*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP. 2002. 180 pp. $19.95.

Reviewed by Christina Murphy (Marshall University, Huntington, WV)

Noise from the Writing Center—"The Rest is Silence"

Nancy Maloney Grimm's *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times* (1999) was the first single-authored, theoretical study of the writing center work and research. Elizabeth H. Boquet's *Noise from the Writing Center* (2002) is the second such book of this type. Grimm's book won the scholarship award from the International Writing Centers Association for book of the year in 1999; Boquet's book may win that award for 2002. Interestingly, while Grimm's book represents a postmodern critique, it is written more in the traditional style of modern scholarship than in the disjointed and accumulative style of postmodernism. Interestingly, while Boquet's book takes on more of the style of postmodernism, it is focused almost singularly on a traditional modern problem—what to make of the writing center within the confines of academic concerns. While only three years separate these books in publication dates, worlds of similarities unite them, while worlds of emphases and epistemologies separate them. Grimm states in her introduction that her goal "is to make well-intentioned people uncomfortable" (x). I would argue that Boquet's goal is to make well-intentioned people *comfortable*. The difference, of course, is what constitutes for each author (and each reader) "well-intentioned people" and what it means to be comfortable or uncomfortable with the work that the writing center does.

Let me say that the premise or opening concept of *Noise* is quite engaging. The book grew out of Boquet's response to and reflections upon a formal memo of complaint from a faculty member officed in the same building

as the writing center who was distressed by the amount of noise coming from the writing center on a late Sunday afternoon when he was attempting to get work done in his office. What he perceived as a party in the writing center was actually a staff meeting, and Boquet uses his letter to draw distinctions between the "noise" in the writing center and the "deafening silence in most of our classroom buildings" (xv). From that memo opposed to noise in the writing center (and, by extension, in academics) Boquet weaves an interesting tapestry of speculations on the relationship of the types of "joyful noise" to be found in popular music with the "joyful noise" that could be/should be found in writing centers.

Both Grimm and Boquet excel at the use of analogies, stories drawn from personal experience, case studies of students, and histories of places and locales as they define people's identities. These stories and anecdotes illuminate theory and make abstract concepts accessible. The use of these tropes within research and scholarship affirms the passion each author holds for the subject at hand. For Grimm, it is the belief that writing centers need to be advocates of reform and change in education. For Boquet it is . . . .? Perhaps it is a good thing that I cannot so easily express her premise as I can Grimm's, but perhaps it is not such a good thing. Grimm and Boquet have similar epiphanies—those moments in writing center work when one thinks, as Boquet states, "maybe I had been asking the wrong questions, that maybe I needed to come up with a different set of questions, a different way of imagining the work of writing centers and the relationship of the work that goes on in them to students, to faculty, to . . . me" (3-4). The result of

this reflection is that both Grimm and Boquet do come up with a different set of questions and a different way of imagining the work of writing centers. What is ironic, perhaps, is how similar their conclusions about differences are.

Boquet lays the groundwork for her analysis in a chapter on early metaphors for the writing center familiar to us all—the clinic, the lab, the center. She explores these metaphors from the traditional perspectives of existing scholarship and then adds some "messiness" (my term) to the picture. Nothing in these metaphors was as fixed or black and white as one might conclude from the scholarship; often where one's own view falls with regard to the white, black, or shades of grey says more about one's own philosophies and expectations for writing center work than it does about the clinic, lab, or center itself. In the same vein, the concepts of the feminization of writing center work and composition instruction in the academy and the prevailing notion that "getting one's hands dirty" with practice is inherently inferior to the "cleanliness" of theory are concepts that Boquet investigates. The manner in which she does so may delight some, puzzle others, and turn off a few. The manner is a far-ranging mix of quotations from postmodern writers like Derrida to personal discussions of friends in labor and giving birth. The questions raised in all settings are: where is the noise, and where is the static? Essentially, is the vision simplified by dichotomizing (at best) versus including the noise of multiple perspectives and the static of ideas still being formulated? Boquet's response is that she views her book—and all of her scholarship from her dissertation on—as "a project now working against the certainty of the whole,

the centeredness of the (writing) center" (24).

It is difficult to argue against the value of any project that calls into question the "certainty of the whole" in the sense that "certainty" is what any scholarly or pragmatic investigation of endeavors as complex as writing centers, or composition instruction, or academics itself should aspire to. Part of any investigation is to make "uncertain" some of our most cherished "certainties"—a claim very similar to Grimm's in *Good Intentions* that her "goal is to make well-intentioned people uncomfortable" and to "disrupt the good intentions not only of the people who don't understand the value of writing centers but also, most important, of the people who think they do" (x). To accomplish this disruption, Grimm uses the metaphors of mapmaking, quilt making, and of "fixing things" in the sense of the *bricoleur* or "fix-it man" in a metaphor Grimm says she borrowed from James Raymond but that actually comes from cultural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. Boquet uses metaphors of noise and images of disruption. Let me say that I found this chapter engaging, as I assume many readers will. I found myself cheering on many of Boquet's assertions and finding an intellectual pleasure in the types of connections she could make among a broad range of writers, events, social issues, and pedagogical assumptions. All of which bring the reader to Boquet's interesting statement and conclusion:

> Rather than adhering to the marginal mindset that writing center staff are "underdogs" (a mindset perceived by [Jeanette] Harris and [Joyce] Kinkead), "renegades, outsiders, boundary dwellers, subversive" ([Kevin] Davis), rather than assuming that writing centers arise *from* the margins, exist *on* the margins, and are populated *by* the marginal, we might instead view writing center staff and students as *bastardizing*

the work of the institution. That is, we might say they are not a threat from *without* but are rather a threat from *within*. We might seize the designation of institutional illegitimacy as a way of explaining our lack of faithfulness to our origins. (*Their fathers, after all, are inessential.*) [Donna] Harraway offers the example of the regenerative potential of the salamander that loses a limb. Though the salamander can grow another one, we can't be sure, really, what that limb is going to look like. It certainly won't be a perfect replica of the old one. And it could even turn out to be Monstrous. (32)

OK, a couple of questions here. The first is whether Boquet's sense of our being a threat from *within* rather than from *without* is all that different from Kevin Davis' view (espoused in 1995) that we can be "subversive"? [Let me add I am assuming this is a reference to Kevin Davis' often-quoted 1995 article on "Life Outside the Boundary: History and Direction in the Writing Center" since Boquet gives a citation to K. Davis but no K. Davis is included in the list of References at the end of the book.] Is this concept all that different from Grimm's challenges to our "good intentions" in her 1999 book and her call to a new vision of writing center work that is counter-institutional when the institution itself is indifferent or impervious to challenges to its hegemony from within or without the academy? I don't find that much difference. I see Boquet's call for change as written with a new twist or angle through its broad-ranging images drawn largely from music and popular culture, but actually not that substantive when the call and the images are examined in some detail. Aside from the fact that one might claim a faulty analogy to compare an institutional construct like a writing center to an organic entity like a salamander, the question still remains as to what a Monstrous writing center might look

like—or perhaps, more to the point, what it might be able to achieve. Boquet is quiet silent on that point—a special irony for a book on noise. We are left with statements like this:

> Such a monstrosity exceeds expectations for the "normal" and that excess, for those of us who work in writing centers, is potentially a way in/out/around the central/marginal/community quagmire we've been stuck in for too long. The question of whether our practices are central to the work of our universities is closely aligned with the degree to which those practices adhere to institutional expectations. The degree of our marginality, in contrast, corresponds to the extent to which we fail to adhere to those expectations (and to the extent to which our institutions fail us). (32)

Exceeding expectations for the "normal" is "potentially a way in/out/ around the central/marginal/community quagmire we've been stuck in for too long"—how so? and why only "potentially"? and what exactly is the "quagmire" we have been stuck in for too long? The next set of sentences on how central our work is to the academy provides no new insights, and I think that this set of assumptions is inaccurate both philosophically and historically. If the assumptions were correct, then the history of writing centers would not be what it is today. Instead, we would be in the hegemonic and culturally conservative writing centers of the 1950s and 1960s and not the writing centers that serve multicultural populations and needs. Few of us find our institutions unwilling to support multicultural and postmodern efforts to address literacy concerns. More and more of us continue to find ourselves working in and directing writing centers that define complex literacy needs and that develop initiatives to respond effectively to these concerns. More and more of us occupy faculty lines and tenured positions and find our professional concerns at the center of

many of our institutions' efforts for instruction and for community outreach. Institutional mandates are broad to assist the range of students who populate our campuses, and the concept that marginalized writing centers are those that oppose counter-hegemony on most academic campuses seems to me an inaccurate view. If it were true, most writing centers would have been shut down years ago as opposed to the much brighter, more vigorous, and more institutionally situated actuality for many writing centers today. What problems remain often reside more with the faculty who tend to misunderstand our work (shades of Stephen North in 1984) than with the structure of institutions that often support our work with faculty lines, budgets, space, support staff, graduate or peer student stipends, institutional affiliations with WAC programs and other literacy efforts, instructional technology, and so forth.

What problems remain often reside within writing center personnel themselves who have difficulty balancing the demands of assimilation for multicultural students versus a resistance to assimilation. This concept is central to Grimm's *Good Intentions* and is more a broader issue that pervades cultural processes than it is an issue exclusive to writing centers. And here again, too, the issue does not seem one of institutional mandates for conformity so much as the ambivalence or cognitive dissonance that writing center personnel feel—and Grimm herself admits—in respecting cultural and socioeconomic diversity and wanting to preserve that diversity and the self-esteem of each diverse individual, versus the very real cultural reality that assimilation is a means to social acceptance and to social success in American culture. To go to either side of this dichotomy is to disadvantage someone or some ideal, and that is the problem. It is much more a personal conflict of ethics and of personal definitions of how and why education should be empowering for individuals than it is an

institutional conflict over support (financial and otherwise) for whether a writing center can survive in endorsing counter-hegemonic views and practices. And I believe that this same cognitive dissonance would exist even if the writing center itself were moved from the academy and were operated within the community by grants, donations, or other financial means. What values are involved in the decision by writing center personnel to help others assimilate or not assimilate, that really *is* the question. That's the type of "noise" or cognitive dissonance we should be investigating, not the idea that the "noise" comes mostly or primarily from institutional constraints. But I digress. Let me return to Boquet's *Noise*.

I accept that postmodern writing does not favor the traditional structures of argument, such as transitions and logical connections, so the disjunction between the chapter on metaphors for the writing center and the chapter that follows on "Channeling Jimi Hendrix, or Ghosts in the Feedback Machine" seems a reasonable postmodern leap from metaphors of institutionality to metaphors of activity and purpose. I must say here that I think this chapter—which is filled with much energy and many vibrant images and memorable lines and that also provides many interesting glimpses into Jimi Hendrix's life and music—takes the long way home to some very pedestrian conclusions. In fact, I think some of these conclusions could be lifted from this context and dropped into tutoring manuals from a decade or so ago, and few readers would find much difference in them or consider them radically out of place. For example, Boquet brings this chapter to shore after discussing the changes Jimi Hendrix brought to the music of his day, with these statements:

> The obvious question here is, at least as I see it, what would a different model for staff education consist of? How might we develop a model that encourages tutors to "voyage

out"? The different model that I am working toward—and I'll be the first to admit (and I am certain my tutors will back me up) that we're not there yet—is a higher-risk/higher-yield model for writing center work. The first step involves those of us who work with tutors (and I'm including at least some measure of faculty support beyond the director of the writing center): we need to recast our understanding of the nature of experience so that we might think of it, in terms of training, not as something someone "gets" (so that peer tutors always fall short when compared to graduate students who fall short when compared to professional staff who fall short when compared to faculty, etc.). To think of experience not as something that someone either possesses or doesn't but instead as something which is continually constructed and reconstructed.

This higher-risk/higher-yield model asks us to reformulate the question "what (or how much) do tutors need to know?" and to cast it, instead, in more musical terms: how might I encourage this tutor to operate on the edge of his or her expertise? And, for tutors: where is the groove for this session? Where's the place where, together, we will really feel like we're jammin' and how do we get there? Where, as [Nancy] Welch has framed it, is there space for play? (80-81)

I don't follow the logic of moving away from the question of asking "what (or how much) do tutors need to know" to encouraging tutors, instead, "to operate on the edge of his or her expertise." What is this expertise and where does it come from if we are not concerned with "what" and "how much" tutors need to know? And I truly wonder, for all of Boquet's hopes and expectations that musical experiences and metaphors can translate into realities in tutoring, how many tutors at any level (peer, graduate, faculty, etc.)

are really capable of "jammin'" in the way that a talented, once-in-a-generation talent like Jimi Hendrix was capable of achieving in the realm of music. And again I ask—perhaps with too much left brain concern entering into Boquet's right brain fantasy—what would this "jammin'" look like and how would it be achieved? Can there be good "jammin'" and bad "jammin'"? I can think of many instances in which tutors could be "jammin'" on ideas that they passionately believe in and enjoy sharing with others, and yet be ineffective or counterproductive—if not downright destructive. And I notice how much of Boquet's vision of this new model of the writing center and of tutoring relates to "feelings" and the "feel" of things. I wish that it could be so easy to engage people in effective tutoring that it could be done mostly by feel while one is "jammin'".

Later on, Boquet says: "I feel strongly that writing-center sessions are not substitutes for faculty response or supplements to classroom instruction. Sessions in the writing center have their own, let's say, groove" (86). If you would wish to know what exactly that "groove" might be, it is hard to find a substantial answer in Chapter Three on "Toward a Performative Pedagogy in the Writing Center." There is more discussion here of music and music metaphors; there is a sense that good tutors should be/would be like great musical performers more or less following the feeling and going with the energy of the moment; there is an attempt to describe the structure of a tutoring session that sounds remarkably like most sessions described in current tutoring manuals and conducted daily in many writing centers in the country; there are, throughout the chapter, entries from journals, tutor-client talk, discussions of tutor meetings; and there are images of tutors and of their own sense of their work that emerge from this montage of techniques that Boquet employs to tell her story. It is interesting, it is definitely

engaging, it has what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1991 called *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* and what Boquet describes as "jammin'". What is not here is anything new—new, that is, beyond the "new" re-labeling of familiar terms and concepts. And there are passages that, in my opinion, are difficult to extract meaningful insights from. For example, when one of Boquet's tutors comments that one of the passages in this book that describes a tutoring session is not "optimistic enough," Boquet writes:

> I had no useful response. Optimism? Optimism struck me then, and does now, as not even the appropriate frame for discussion, since optimism seems decidedly outcome-oriented. Optimism is fact-based and, as such, it is rooted in the past. We can be optimistic about future events to the extent that we are able to link them in some way to previous successful outcomes. By contrast, *hope* requires us to anticipate successful outcomes even when we have no reasonable expectation that the future will be any different from the past, we simply believe it to be so. Hope in this way, to quote Ernst Bloch, is "capable of surviving disappointment." (139)

I am hopeful (or is it optimistic?) that there is some "deep" message or distinction here that is an important one, but I think this is "language juggling" as only a rhetorician can do—or a Sophist. After all, was it not Aristotle who described hope as the expectation of some future good? And hope by Boquet's definition is still anticipating successful outcomes, only with less optimism (or is it hope?). See what I mean?

This is a book that has a chapter called "Conclusion" but that has difficulty with a convincing conclusion. Ultimately, Boquet tells us this is "a book, in the end, about hope." Unfortunately, the hope she advocates here

does not support her earlier quotation from Ernest Bloch that hope "is capable of surviving disappointment" because, in the end, this book does disappoint. In the end, it falls back on clichés—however heartfelt—such as the comparison of the writing center to the description of a guitar in the promotional material for an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum—that the guitar is "no longer merely a machine that makes sounds." Boquet writes: "The last several decades on writing centers has provided us with rich descriptions of the skills and strategies of writing center practitioners. We have not so self-consciously considered, however, the ways in which the writing center is no longer (was it ever?) merely a machine that makes writers (much less writing). How, without sounding a note, the writing center is already a bundle of meaning and possibilities hinted at, if not entirely contained, in the product" (149).

OK, label me stupid, but if *that* really is the case, then where is Boquet's response to this problem—where does she consider the issues she raises about the "bundle of meaning and possibilities" that has not been "self-consciously" examined in writing center scholarship over the last several decades? If *Noise* is to be viewed as that exploration, then it has not achieved its objectives. Like many articles and books on writing centers, *Noise* is effective at describing a set of "issues" or problems a writer identifies with writing center practice—yet ineffective in providing meaningful approaches, alternative, or solutions. Where are we headed next, and will we get there by "jammin'"? Will we get there by drawing our metaphors and images and guiding concepts from Jimi Hendrix and popular culture? Or will we get there by some truly new ideas and some genuine honesty about our current circumstances and challenges in the writing center? After all, the writing center Boquet directs and describes is not a conservative writing center working in support of traditional aca-

demic hegemony. Instead, it seems to be composed of "writing center staff and students" who are quite good at "*bastardizing* the work of the institution" (32). In fact, the writing center she describes contradicts Boquet's broad philosophical claim: "The question of whether our practices are central to the work of our universities is closely aligned with the degree to which those practices adhere to institutional expectations. The degree of our marginality, in contrast, corresponds to the extent to which we fail to adhere to those expectations (and to the extent to which our institutions fail us)" (32). Boquet's writing center is not de-

scribed as one marginalized for failing to adhere to institutional expectations or for "*bastardizing* the work of the institution." In fact, its greatest "crime" seems to be producing too much "noise" that annoyed a professor under pressure to complete his tenure file on a late Sunday afternoon. Other than that, Boquet, from what she describes, seems to have broad latitude and support in exploring new territories, in *bastardizing* old practices and challenging the traditions of the "fathers," and in creating both "noise" and "static."

I found *Noise* to be a "good read"

and Boquet to be a fine romancer, in the tradition of great storytellers who can spin engaging fantasies. *Noise* tells us that the writing center should be/can be more noble than what it is, and that a better world lies ahead—if only we will embrace it. Unfortunately, even though Boquet has a genuine concern that the work of the writing center will "go right" and will matter in the institutional and cultural landscape, she is short on the specifics of how this transformation will occur. This is the "silence" or "static" at the center of the beautiful "noise" that Boquet has created.

Reviewed by Nancy Grimm (Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI)

Unlike edited collections, which are valuable for providing multiple perspectives on issues, a single-authored book provides a focused and in-depth consideration of important topics. We have too few single-authored books in writing center studies and too few that attend to everyday issues with theoretical clarity. *Noise from the Writing Center* is such a book, and it calls for an attentive reading. As the opening quote from Deleuze in the prologue suggests, this is a book written "at the frontiers of our knowledge," a book that pokes at the edges of what we know for sure about writing centers and asks what more could be going on than we have yet to say. Boquet's book is a thoughtful, deeply reflective investigation of the intellectual work of writing centers. Using varied theoretical lenses, multiple metaphors, and the chronicle of a summer staff education program at another college, Boquet examines the writing center's relationship with the university as well as her relationship with herself as a scholar/teacher/administrator. With respect to the questions Boquet is willing to ask about writing center practice, the book has the same piquant courage of Nancy Welch's *Getting Restless*.

What I appreciate most about the

book is its potential for moving the field forward. Boquet models how examining our frustrations with colleagues, students, and our own tired approaches often leads to breakthrough understandings and productive change. Boquet urges us to "com[e] clean about the chaotic nature of our work" because the transformative possibilities of writing center work "must develop *out* of chaos, not through the elimination of it" (84). Following Jimi Hendrix, Boquet amplifies the "noise" of the writing center, sharing what she thinks about what she hears and suggesting other melodies to be played against the noise.

Boquet begins her book with the dissonance created by a condescending memo from an irritated colleague complaining about the "noise" emanating from the writing center that she directs at Fairfield University. Rather than slam the door shut, Boquet instead takes the memo as a productive encounter (as in a productive cough), one that eventually leads her to embrace the metaphor of noise as an apt one for theorizing writing center work. Musing about her colleague's complaint and her response to it, she remembers a much earlier but still disturbing writing center encounter with "Todd," a stu-

dent she tutored when she was a peer tutor. She credits her unproductive sessions with Todd for initiating her search for answers "about the things I thought I knew, about the things he didn't know, about how we both came to be where we were" (2). She concludes that to close the door (some of us would prefer to slam) as a defense mechanism would signal "an unwillingness to engage, a refusal to ask *What is it I hear that others fail to hear?*" (23). This becomes a central question in her book as she pokes at various metaphors for writing centers, searching for one that opens up possibilities rather than produces closure, one that invites transformation rather than one that reduplicates the noise of the institution. In reflecting on the noise a writing center is not supposed to make, Boquet observes, "Ironically, it is the noise, not the official information, that allows for the mutation and potential reorganization of the system" (51).

To explore the possibilities of writing centers becoming places "powerful enough to allow for the mutation and potential reorganization of our system of education," Boquet wisely begins with tutor training, which she aptly calls staff education. (51). Thinking

through the approaches and texts she has used in her nine years as a writing center director, Boquet comments, "I think we do tutors a disservice when we 'train' them in ways that suggest that we are more concerned with their being competent than with their being truly exceptional" (81).

Recognizing that transformative possibilities require the reconsideration of the typical preemptive, lock-step model of tutor training, "where we offer solutions to problems tutors may not have encountered yet" (72), she travels to Rhode Island College (RIC) to study the staff education program Meg Carroll has developed. According to Boquet, "[Carroll] has found a way to emphasize foundational principles of collaborative work and the political significance of literacy and education not only by way of the readings compiled to prepare tutors for this work, but also by inviting tutors into the design of their own and their peers' education" (90).

Rather than offering a prescription for "training blahs," Boquet's study offers instead "exaltations" on the work of peer tutors in one particular writing center (87). What she finds in Carroll's program is indeed worthy of exaltation. Boquet provides ethnographic observation of the staff education program as well as extended quotes from interviews with RIC tutors and from papers submitted for the course, many of which I annotated with exclamation points and stars. The tutors show an understanding of the political and ideological work of literacy and the reflexive tutoring this awareness calls for in ways I often find absent in other published accounts of writing center work. For example, Mike, one of the experienced undergraduate tutors contributing to the design of the summer program, writes of the importance of reaching "a critical unease that leads each participant in the group to consider where-am-I and to ask, how does another person go through this process?" (103). Later, Mike recognizes how his own proficiency can often si-

lence others: "My desire to express my emotions and mind patterns to my friends only ends in silencing them" (116). Jay, an experienced tutor, acknowledges the recursive and reflective nature of learning in a writing center: "Although the only rehearsal for a session is a session itself, we have the opportunity to recreate the experience in the next session, and to change it based on reflecting on the last session" (127). Donna, an artist and mother of two who is preparing to be a tutor, already recognizes that literacy involves far more than learning to write: "Helping people communicate with pride in a culture that is sometimes hostile toward them based on the way they look and where they come from is a task that requires a willingness to learn as well as to teach. It goes beyond 'where there's a will there's a way'" (122).

Noise from the Writing Center contributes to a growing movement in writing center studies that sees writing centers not strictly in terms of service to the institution but also as places where knowledge is constructed, opportunities are created, and transformation is begun. *Noise from the Writing Center* ends rather than concludes, fittingly perhaps for a book inviting the field to think differently about what writing centers do. I hope the field takes up the invitation in active ways, making substantive changes and sharing the results. These are the efforts I hope will come next:

1. I hope we reconstruct tutor training as staff education, making an effort to provide an education that fosters the critical unease, the cultural critique, and the reflexivity evident in the comments of the tutors quoted above. At RIC, Meg Carroll regularly invites both experienced and novice tutors to become designers of the next staff education program, thus instantiating the vision of students called for by the New London Group—designers of social futures (*Multiliteracies*, 2000). Shaping staff education in this way should

lead to changes in the ways things are traditionally done and result in new ways of thinking about perennial issues. Clearly, in Carroll's writing center, it produced a community of tutors who keep their options open and who willingly second-guess themselves.

2. I hope that as we collaborate with tutors and with colleagues at other writing centers, we can find creative ways to represent the results of our collaborations. Academic discourse pushes us toward traditional notions of authorship. Attempts to break away from a monologic voice often appear awkward and fragmented. In *Noise from the Writing Center*, Meg Carroll's accomplishments are abundantly evident yet her voice is noticeably absent. Her name is listed on page two of the acknowledgements, well after the names of Boquet's graduate school friends and colleagues at Fairfield. There may have been deliberate decisions made about this, but they were not foregrounded. Boquet, a tenured professor, was able to use sabbatical leave time to study the program designed by Carroll (a part-time administrative staff person). I think that those writing center directors who are tenured and enjoy the (occasional) luxury of time to reflect and write need to continue such collaborations but also to find new ways of foregrounding the contributions of those whose appointments are constructed differently.

3. The focus of this book was necessarily on the people who *work* in writing centers. As the field develops, I hope that our focus will also begin to include the people who *use* writing centers. Adding their voices would contribute more of the "noise" that provides reasons to rethink and reshape our practice. Moreover,

including the students' experiences of the literacy curriculum is essential if a goal is to transform the institution.

4. Identities (race, class, ethnicity, discourse orientation) strongly influence the way students write and tutors tutor and directors direct. I hope that as writing centers amplify the noise and feed back more information to our institutions that identities will merit more attention. Reading the words of the tutors at RIC, I kept wondering if some of their astuteness about systems, their effectiveness at opening up spaces for conversation, and their tendency to dismiss their work as "just talking" might have come from experiences shaped by race, class, culture, or ethnicity. I think writing centers are well positioned to study the ways that identities shape and reshape one's view of institutional expectations. I also found myself wondering how much of what I read about both Carroll's and Boquet's writing centers was shaped by the context of relatively small Eastern schools with strong liberal arts programs. I found myself wondering how the programs at schools with a larger writing center staff, a staff with engineering and science majors, a school located in another geographic region might be different. These details about identities and contexts are in fact part of what we need to amplify as we take up Boquet's call to "refus[e] an identity construction that merely positions the center as a reduplication of the sound of the academy" (141-142). As she reminds us, "[I]t is not in the typical that our hope resides" (141).

Reviewed by James McDonald (University of Louisiana—Lafayette, Lafayette, LA)

"Where is the noise?" in our theories, metaphors, and histories of writing centers, Elizabeth Boquet asks in her new book, *Noise from the Writing Center*. Boquet is troubled by representations of writing center work that she finds too "romanticized" or "monolithic"–"sanitized" of the messiness, labor, and noise of writing center life and practice. Boquet wants to disrupt received opinions in writing centers and promote a more improvisational approach to tutoring and tutor training than minimalist tutoring can provide. I read *Noise from the Writing Center* in part as a response to the recent proliferation of tutor-training manuals and collections of important articles on writing centers, which may signal the formation of dogmas governing our practices and views of writing centers. The climax of Boquet's book is a description of a summer tutor-training course at Rhode Island College that attempts, not always successfully, to recognize the noisy nature of a writing center and to encourage tutors to question dogmas and work out tutoring practices more attuned to the complexities and exigencies of individual conferences and students.

One of the most interesting sections of *Noise from the Writing Center* is its examination of writing center metaphors in Chapter 1, "Tutoring as (Hard) Labor." "Setting metaphors in motion appeals to me," Boquet writes. "It gets me thinking less about the structural entities themselves as foundational–*the* lab, *the* clinic, *the* center– and more about the fundamental moments being played out *in* them, shifting the terms of the discussion 'by leaping out of a "mechanics of solids" and into a discussion of *fluidity*'" (18). Boquet often takes issue with other scholars' discussions of the meanings of metaphors for writing centers but then appropriates the metaphors to explore other meanings. Her critique of lab, clinic, and midwife metaphors in writing center literature, for example, leads Boquet into an exploration of writing center work as "the hard-labor center of the academy," where Boquet considers writing center as factory-like cleaning services for student papers, drawing on Barbara Ehrenreich's critique of maid services, yet argues for embracing writing center practice as labor instead of hiding the toiling, pain, messiness, and noise.

Boquet's noise metaphor is in part an attempt to disrupt the sterile debates about the place of writing centers at the center or margins of the institutions that house them: "Tales of writing centers are invariably tales of location, space. They involve a privileging of the gaze" (38). So, instead of the visual metaphors of the politics of location, which tend to fix and objectify their subjects, Boquet turns to sound metaphors, drawing on the example of Jimi Hendrix and on the theories of noise developed by Michel Serres and others. "Where we can shift our gaze, avert our eyes, even (as Peter Elbow points out) close them altogether," Boquet writes, ". . . we receive sound in an undifferentiated manner–it is disorder; it is chaos–and we must constantly labor to make sense of the input, to filter and to direct our attention properly. Our writing centers seem clearly to be academic spaces designed to explore the relationship, to exploit the tension, between sight and sound" (38-39). Boquet does not present noise as a metaphor for what a writing center should or should not strive to become but as a metaphor that can help tutors and directors listen more for the sounds of pain and dissonance as well as for the opportunities and possibilities in the writing and writers that come to the writing center. Theories of noise can get at some of what the contact zone metaphor gets at—the clash of systems where what is intelli-

gent and valued in one system is heard as chaotic noise in another system. But a metaphor grounded in sound rather than sight and territory suggests more of the fluidity that Boquet sees lacking in many accounts of writing centers and allows Boquet to develop a metaphor–feedback–that works particularly well in understanding dialogue between tutor and writer, not only the creative possibilities of a conference where tutor and writer are attuned to each other but also the pain that criticism of a student's writing often causes and the deadening effect of a "feedback loop" where tutors, for example, rely on "stock methods and stock responses" (78). Because of the relationship to information theory, a theory of noise risks treating human communication and relationships too mechanically, but Boquet largely avoids this problem, largely because of her use of music and Hendrix.

Boquet ignores one metaphor offered in the first pages of the book, in a memo from a colleague complaining about noise coming from Boquet's writing center at Fairfield University, a memo that provoked Boquet's exploration of the work and noise of writing centers. The unhappy professor had mistaken a meeting for a party. Considering that Boquet grew up in the Mardi Gras country of Louisiana, I was disappointed that she did not take up a metaphor that is rich in possibilities for considering community, difference, and outsider/insider relationships. But the mistake Boquet's colleague made is an ironic one, for Boquet argues that tutors, directors, and students should be having more fun in writing centers than they are, that writing centers should be more about "possibilities and play" by engaging in more improvisation, even though improvisation would also bring more risk and dissonance into a center. Writing centers are too concerned with "academic seriousness," Boquet believes, especially the seriousness represented by statistical research to satisfy administrators. Instead of a

celebratory piece extolling writing center accomplishments, *Noise* often expresses disillusionment about where we work. "For many of us, our universities are not the communities we thought they would be" (5), Boquet writes, and she doubts that she has made her writing center into a community and even that she should take on this feminized position toward her tutors.

Yet if I were to choose one book on writing centers for reading at the beach, I'd select *Noise from the Writing Center*. Like a good summer book, *Noise from the Writing Center* is an easy and pleasurable read, for all the troubles that Boquet explores, and Boquet certainly has peer tutors in mind as part of her audience. She writes as an essayist rather than in the style of an academic book. She writes with an informal style and tone, frequently with wry humor, and her book is filled with rich descriptions, stories, and characterizations of the individuals that populate the book, and Boquet engages in a lot of language play and play with print conventions. Boquet eschews an academic argument for the open-ended, less conclusive approach of an essay that takes the reader on a journey with the author that begins with a tense exchange of memos with her colleague and eventually leads to a summer spent in Meg Carroll's tutor-training course at Rhode Island College. As much as Boquet cites and analyzes scholarly works, the heart of her book is her reflections of Jimi Hendrix's use of noise and improvisation for writing centers. The pleasure and joy in Boquet's writing plays as a counterpoint to the pain and disillusionment of much of her analysis of writing centers, that her awareness of the deeply entrenched problems of writing centers has not blinded her to the possibilities and play that can be found in writing centers. Boquet's style also seems to be an argument about what kinds of research individuals should be conducting in writing centers; at one point Boquet objects to

calls for writing center directors to do the "research we think *administrators* really care about": "it is late in my day (some days) when I manage to do the research I really care about. I can't tell you how nearly impossible it is to find time to do the research I *don't* really care about" (47). Boquet clearly cares about her research here and works hard to get readers to care as well.

Boquet's desire for an improvisational approach to tutoring leads her to address the practical problem of tutor training. Boquet writes that she is "unhappy with a model of staff education that sets up a content model for tutoring, a low-risk/low-yield approach" (77). Because Boquet wants tutors to take more risks and be more responsive to individual students and unique circumstances rather than relying on a "carefully constructed shield of strategies" (77), she cannot offer one solution to tutor training. Instead she describes the experience of Carroll's course at Rhode Island College that summer in detail without seeming to offer the course as a model to imitate. The process of tutor training here is a messy one, often not going as Carroll and her staff had planned, and while the tutors often benefit from the course, Boquet does not ignore the problems that occurred over the summer. The messiness is part of the process, and Boquet makes a point of allowing the tutors to offer their own analyses and assessments of the class rather than offering her own evaluation alone. However, I would have liked more discussion of the issues of labor, identity, and institutional demands in the analysis of Carroll's course. Readers, especially those who encounter *Noise from the Writing Center* in tutor training, should evaluate the lessons taken from Carroll's course in light of the institutional contexts and student populations in their writing centers as well as with an ear to injecting pleasure and play in their work with writers.

TUTORS' COLUMN

After my first semester tutoring in the Writing Center, I have noted common differences in how tutors approach the writing process compared to their tutees. I feel these observations provide insight into our relationship with those seeking our assistance. Acknowledging the writing experience we bring to a session is important if that session is to be effective.

We like to write. This is a safe assumption among writing tutors. We wouldn't take the time to help others become better writers if we didn't enjoy the activity ourselves. To us, writing is not a terrifying activity, but a rewarding one. We've achieved success as writers or we wouldn't be tutoring the subject. However, unfortunately, the same can't always be said of our tutees. This goes without saying, but can often be overlooked. Some tutees have an outright bad attitude toward writing. Others find it a scary and intimidating process. I have found that assessing a tutee's fondness for writing is necessary at the beginning of a session. An undetected bad attitude can limit effective communication in a session; an intimidated tutee needs more reassurance and encouragement from you than constructive criticism. Taking the time to assess attitude provides an opportunity for a friendly conversation, a conversation that can help create comfort and build rapport. It also allows a tutee time to relax and an opening to share with you background information. Maybe English is their second language or they have a learning disability. In my experience, taking the extra five minutes to evaluate a tutee's attitude toward the writing process can only benefit the session. It reveals with what sensitivity you need to approach someone's paper. Never assume that the tutee relates to writing as well as you do.

As tutors, we have writing experience. We know what a well-written paper contains and how to effectively organize our arguments. We know not to include new information in the conclusion. We recognize the need for transition words and phrases. We know how to properly cite quotations. We have outgrown the five-paragraph essay form. Even at the college level, however, this does not always apply to our tutees. Often times we have become so accustomed to thinking as writers, that we have difficulty relating to our tutees. For example, we know and use a writer's jargon when explaining things to our tutees. While we almost innately understand words like sentence fragment, dependent clause, and thesis statement, we can't assume that our tutees do. A tutee may not know what you mean when you ask for a transitional phrase or how the argument could be more developed. I'm not asking you to assume the tutee knows nothing. I just want to point out that even these words we find basic and freely throw around can be intimidating or uncomfortable for our tutees.

Another aspect of writing that tutors may assume the tutee realizes is that writing expectations differ among various disciplines. I remember getting lab reports back from my professor with comments on my descriptive and vivid imagery. "Beautifully written," he wrote, "but this isn't an English class." It was a difficult process of recognition, even for me as a first-year student. The thing to remember is that our tutees may be undergoing the same process. I've read political science papers that belonged in an English class and research papers that sounded like a philosophic debate. It isn't that the tutee writes poorly, he/she just hasn't realized the differing expectations of writing in other disciplines. This is why it is important not only to assess a tutee's attitude, but his/her knowledge as well. Once again, a simple conversation proves invaluable. The simple question of what's your major or have you ever taken a history class before can be a natural method for assessing a student's writing knowledge and experience. Even without an *assessing* conversation, if in a session, a paper seems to be missing something, first check to see that the paper was written according to the appropriate expectation of the discipline.

Because we, as tutors, usually enjoy the writing process, understand the elements of a well-written paper, and generally consider ourselves good writers, we approach the writing process with a confidence many of our tutees lack. The reasons for this lack of confidence among our tutees could be attributed to a whole host of factors. However, if we are to be effective in helping them gain confidence and become better writers, we first need to recognize the advantage we often bring to the table during a session. My experience has shown that conversation is the most effective tool tutors can utilize to overcome this inequality; it allows the tutor an opportunity to assess the attitude and needs of a tutee.

Kelly Knickmeier
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT

Justification for writing centers and tutor training

Many years ago, I had the pleasure of working as a tutor in a university writing center. I won't tell you which one because every writing center deserves the praise I forthrightly bestow. During my time at the writing center, I met another tutor with similar interests. Today, we are running our own corporation focused on business media, and enjoying our success.

I have often paused to reflect on how lucky I was to have worked as a university tutor. While I make a living off what I learned in the writing center, I frequently see experienced technical writers struggle to create understandable instructions. I see professional writers meander from point to point with no compass or anchor. And, every day, I am grateful for my understanding of the writing process. I am grateful for the tools the writing center gave me.

I can't begin to illustrate the difference my experience at the center made. Honestly. And I'm not alone. I have a friend, Diane, whom I met after I had already started my career in business media. Toward the end of her college career, she was offered a position as a teaching assistant for a women's studies class. The class consisted of a group lecture that broke into small discussion groups on the off days. Diane ran one of the discussion groups. She excitedly spoke to me about how she formatted her class, how she motivated students, and how she got them involved and invested. She didn't know I had ever worked in a writing center, but she told me she had gone to one and had borrowed some of the center techniques. She practiced silence. She asked questions instead of giving answers. She asked for clarification. She provided options. Diane had absorbed center pedagogy simply from being tu-

tored herself. Even with my understanding of Diane's keen intelligence, I was shocked to see that her application of the knowledge was near flawless.

I realized the impacts of the writing center extend well beyond the handful of tutors who work there. The center experience affects the lives of the students who use the services offered. It impacts the businesses those students work for once they have left the halls of academia. I have come to the conclusion that writing centers do make a difference: a big difference. They touch the lives of the entire community, not just the lives of those who come through the writing center doors.

Since I left the university, I have seen the influence of the writing center repeatedly reach out into the world and return to face me. Stephen North's aphorism of making better writers instead of better writing still isn't large enough to capture the spirit of the writing center. Writing centers do help people create better writing. The centers do help make better writers. But more than that, they make better people.

While I was working at the center, there was another tutor whom I didn't like much. The woman drove me batty, no two ways about it. However, now that I'm out in the business world, set loose from my protective bubble, I am thankful I had the experience of working with her. Back then, I resented having to share my air supply with her. Today, I would hire her in a flash.

People are different, unique. We all have our strengths and our weaknesses. For all that I disliked about the tutor, she had her strengths—positive qualities that her time in the center brought to fruition. Now, I would hire my

greatest writing center adversary before I would hire someone who hadn't worked in a center. I would do it because, in addition to their incredible writing skills, writing center folk understand the value of diversity.

The writing center is a true celebration of diversity. It is the one place on campus where writing across the curriculum truly happens. It is the one place on campus where diversity really is celebrated, embraced, and supported. The environment provides the tutors with exposure to that lifestyle. And we all learn it well—every last one of us. We learn to embrace and support diversity as individuals. We learn to take advantage of its offerings. People who like me probably wouldn't like the other tutor I mentioned. But, much to my own shock and dismay, not everybody likes me. And people who don't like me may very well get along with the other tutor. Managing a business has taught me that diversity is a good thing. Diversity multiplies strengths, but it doesn't multiply weaknesses.

Lessons like these prompted my business partner and me to model our training of new employees after the tutors' seminar we took in college. Using the management of the center as a guide, we have created an exciting and rewarding work environment for ourselves and those we work with. Our project managers work as coaches, team members, and supporters. We avoid appropriating the work of others. We listen more than we talk. It works.

But as I write these words, my old writing center is struggling. The tutors' seminar is in danger of being canceled because the university trustees decided classes with low enrollment, such as the tutors' seminar, are not worth the expense. The director is seeking an ex-

emption, but the fate of the seminar is uncertain.

It would be a horrible error if a tutors' seminar suffered because someone who didn't know better thought it wasn't of service to enough people: a true tragedy. I don't want this to happen at my old writing center. I don't want it to happen at your writing center. The survival of these seminars is important, not just because I have a personal sense of loyalty to writing centers, but because the seminars are good things. Good things are more rare than they should be, and not to be tossed aside.

I no longer call myself a tutor. I no longer share stale coffee with other tutors while we discuss our latest sessions. But I have been there, and I have carried away with me an understanding of the center process that has made my life—and the lives surrounding mine—more rewarding.

Thank you for that gift. I enjoyed my time at the writing center. Perhaps, one day, I will return. In the meantime, I hope you may find a way to make this affirmation of your worth serve as some small payment for all you have given to me and to the communities that embrace you.

Michele Douglass
Galileo Media Inc.
Portland, Oregon

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

February 13-15, 2003: Southeastern WCA, in Charlotte, NC
  Contact: Deanna Rogers, Writing Resources Center, 220 Fretwell, 9201 University City Blvd., UNC Charlotte, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001. Phone: (704) 687-4226; fax: (704) 687 6988; e-mail: drrogers@email.uncc.edu. Conference Web site: <www.uncc.edu/writing/wrcindex.html>.

February 20-22, 2003: South Central WCA, in Fayetteville, AR
  Contact: Carole Lane and Karen Clark (writcent@uark.edu), Quality Writing Center, University of Arkansas, Kimpel 315, Fayetteville, AR 72701. Conference Web site: <http://www.uark.edu/campus-resources/qwrtcntr/scwca.htm>.

March 8, 2003: Northern California WCA, in Monterey, CA
  Contact: Natasha Oehlman. E-mail: ncwca@csumb.edu; phone: 831-582-4614. Conference Web site: <http://www.asap.csumb.edu/ncwca>.

March 27-29, 2003: East Central WCA, in Marietta, OH
  Contact: Tim Catalano (catalant@marietta.edu) Director of the Campus Writing Center, 215 Fifth Street, Marietta College, Marietta, OH 45750 <Catalant@marietta.edu>. Conference Web site: <http://www.marietta.edu/~mcwrite/eastcentral.html>.

April 5, 2003: Northeast WCA, in Nashua, NH
  Contact: Al DeCiccio, River College, 420 South Main St., Nashua, NH. Phone: (603)897-8284; e-mail: adeciccio@rivier.edu. Conference Web site: <http://web.bryant.edu/~ace/wrtctr/NEWCA.htm>.

April 5, 2003: Mid-Atlantic WCA, in Westminster, MD
  Contact: Lisa Breslin, The Writing Center, McDaniel College, 2 College Hill, Westminster, MD 21157. Phone: 410-857-2420; e-mail (lbreslin@mcdaniel.edu). Conference Web site: <http://www2.mcdaniel.edu/mawca>.

October 23-25, 2003: International Writing Centers Conference and National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Hershey, PA
  Contact: Ben Rafoth, brafoth@iup.edu. Conference Web site: <www.wc.iup.edu/2003conference>.

Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
April 5th, 2003
Westminster, MD
Keynote Speaker: Terry Riley

Proposals are invited for presentations (20 minutes), workshops (60 minutes); roundtable for panel discussions (60 minutes); poster presentations (easels and tables provided for presentations). Online submission available at the conference web site: <http://www2.mcdaniel.edu/mawca>. A hard copy submission form is also available for downloading on the web site. For those without Web access: 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. Proposal due date: January 31, 2003. Send to: Lisa Breslin, Conference Chairperson, The Writing Center, McDaniel College, 2 College Hill, Westminster, MD 21157 Phone: 410-857-2420; e-mail: <lbreslin @mcdaniel.edu>.

Associate Writing Center Director
Michigan State University

One-year, annual year position in the Academic Specialist system with an expected term of five years. Annual renewal contingent on performance reviews, program nee, and availability of funding.

Responsibilities: assisting the director by facilitating the day-to-day operation of the center (including, for instance, the preparation, scheduling, supervision and on-going professional development of writing consultants, including the development of digital writing consultants), development of new initiatives related to on-line writing center, support for writers and digital and multimedia writing and rhetoric, development and involvement of writing consultants in center-related research initiatives (including the development of grant proposals to fund such research),

and teaching one course each semester related to the center mission (e.g. the consultant preparation course, course on digital writing). MSU Writing Center <http://writing.msu.edu/>.

Qualifications: M.A. in Rhetoric/ Writing, English, or English education (Ph.D. preferred); knowledge of current writing/writing center theory; experience working in a writing center (administrative experience in a writing center or writing program preferred); ability to develop Web sites, digital presentations and desktop publishing; and experience teaching writing (on-line preferred). AA/EO. Persons with disabilities may request and receive reasonable accommodation.

Salary & Benefits (http://www.hr .msu.edu/depts/benefits): The annual-

year salary is nationally competitive and commensurate with qualifications and experience. Michigan State University offers a highly competitive package of benefits, including highly attractive retirement benefits.

Send (1) a cover letter explaining your interest in and qualifications for the position, (2) a curriculum vita, (3) a scholarly writing sample, and (4) name, e-mail address and phone number of three references to Janet A. Swenson, Director, The Writing Center, 300 Bessey Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824 -1033, or faxed to her at 517-432-3828, or e-mailed to jswenson@msu.edu. Review of applications will begin January 1, 2003 and will continue until the position is filled. Start date: August 16, 2003 or earlier, depending upon candidate availability.