THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Volume 27, Number 7 Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing March, 2003

...FROM THE EDITOR...

This month's newsletter offers us reflections and research results on topics that concern us all—two very different methods of effective publicity, quantitative results of tutorial effectiveness, and thoughts on working with challenging students.

Jill Frey shares her experience with creating a campus newsletter; Linda Eubank and her co-authors describe the jazz band event they created to publicize their writing center; Luke Niiler reports on his preliminary study of the effectiveness of tutoring in his center; and we learn about three tutors' experiences working with challenging students—an under-prepared student, a handicapped student, and non-traditional students.

And a question to you: One of our newsletter group has suggested that if authors agree, I include their e-mail addresses, as well as their institutional identifications, so that readers can commend them on particularly good articles and/or ask follow-up questions. This strikes me as an excellent suggestion, but there may be reasons not to do so. Could you share your thoughts with me about this: harrism@cc.purdue.edu.

To those of us living in colder climates who have had far too much winter this winter— happy almost spring.

• *Muriel Harris, editor*

...INSIDE...

Newsletters from the writing center: Not just publicity

One of the responsibilities of writing center administrators is to publicize the writing center. Yet, when the 2001-2002 Writing Centers Research Project Survey listed nine categories from which to choose answers to the question of how writing centers are publicized (Ervin), it overlooked one that can yield rich rewards—a newsletter. At Presbyterian College (PC), a liberal arts college of approximately 1,200 students, our writing center produces a newsletter *Writing Centered*, which brings not only publicity but also other benefits. Producing the newsletter enriches tutors and increases interaction with faculty and administrators, giving the writing center increased visibility on campus.

Tutor enrichment

Producing a newsletter brings tutors together on a project that uses and expands their writing, editing, and technology skills. The newsletter keeps writing topics on tutors' minds during times when they are not tutoring as they e-mail and interview faculty members and fellow students, research, write, and revise articles. Roberta Buck, Writing Center Coordinator at

Western Washington University, says her tutors benefit from their newsletter *The Definite Articl*e: "Staff enjoy seeing their names in print, and they really learn a lot in the process of preparing their articles. It's basically staff development." Ele Paynter, student co-editor of *The Paper Chase* at Agnes Scott College, finds that working on the newsletter encourages "tutors to constantly think about other aspects of tutoring, of writing, of being tutored; *The Paper Chase* brings up discussion long after our initial 'training' or orientation sessions are over." She notes the "opportunity for tutors to publish an article at least once a year," adding that "we have things to say that reach beyond individual conferences." Tutors also become competent with technology through working on a newsletter. PC tutors learned about Web construction by putting the print version of our newsletter online.

The Western Washington tutors use past issues as resources in conferences, "a legacy of expertise collected in one convenient place," according to Buck, who has overheard writing assistants working with students ask, "'Where's that issue on cover letters?'"

Increased interaction with faculty and administrators

At PC we collaborate with faculty members to put their ideas about writing in our newsletter, passing the drafts back and forth as we produce the final article. This process helps us learn to know each other and to share our views of writing and the role of the writing center on campus. We give recent copies of *Writing Centered* to new faculty during their orientation, and past newsletter articles become a resource for faculty. Besides having an online version of our newsletter in the Faculty Resources section of our Web site, we created a page called Communication Across the Curriculum Ideas at PC, which indexes past articles.

Administrators and staff also become aware of the writing center through reading a newsletter. The admissions staff added the PC Writing Center to their campus tours for prospective students and parents after we sent them copies of our newsletter. Tim Hadley, Assistant Director of the Texas Tech University's writing center, sends a copy of their newsletter to important administrators who make funding decisions, as well as to faculty. He says, "For the relatively small amount of money and time invested, we feel that our newsletter creates a more professional ethos for us on our campus."

If these advantages have convinced you to consider a newsletter, an initial question is who your primary audience will be. Some writing centers aim their newsletters toward faculty and administrators, whereas others write primarily for students.

A newsletter for faculty

In *The Writing Center Resource Manual*'s chapter on public relations, Sally Crisp notes that she sends her "one-page front and back" newsletter *WRITE-ON* to faculty and staff. In particular, those who direct both a writing center and a writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) program publish their newsletters for faculty and administrators. Others without a formal WAC program use the writing center newsletter to integrate WAC ideas at their college or university. Therese Zawacki, at George Mason University, recommends a newsletter to "showcase the writing that goes on across the university."

A newsletter for faculty models the WAC focus on faculty development. Just as faculty who have been through a WAC workshop lead future workshops, sharing what they have learned with their peers, faculty can educate their peers about using writing in a writing center newsletter. Christopher Thaiss recommends newsletters for such a purpose: "There's probably no better way of bringing to the attention of faculty and administrators all over a large campus the teaching excellence of individual faculty" (66).

Along with the WAC model of faculty peer influence is the model of the local hometown newspaper: People pay attention to articles about themselves or someone they know. "I read your newsletter cover to cover and love hearing what other people are doing," a business administration professor told me about a recent *Writing Centered*. The History Department Chair expressed her pride when we featured several history professors' writing ideas. We try to mention many

The *Writing Lab Newsletter*, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by the Department of English, Purdue University, is a publication of the International Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement.ISSN 1040-3779.

Editor: Muriel Harris
Managing Editor: Mary Jo Turley
English Dept., Purdue University, 500 Oval Drive, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2038 (765)494-7268.
e-mail: harrism@cc.purdue.edu
mjturley@purdue.edu
web site:http://owl.english.purdue.edu/lab/newsletter/index.html

Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures. Yearly payments of $15 (U.S. $20 in Canada) are requested, and checks must be received four weeks prior to the month of expiration to ensure that subscribers do not miss an issue. Please make checks payable to Purdue University and send to the Managing Editor. Prepayment is requested for all subscriptions.

Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays. If possible, please send as attached files or as cut-and-paste in an e-mail to mjturley@ purdue.edu. Otherwise, send a 3 and 1/2 in. disk with the file, along with the paper copy. Please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

faculty members in each newsletter, placing their names in boldface.

Having faculty as the audience for a newsletter makes sense because faculty practices often determine whether or not students come to the writing center. Faculty set the conditions that make it possible for students to have writing conferences by assigning out-of-class writing, allowing time for the writing process, and encouraging writing center visits through syllabi, assignment sheets, and verbal introductions to an assignment. Buck sends her newsletter to faculty because "most of the writers who use our Center learn about us from faculty (we know this from surveys)."

A newsletter for students

Other writing centers aim their newsletters toward students, the actual clients of the writing center, allowing faculty and administrators to look on as a secondary audience. Agnes Scott produces *The Paper Chase* to encourage students to use the writing center, "to inform the campus community of events related to the tutoring staff and writing in general, and to provide information about writing" (Cozzens and Elliot 77). Paynter says, "Much of our content focuses on student writing and how the writing center can help students."

Once you have determined your primary audience, you may wonder what you can include in a writing center newsletter. To ensure "a steady flow of high-quality material" for a WAC newsletter, Christopher Thaiss recommends regular sections, and the same is true for a writing center newsletter (66). The following are features some writing center newsletters have adopted.

Information about the writing center

Newsletters include the writing center's location, hours, phone number, and the Web site or online writing center URLs. We highlight any additions to our Web site and pages of current interest to faculty or students.

Writing center statistics

One staple of our spring issue is an article with attendance figures from the fall semester: total students, total conferences, number of professors sending students, and departments having the most classes from which students come.

What's new in the writing center and in writing on campus

Many newsletters summarize past workshops sponsored by the writing center, announce future workshops, and note other writing-related events on campus. Articles in *The Paper Chase* on Agnes Scott's "new, required first-year seminars, discipline-based courses [which] are writing intensive," were used in "first-year seminar reports and grant applications" (Cozzens).

The tutors

Some newsletters include pictures and biographical sketches of the tutors. A *Writing Centered* article used quotations from tutors' mid-semester self-evaluations telling what they enjoyed about tutoring. Sometimes we combine articles about tutors with writing information such as the article that discussed the writing processes of tutors, compiled from papers they had written during training, sending the message to faculty that students' writing processes differ. Newsletters also relate various other tutor activities, such as community outreach, conference presentations, publications, or alumni tutor achievements.

What writing centers do

Newsletters are an excellent place to point out what we do and how we do it. "What Goes on in the Writing Center" was a recent article of ours based on tutor self-evaluations of what they do most in a conference. Many newsletters feature articles that focus on the writing center itself. However, we also use an integrated approach by mentioning the writing center in many types of articles. For example, when writing about a professor's assignment, we noted his encouragement of writing conferences. In another article on how to create assignment sheets, we told how helpful these sheets are in beginning a writing conference.

Ways to encourage students to come

We list ideas from faculty members who have many students come to the writing center as examples of ways to encourage students to participate in conferences, such as offering incentives, collecting a mid-process draft, and talking about the writing center when they introduce an assignment.

Articles about writing: Choose a theme

Many editors choose a theme for each newsletter. Ideas for our themes come from assignments, problems with writing we have noticed, or concerns on campus, such as plagiarism, the theme of our spring 2001 issue. Our spring 2000 issue highlighted assignments that excited students, including an article about a creative writing assignment in a Bible survey course: "If the content is a story, then the methodology needs to be story," the professor said. The articles quoted the professors on the purpose for their assignments, their response to drafts, and the reactions of the students. Integrating writing and technology is another theme we have used with articles such as "Student Web Sites," "Writing on a Blackboard," and "Using an Internet Simulation to Improve Classroom Learning."

Articles on current writing research

We wrote a *Writing Centered* article on research into the effect of personality preferences on faculty evaluation of writing that elicited several faculty responses. One professor e-mailed: "I've read through all the writing/teaching characteristics of my [personal preferences] profile, and I've discovered that

I had all the faults and none of the virtues of my type. Thanks for a good newsletter" (Baker).

Writing tips for students

The Definite Article's fall 2002 issue included tips for students on the theme of organization: "Ditch the Outline," "Revision: It does a paper good," and "Research Woes?"

Book reviews

Writing Centered always includes a review of a book related to writing, pointing faculty to recent acquisitions on writing in our college library.

Highlight good practices of many faculty members

"Group Papers" was an article that brought much faculty response: several professors mentioned the article in class, and one changed an upcoming assignment to a group paper after reading it. Co-authored by four tutors with experience in writing group papers, the article expressed faculty views of and student responses to group assignments.

Showcase good practices of a single faculty member

Our first newsletter included many articles of the '"successful technique"' type since the theme developed from a faculty workshop on writing across the disciplines (Thaiss 66). These articles highlighted a single faculty member's use of writing in the classroom or a department working together on writing. Articles included one by an English professor on "Writing to Learn," another on journals in math, and one on writing conferences by a philosophy professor who said, "The single most rewarding and challenging thing I do as a teacher is to have student writing conferences."

Concerns about starting a newsletter

In a recent WCenter post, Jeniffer Viscara shared two concerns about starting a newsletter: extra effort and budget constraints. Producing a newsletter is time-consuming, and printing costs come from the budget. As with many other writing center issues, the campus context is crucial, but by using the financial, technological, and human resources available, writing centers of all ages and sizes can publish newsletters and realize a rich harvest.

Time and effort

The time and effort needed depend on how often you publish your newsletter and how many work on it. Some writing centers try for a short, one-page newsletter every month, while others publish one issue a semester or one a year. Newsletters range in size from one page front and back to eight pages or more.

Tutors do most of the work on the newsletters in some writing centers. Two Agnes Scott tutors choose to be co-editors of *The Paper Chase* as their jobs for the year, but all the staff write articles. At PC we work on *Writing Centered* in the spring semester when we do not have constant conferences. Tutors decide which articles they would like to write on the year's theme and work on the newsletter during their regular hours. Zawacki recommends asking "faculty across the disciplines to write about their assignments" to spread the effort.

Most writing center directors who give tutors free rein in writing articles play a part in the final stage of proofreading to make sure the newsletter is ready for the public. As Thaiss recommends for a WAC newsletter, the writing center director should be a "strong editor [. . .] to ensure uniform high quality of the prose" since the newsletter represents the writing center (66).

Financial constraints

Budget constraints play a role in the decision of whether the newsletter appears in print or online. The Russell Program, an endowment at PC to create awareness of modern communications media, pays the $175 it costs to print 250 copies of our newsletter. Hadley says his costs at Texas Tech University are a minimal $300 because "printing is done by our on-campus copy shop, and our on-campus bulk mail department folds, labels, and mails each issue. Since it is only campus mail, there is no postage cost." Of course, a newsletter sent only to faculty is less expensive to print than one sent to students as well.

Some writing centers with a Web presence put their newsletters online. Buck posts *The Definite Article* on the writing center Web site in PDF form "mostly to save printing costs," but she makes some print copies available in the library. Greg Dyer, at the University of Sioux Falls, who tries to publish his electronic newsletter every month, uses "MS Outlook to load the Web page into an email that is distributed to the campus community."

Some, however, worry about attracting readers for an online newsletter. Rita Dudley, at Loras College, switched from an electronic newsletter to a print version, of which she sends a single copy to each department, requesting that faculty circulate it. "It's too easy to delete electronic information without even glancing at it," she says, "and I found that if I can make it colorful with photos, it's more likely to be read." Buck agrees that Web texts are easy to ignore: "I have a whole slew of URLs I've been meaning to visit. Even if people don't read the hard copy, they have to handle it and notice where it's from. Maybe they'll even be hooked by a headline."

Technology

In considering technology, whether for a print or online newsletter, writing centers use what they have and understand. We use Word for our print version because all our computers have it, our tutors are familiar with it, and it al-

lows us to incorporate graphics and digital photos. Agnes Scott tutors use Microsoft Publisher, and Western Washington uses PageMaker because the student editor likes the program. Dyer has "set up a template Web page with all of the formatting. The various blocks are then filled in with the appropriate text."

Having Pagemill on our writing center computers made it the logical choice for us in creating our Web version, which we add to our Web site each spring when we distribute the print one, usually just before spring break so that faculty have time to read it. The Web edition includes extras not possible on the hard copy, such as professors' handouts and links to Web resources.

Creativity

Newsletters give writing center staff a chance to be creative in writing and graphic design. They can work on those aspects of the newsletter they enjoy most. Dyer, who uses the new technology of Flash in his electronic newsletter to allow for "a bit of 'snazziness' that generates attention," admits that this "approach simply allows me to spend some time dinking around with one of my hobbies." Even the titles of many newsletters show creativity: *The Write Track* (The Citadel), *Writing@Center* (George Mason), and *Word Works* (Boise State).

In answer to Viscarra's concern that a newsletter might not be worth the extra work and the cost, we can only say that ours has yielded what she hoped one would: improved relations between the writing center and campus community and increased "visibility and perhaps even the credibility of the center."

Jill Frey
Presbyterian College
Clinton, SC

Newsletters Available Online

- Boise State University: <http://www.idbsu.edu/wcenter/issues.htm>
- George Mason University: <http://wac.gmu.edu/program/Newsletter/newsletter.html>
- Presbyterian College: <http://www.presby.edu/writingcenter/newsletter/spr02.html>
- Sioux Falls University: <http://www.usiouxfalls.edu/academic/english/writing_center/ news/wcnews09.02.htm>
- Western Washington University: <http://www.ac.wwu.edu/~writepro/ DefiniteArticle.htm>

Works Cited

Baker, Richard. E-mail to the author. 19 Mar. 2001.

Buck, Roberta. "Re: your newsletter." E-mail to the author. 20 Nov. 2002.

Cozzens, Christine. "RE: The Paper Chase." E-mail to the author. 20 Nov. 2002.

Cozzens, Christine S., and Sterling Elliott. *Tutoring Writing and Speaking at Agnes Scott College: A Handbook for the Center for Writing and Speaking.* Decatur, Georgia: Agnes Scott College, 1998.

Crisp, Sally. "Only Everything We Do: Public and Community Relations in the Writing Center." *The Writing Center Resource Manual*. Ed. Bobbie Bayliss Silk. Emmitsburg, MD: NWCA Press, 2002. IV.5.1-8.

Dudley, Rita. " Re: newsletters." Online posting. 14 Nov. 2002. WCenter. 14 Nov. 2002 <http://www.wcenter@lyris.acs.ttu.edu>.

Dyer, Greg. "RE: newsletters." Online posting. 14 Nov. 2002. WCenter. 14 Nov. 2002. <http://www.wcenter@lyris.acs.ttu.edu>.

Ervin, Christopher. *Writing Centers Research Project*. "The Survey for AY 2001-2002." 7 Oct. 2002 <http://www.louisville.edu/a-s/writingcenter/wcenters/survey2001-2002_Semester.html>.

Hadley, Tim. "RE: newsletters." Online posting. 14 Nov. 2002. WCenter. 14 Nov. 2002 <http://www.wcenter@lyris.acs.ttu.edu>.

Paynter, Ele. "RE: Agnes Scott College Paper Chase." E-mail to the author. 3 Dec. 2002.

Thaiss, Christopher. *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum.* Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1998.

Viscarra, Jeniffer. "Newsletters." Online posting. 14 Nov. 2002. WCenter. 14 Nov. 2002 <http://www.wcenter@lyris.acs.ttu.edu>.

Zawacki, Therese. "Re: Little bits o'WAC." Online posting. 20 Nov. 2002. WCenter. 20 Nov. 2002 <http://www.wcenter@lyris.acs.ttu.edu>.

The numbers speak: A pre-test of writing center outcomes using statistical analysis

Introduction

When we think of assessing the work writing centers do, we often think in qualitative terms, such as ethnography and narrative. We may think of the daily records our centers keep. We might think of forms that give our tutees a space to respond to questions related to their perceptions of how well we've assisted them. We may think of end-of-semester faculty feedback forms. We may be required to file annual reports that assess our institutional effectiveness. Indeed, qualitative assessment tools broadcast our centers' richness and diversity, and as a discipline, we've become highly adept at explaining ourselves in these terms. Perhaps, too, qualitative means of assessment show all who may be paying attention that many writing centers focus primarily on the writer, not the writing. By examining the work that we do in qualitative terms, we become better acquainted with individual, idiosyncratic writing processes, and in turn with the very people we tutor.

Yet numbers play a role in the daily lives of our writing centers. We budget, write grants, and schedule tutorials, tutors' hours and staff meetings. We try to understand the most efficient use of our resources—how to staff, when to staff, with how much. And as Peter Carino and Doug Enders have recently indicated, numbers can help us better assess the work we do. As they note, there are statistical correlations between frequency of writing center visits and students' perceptions that their writing has improved. They stop short of attempting to quantify that improvement in any way, however, noting that "while it would be interesting and helpful to know what criteria, beyond grades, students use in assessing their improvement, it would require that they be surveyed, and their texts examined in terms of these criteria as well as criteria valued by supposedly expert evaluators" (99). They note that "here, knowledge begins to get murky. It slips out from under the numbers as variables increase, and reality becomes more of a construct than something quantifiable" (99).

This epistemological murkiness appeals to me, as I have spent substantial time this past year evaluating student texts in an attempt to quantify how writing center intervention impacts their writing. In my own statistical analysis of writing center outcomes, I have attempted to answer three questions:

1. Were students "better writers" after coming to the writing center than before?
2. How consistent were raters with each other in rating writing performance?
3. Did raters see more improvement in writing from classes inside their major field of study or in writing from other disciplines?

I ask these questions not only to build on Carino and Enders' work, but also to attempt to enrich—not replace or threaten—the reams of qualitative data I've amassed in our writing center. That data tells me, in sum, that we are doing a good job. And there's nothing wrong, of course, with this kind of data. But it seems that such findings are in part based on 'felt' per*ceptions*, subjective impressions of students, faculty and tutors alike. What if we could measure, with as much objectivity as is humanly possible, the extent to which student writing actually improved? And what further questions might arise as a result?

Methodology

A synopsis of my methodology follows. I stress at the outset that I constructed this experiment as a pre-test, a means of not only finding answers to three questions, but also as a way of learning how to create a better test. I will therefore point out several limitations in my methodology in my conclusions.

In Fall 2001, I visited with six sections of colleagues' classes: two freshman composition, two junior/senior-level criminal justice, one senior level music theory, and one junior-senior level sociology. I visited each class on the day a major paper was returned. By prior arrangement with the instructor, I wrote each student's grade for the paper on an index card, and passed back those cards to each student. At that point, upon reading the cards, students were instructed to self-select: to choose whether or not they would visit the writing center for tutorials to revise their drafts, and thereby increase the chances they'd receive a higher grade. If a student wished to keep her grade, the instructor returned her paper.

The instructor retained the drafts of students who wished to visit the writing center, and those students printed out and then took unmarked, clean

copies of those same drafts to the writing center. This was done to ensure that tutors would not simply work from or be influenced by professors' comments, but instead treat each draft afresh, following their own best tutoring practices. This also assured me of two clean, unmarked stacks of data: 'A' drafts, or drafts created before writing center intervention; and 'B' drafts, or drafts created with writing center intervention. A six-class sample provided me with 51 sets of data. I then obtained 12 additional data sets from students in those six classes who had not visited with us in the writing center. Each of these 12 data sets was comprised of one clean, unmarked, "A" draft of that student's paper, which I then xeroxed in order to create a "B" draft. "B" versions of these 12 papers were, in other words, simply copies of "A" drafts. This sample would serve as my control.

Students visited the writing center at their convenience, for as much or as little tutoring as they wished. Professors shared clean, xeroxed copies of pre- and post-intervention drafts with me afterward. I then assembled three raters, all of whom were writing center tutors, and normed them, via discussion of writing samples, to the seven following traits: claim, or clear evidence of purpose, intention, or focus; development of claim, or clear evidence that ideas set forth in the claim are extended, elaborated upon, or clarified; organization, or clear evidence of logically sequenced writing; citation/format, or clear evidence that writing follows format required by discipline; and punctuation, grammar, and spelling. These traits, I should note, are the traits our tutors most commonly read for in their tutees' writing.

Each of the three raters read each data set of two drafts (the A and B drafts) sequentially, and twice: on the first read, they assigned ratings from 1 to 5 (one lowest, five highest) in terms of 'improvement' from pre- to post-writing center intervention. On the second read, they assigned each draft a score from 1 to 5, with 1 again the lowest value and 5 the highest. Results were tabulated, entered into Excel, and crunched via an SPSS database.

Resu

Let's begin with question #1: "Were students better writers after coming to the writing center than before?" My study shows improvement in each category rated. Claims improved from a mean score of 2.9 to 3.6; development, from 2.6 to 3.5; organization, from 2.9 to 3.7; citation/format, from 3.1 to 3.7; punctuation, from 3.1 to 3.7; grammar, from 2.9 to 3.5; and spelling, from 3.7 to 4.2. The mean overall increase was .7. The probability that these increases were caused by a factor or combination of factors other than writing center intervention was shown to be less than 1 in 100.[1]

Concerning question #2: "Did raters rate consistently—were they as 'objective' as possible?" Without showing you extensive tables, I can say that there was a positive association between at least two of the raters' ratings for each data set, and for each reading. At least two out of the three raters read drafts in a manner consistent with each other. This means that in all categories I examined, and for each of the two readings, at least two of the raters' ratings were consistent enough together to be of statistical relevance. Typically I saw two raters sharing correlation coefficients between .512-.748, which indicates a mild positive correlation. In addition, I saw a perfect consistency among all raters when I factored in the control group of papers. All raters scored each draft within those 12 data sets identically, from pre- to post-intervention, noting that no improvement had taken place in any of the sets.

Re. question #3: "Did raters see more improvement in classes within their disciplines or classes outside their disciplines?" In a word, yes. When I examined the standard deviation—that is, the spread or range of improvement scores—for all three raters for each category in all courses, I saw that the standard deviation between their scores increased as they rated writing in advanced courses within the disciplines. For example, in the introductory composition course (English 1301), I saw standard deviations ranging from .14907 to .72265. In the senior level criminal justice course (Criminal Justice 4307), I saw standard deviations ranging from 1.09834 to 1.50066. To better understand this result, consider that a larger standard deviation indicates a more diverse body of data, while a smaller standard deviation indicates a tighter, more condensed body of data. To put it another way: raters agreed more on what constituted improved writing in lower-division courses, and less on what constituted improved writing in upper division courses.

What holds true for this sample also holds true for the entire study: raters showed smaller standard deviations when evaluating improvements in writing samples from lower-division English classes, and greater standard deviations when scoring upper-division papers in criminal justice, music, and sociology.

Conclusions

Far from deriving conclusive answers to my three original questions, my study actually created more questions than it resolved, which I will share below. I also learned that for a study like this to work better, I need to make changes in my statistical method-

ology, and I need to fuel that methodology with stronger, more pointed questions.

For example, we can conclude, with reference to my first question, that yes, there is a correlation between improved student writing and writing center intervention. But because I did not employ an adequate control, I have to place a large asterisk next to these figures; I cannot unequivocally claim that the writing center actually "caused" improvement in the writing of those who visited with us. Further, I have learned to drive future studies with more pointed questions. I might consider, for instance, which groups of writers improve more after visiting the writing center: first-time users, or repeat users? Writers from lower-division courses, or advanced courses in the disciplines? And I might use some of the qualitative data I've gathered over the past few semesters to help me frame and eventually create such questions. For example, I know of many professors who regularly refer their students to us. Could I, perhaps, compare the writing of referred to non-referred students?

Yet while my first question, upon consideration, may be seen as limiting, my second and third questions seem more viable, more productive. With regard to question #2, we can conclude that it is indeed possible to norm raters so that there are positive correlations between their ratings—so that, in effect, we create a benchmark, a usable set of objective criteria. Contrary to Casey Jones, who holds that quantitative assessments of writing center outcomes entail too many "subjective judgments" to be credible (6), I maintain that interrater reliability—a reasonable correspondence between individual raters—is in fact a possibility.

Interrater reliability notwithstanding, what of the possibility of rater bias, given that the raters were, in fact, tutors? As I've noted above, all tutors noted zero improvements in the 12-sample control. Based on this limited sample, I might conclude that tutors were not predisposed to believe that writing center intervention contributed to improvements in student writing.[1] Yet such a conclusion would be problematic, at best. In fact, the process raters followed may have revealed the control. As I've noted above, raters worked sequentially from draft #1 to draft #63, reading the "A" draft of each data set first, and the "B" drafts second. It is therefore possible raters spotted the xeroxed drafts in the 12-sample control quickly, and rated accordingly. Their ratings, then, were even and accurate but perhaps obvious—more the product of quick comparisons rather than good judgments. The question of biased judgments remains.

To better address this question, I need to employ a stronger control for rater bias in the future: a random, single-blind read. In a random, single-blind read, each rater will be given a stack of papers. Each rater's stack will be arranged in a different order, so that no two raters will read in the same sequence. And no essay will include an "A" or "B" designation. Raters will simply assign a numerical ranking to each draft they read. This will help control for their expectations of stronger "B" drafts. To avoid the xeroxing dilemma, in which raters make quick comparisons rather than strong judgments, I will solicit two writing samples on the same topic from all students—not just students who visit the writing center. And as with the current study, the experimental group will be comprised of students who visit the writing center, while the control group will be comprised of writing from students who don't visit the writing center. This approach goes a long way toward eliminating the kind of rater bias that my current study admits.

Of course, it will be incumbent upon me in future studies to enlist experienced English faculty to serve as raters. Tutors, after all, are not used to rating, or grading: they're trained as facilitators and collaborators, not judges. Faculty, however, are used to making the judgments grading entails. Faculty, further, have no vested interest in presenting the work of the writing center in a positive light. Tutors, however, do: and this is to be expected, given that tutors help promote, publicize, and in other ways celebrate the services the writing center offers. No matter how much I try to control for rater bias, the fact remains that the integrity of my findings is compromised by tutor-raters' potential conflicts of interest. I cannot deny that the question of tutors wishing to present their tutoring in the best possible light haunts this study.

On, then, to question #3. If we consider the increased standard deviations among those raters when scoring work outside their major field of study, English, we can better understand how tutors 'see' writing outside their own major field. We might conclude that our tutors were more helpful to freshman writing students, and less prepared to address the needs of students in upper-division courses outside those tutors' major field. We might conclude that our writing center needs more contact with professors in those disciplines, to better understand and address their concerns in their students' writing. Here we see several questions related to 'generalist' vs. 'subject area' tutors coming into play. What are the limitations of generalist tutors at UT-Tyler? Might we be discovering some? And how might we respond? Such findings could help us create positive, productive changes in both tutor training and writing center outreach: clearly, we need to do a better job training tutors to recognize strong writing within the disciplines. We might accomplish this, further, by establishing closer ties to faculty in departments outside of English, as well as creating a "tutoring fellows" program, in which strong students in the disciplines are

trained to tutor writing in advanced (3000 and 4000-level) courses. Perhaps we could work harder to recruit students from outside English to work in our writing center.

I should also conclude that the work I've done to date, and the results I've shared with you, in no way compromise or challenge the integrity of my prior qualitative analyses of writing center performance. In fact, as I have already noted, that work is enhanced by these findings. I can now say that I can see a correlation between writing center intervention and improved writing in terms of narrative and numbers, lore and statistics. Certainly such numbers give me a way of better communicating what our writing center has to offer with faculty whose vocabulary does not necessarily include or embrace writing center lexicon. Indeed, through this work, I have come to question the strong reliance our writing center has on North's 1984 rallying cry, "It's the writers, not the writing." At some point we need to care about the writing itself; at some point, we can and should productively question North's dichotomy between "better writers" and "better writing." Certainly, becoming a better writer means, at least in part, writing better. And we should be able to confidently claim that our writing centers help produce both. Our colleagues, deans, administrators and students expect as much, and it is their expectations that make much of our work possible. Indeed, asking what "happens" to writing after a writer visits the writing center is a reasonable question, and one that I will continue to explore with future quantitative studies.

Luke Niiler
University of Texas at Tyler
Tyler, TX

Works Cited

Carino, Peter, and Doug Enders. "Does Frequency of Visits to the Writing Center Increase Student Satisfaction? A Statistical Correlation Study—or Story." *Writing Center Journal* 21:3 (Winter 2001). 83-103.

Jones, Casey. "The Relationship Between Writing Centers and Improvement of Writing Ability: An Assessment of the Literature." *Education* 122:1 (Fall 2001). 3-21.

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

---

[1] For complete data, please contact me at lniiler@mail.uttyl.edu.

[2] I reassured raters at the beginning of the study that their findings would in no way compromise my view of their work as tutors. They took me at my word, and I am grateful to them for it.

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

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, Rivier 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>.

TUTORS' COLUMN

Confessions from the center: A tutor's dilemma

As a graduate student and writing tutor at Long Island University in Brooklyn, I have the privilege of working with students from all over the world. The intense variety is challenging and invigorating. One of the first things I learned was the necessity of rethinking my assumptions. For example, Veronica was one of those students I didn't think would attend our sessions on a regular basis. At our first meeting, she was hesitant and soft-spoken. Every word was a chore. I quickly assumed she wouldn't be around long. I was wrong. That was the first of many ways Veronica would surprise me.

The first thing I couldn't help noticing was that Veronica's writing was complicated by many grammar and spelling errors and she knew it. As an immigrant from Haiti, she had often been reminded of such "deficiencies." This criticism compounded her natural shyness. I spent our initial sessions trying to get to know Veronica, asking questions and telling her a little about myself. I did not know how to help her, and our chats may have been at least partly about me putting off the actual work. Once Veronica had settled in, however, she was anxious to get started.

Her first essays were extremely brief and formulaic. During sessions, we often had to reread class texts before she could get a handle on the material. If she didn't understand the assignment, she would come to the session with nothing to work on at all. In the beginning, we spent a lot of time discussing what her teacher expected. We talked about how the language of academia can seem so foreign and intimidating in the beginning. I suggested that she not worry about trying to sound "smart" and just write.

We even invented a mantra: write first, think later. During all of this "pre-writing," I wondered about pedagogical correctness. I was supposed to be a writing tutor, but we hadn't worked on much writing. I considered launching into a demonstration of subject-verb agreement rules many times. But something held me back. It was Veronica. She calmly and assuredly took our sessions out of my directive hands and guided us, often interrupting me to take us in a new direction. I had the feeling she was heading somewhere—towards some important place in her mind. Veronica knew, without me telling her, that self-exploration is often the key to becoming a better writer.

One day during our second semester together, she showed me what we were accomplishing. She brought a piece she had written as a response to a class text about family relationships. The assignment required that she use the text to argue one point or another. She completely ignored the assignment, and her sentences were wild and meandering. Nonetheless, it was one of the most profound pieces of writing I have ever read. It was an essay about her relationship with her mother, one fraught with tension and misunderstanding. One day, after being humiliated by her mother in front of her boyfriend, Veronica nearly burned her mother alive in an apartment fire. The fire department assumed the blaze was accidental, and Veronica had never admitted the truth to anyone. I was the first.

She read the essay to me calmly and without emphasis. She described the anger and desire for revenge that drove her to the act. She described the guilt she has felt for many years since and the ways in which she has tried to justify that act. Recently, she realized that justification is impossible. She has begun the process of trying to understand and take responsibility. I listened and tried not to react with either surprise or concern. I tried to see Veronica herself as a text under revision, constantly reformulating her identity in response to her past.

When she finished reading the essay, Veronica looked up at me with eyes that were not particularly changed or even enlightened. She was the same Veronica I had met on that first day. At the same time, she had crossed a threshold into a world of self-reflection and self-expression. She had broken through to new ground. The idea that the personal narrative can be an avenue to critical inquiry entered my mind for the first time. The idea that the personal narrative can exist alone and for its own sake seemed just as valuable. From a pedagogical perspective, I realized that my role as a tutor is not fixed. I need to allow each new student to help shape the way I tutor writing. I learned that theory does not exist alone, but is constantly informed by the unique needs of each writer.

In the back of my mind, however, the question posed by the professor lingered. Veronica had not referred to the class text as she was assigned to do. I thought of all the teachers who had insisted she work on her grammar before her writing would be taken seriously. Veronica asked me if there was anything I thought she needed to change before turning in the essay. I thought for a moment and considered what had just happened.

"It's perfect, Veronica," I said. "Don't change a thing."

Ann Larson
Long Island University
Brooklyn, NY

Wheelchair

I hadn't been working at Western Michigan's Writing Center for more than a month when one of my coworkers quit. Someone needed to take over her weekly sessions with a man named Jim, who was revising his novel. I rarely get the chance to discuss creative writing assignments; our clients tend to bring essays, proposals, letters, or resumes. As I'm a fiction writer, you'd think I'd jump at this chance.

Jim depends on a wheelchair and needs an attendant to wheel him from place to place. And since his childhood accident, a head injury that rendered him blind, he doesn't easily call up visual images. I wondered how I could possibly help him, and yes, whether helping might become a burden, because even waiting for him to spit out a simple sentence was an exhausting chore. *You're so lucky*, the other tutors said, *to have this opportunity—it'll be a great learning experience*. Easy for them to say. Besides, as Jim hadn't been enrolled at Western for years, there was something clandestine and vaguely subversive about penciling him in on the schedule. Other tutors advised me to be discreet, and I felt trapped by everyone else's enthusiasm.

During my sessions with Jim, I read sections of his novel aloud, and Jim was to stop me whenever he wanted to make a change. In our earliest sessions, Jim didn't say much: I got the feeling he was waiting for me to tell him what to write. When he did suggest revisions, I was to pencil them in on the hard copy and then type detailed instructions to email to his mother, at home. These instructions were to clarify my editing marks, which became more unreadable the more Jim changed his mind. The process was tedious, interminably slow, and hardly seemed worth the effort, but Jim's mother preferred to do the typing herself. Often, I was tempted to skip ahead and compose the book for him. But I didn't want him to confuse his writing with his disabilities: I was afraid of becoming Jim's wheelchair.

Then gradually, as Jim became more comfortable, he began dictating short passages to make transitions between scenes or strengthen the reader's sense of the setting. Much of Jim's novel was written in a chronological beeline, where marriages, journeys, the cycling of seasons, could take place in a matter of fifteen swift pages. While Jim's inner landscapes were varied and vast, Jim's biggest challenge (the challenge for all writers) was to transfer his visions from his mind to the page. I didn't know the speed with which Jim's ideas milled around in his head: his speech had the cadence of geology; slowly he ground out his story, and the terrain of his prose changed—incrementally, his valleys deepened, his vistas widened, and his continents shifted. Our two-hour sessions required an ocean of patience. Near the end of those two hours, when Jim would become weary, the final syllables of his words seemed to stick there on the tip of his tongue, and I'd find myself listening for his attendant—my savior—to show up and wheel Jim away.

But the most difficult part wasn't our sessions: it was when Jim asked me to do things outside the tutorial. He's invited me to concerts, asked me to spend time outside the Writing Center tutoring him, and forwarded me unfunny jokes via e-mail. He's asked for my home phone number. He's asked me to bear with him. He's asked for assurance, advice, and friendship. All I could offer was two hours of tutoring per week.

Things came to a head when Jim's father died of cancer. It's very difficult to tell what Jim feels. His limbs and features twitch of their own accord. His voice is deep and atonal. All I know is what little he's told me: his sister, a counselor, has advised him to think of our sessions as a way of maintaining routine and normalcy. Jim's mother e-mailed me to say I'm a very important person in Jim's life. I'm sorry that I can't—won't—offer him more than two hours of my time each week. Instead, I have designed simple writing assignments that require him to record the sounds, smells, and textures that comprise his world.

Still, I like knowing that Jim wants *me* to help him; it's rewarding to be chosen. And this is just one of the things I must consider if I'm going to keep working with Jim. Another is that though Jim isn't able to tell me about the shape of the wave or the qualities of moonlight, he tells me volumes about the stamina needed to create fictional worlds on a page, which in turn requires time and practice. If I can't bear with Jim, how can I possibly dedicate myself to my own writing, which has never come easily and probably never will?

Ingrid Hawkinson
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI

Non-traditional students in the writing center: Bridging the gap from a process-oriented world to a product-oriented one

Two and a half years ago, I returned to college after a twelve-year hiatus. I owned my own business, but the summer I turned thirty, I decided that it was time for some changes in my life. I must admit that I was scared. I had attended college right after high school, and I already had most of my basics out of the way. So all that was left to do was jump in with both feet and hope I didn't drown.

That first semester back was treacherous. I ended up enrolled in an introduction to literature class that required a literary analysis of poetry and an essay on Hamlet. I was also enrolled in a sociology class that required me to write a research paper. I hadn't written an essay, a research paper, or a literary analysis in over twelve years. Sure, I had written in those years after leaving college, but that writing consisted of business letters or interoffice memos—quite different from the type of writing that would be required in the world of academia.

I was what many would call the "typical" non-traditional student. I did all my homework and had my papers done weeks ahead of time. It was during this very trying first semester that I learned about the writing center. I will never forget the first time I walked in the door. I didn't want to admit that I was having problems, but, at the same time, I needed help. In all honesty, I wanted a tutor who would understand how I felt, and DeDe came to my rescue. She was a non-traditional student working on her graduate degree. Over that semester she became my security blanket and the person whom I would go to when I needed help getting papers ready to be turned in. Now I am a non-traditional tutor in that same writing center I stumbled into as a confused and scared student two-and-a-half years ago. Moreover, I want to share some of the challenges faced by non-traditional students who go from writing for the middle-class business world to writing for the world of academia.

More and more non-traditional students are now enrolling in college. People of all ages are finding themselves faced with either the necessity or desire to return to college and get that degree they weren't able to get so many years ago. Some are first-time college students and are taking English and Math for the first time since high school. Some of the students are returning to finish what they started before deciding to get "real jobs" and/or raise families.

Regardless of why they are choosing to return to college, they are faced with a set of challenges even they don't know they are up against. They must write papers for the world of academia. If they have been employed before returning to school, they face the challenge of going from an environment, as Cynthia Haynes-Burton puts it in "Thirty Something Students: Concerning Transitions in the Writing Center," that is "product oriented" to an environment that is "process oriented." Not only will their instructors want a finished product, they will also require that the students go through the processes to get to that finished product. If the non-traditional student hasn't worked in an environment that requires them to write, many of them will be writing for the first time since high school. The one thing they all have in common, regardless of what they have done in the interim between high school and their return to college, is the terrible memory of their eighth-grade English teacher bleeding on their papers with a red-ink pen because they didn't have commas in the right place.

As a tutor in the writing center, I found myself faced with two such students last semester and one this semester. Both of the students I worked with at length last semester were women who had been employed in the business world and decided to return to college to finish their degrees. What this meant to me as a tutor was that it had been years since they had had a college English class, and they were now faced with writing lengthy papers that required them to write several drafts before turning in a finished product. One of the students, "Mary," was an English major who was faced her first semester back with writing a number of essays and literary analyses. The other student, "Joan," worked on campus and was enrolled in two upper-level history classes that required her to produce two different 15-page research papers on two very different topics. Both Mary and Joan had written business letters and memos to colleagues in the past, but neither had any idea that writing for college classes would be so different. The student I will be working with this semester, "Norma," is sixty years old and beginning her college career after raising a family and watching one son receive his Ph.D. Unlike Mary and Joan, Norma is starting from scratch. She hasn't written much more than personal letters for many years, and now she finds herself faced with writing papers for a freshman composition class.

Non-traditional students enrolled in writing-intensive classes face different challenges than traditional college freshmen. Sure all college students worry about making sure they have understood what the professor wants, making sure they get their assignments turned in on time, and getting good grades. However, many non-traditional students also juggle families and jobs along with their schoolwork. They must re-learn how to negotiate critical writing and thinking skills, skills that have been put on the back burner. Tutoring non-traditional students is very different than tutoring a traditional student. I base this observation not only on the fact that I was a non-traditional student but also the experience I have gained working with these three other non-traditional students in the writing center environment.

One advantage of tutoring a non-traditional student is that they almost always come early and come prepared. Mary, Joan and Norma all came to their sessions having read the material numerous times and carrying pages and pages of notes. They do not sit down the night before and scribble down something just to make their tutor happy; they have put a lot of thought into what they bring in to work on. But it is important to consider, as Cynthia Haynes-Burton explains, that while these students "are more organized in their approach to assignments, they are less confident [in] their ability to convey their thoughts" (Haynes-Burton 106). Non-traditional students want help. That is not to say they are not a little scared or intimidated when they walk through that door for the first time. They are scared. When I asked Mary, Joan, and Norma what scared them the most, they all had the same response, "I didn't want to look stupid." Mary came to the Writing Center because she knew me from class and knew that I struggled with many of the same things she struggled with in that class. She approached me outside the Writing Center and asked what she needed to do to get help. She didn't have the slightest clue where to start when writing an essay or a literary analysis. Joan came to the writing center of her own free will for help with her history papers. She came early in the semester to work on papers that weren't due until close to the end of the semester. Both Mary and Joan needed help getting started with their papers, but both believed the writing center was mainly available to help them with grammar. Mary had no idea we could help at any stage of the writing process, and Joan, while there of her own free will, was told about the writing center by her professor as a way to clean up her sentence-level errors. Joan was in for quite a surprise when we sat down to look at her first draft and spent the majority of the time working on her thesis sentence, and her use of grammar did not come up even once. Norma was quite a different story. She had been on a tour of the writing center the first week of classes and found the center to be a safe haven where she could get the help she much needed with her first paper of the semester. All three of these students chose to work with me because I was a non-traditional student. When I asked Mary why my being a non-traditional student made a difference, she simply said, "You won't think I am dumb. I don't want some young, smart college grad thinking that I don't know how to write."

What I have found in working with all three students is that in some cases, we needed to start from the beginning. It wasn't safe to assume that they would know what a thesis sentence was or that they knew exactly what the professor was asking for in the writing prompt. Sure they knew how to produce a product, but they didn't know how to go through the necessary processes to get to a final product that would be acceptable. I worked with Mary eleven or twelve times over the fall semester. Each time I saw she was making progress. By the end of the semester, she had come a long way from that first meeting where she brought me a paper with no thesis, no evidence, and absolutely no organization. She had learned how to go through the processes of making claims and supporting them to come out with a product she could be proud of. Each time she came, we had to work less and less on her papers. By the final paper, we really needed only to focus on surface-level errors.

While Joan made a lot of progress in the six or eight times I worked with her, her story doesn't have such a happy ending. The help that Joan wanted and the help Joan needed were very different kinds of help. She had become so accustomed to producing a *product* that she wanted to skip over the *processes* needed to come up with a polished final draft. I found myself turning into a cheerleader just trying to get her through with something that would pass as intelligent as the deadline for the papers loomed ahead. She had become the student that Nancy Grimm refers to in *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times*; she was overlooking her "writing coach's suggestions for revision because she had been taught to pay more attention to surface features rather than the deeper structure of her essays" (36). I found myself moving from a cheerleader to a position in which I had to be very frank with her about my concerns. I guess you could say we both got frustrated, and Joan chose to finish the papers on her own without the help of the writing center. I do not know the outcome of our endeavors, and while it is unnerving to know she needs help that she doesn't believe she needs, I found myself stuck in a difficult situation.

In the first tutoring session I had with Norma, we started in square one. We talked about what a thesis is and what its purpose is in the paper. We talked about making claims and backing those up with evidence. I am very anxious to get to work with this student this semester as it will offer me a whole new experience in working with

a student who has a great desire to learn how to write for academia but has absolutely no idea what processes are needed to get to the final product.

These three women are not your everyday students. They are all trying desperately to bridge the literacy threshold. Each is learning as Grimm says that "literacy is not always a happy march of individual progress but really a matter of conforming to predetermined expectations" (34). The battle that non-traditional students must fight first is recognizing what those predetermined expectations are. The students I worked with wanted a non-traditional peer tutor because they believed I held the key to unlocking the secret of conforming to those predetermined expectations. They all recognized I had walked in their shoes and I could relate to what they were going through. Of course, it's possible that that wasn't the case at all; maybe I hadn't walked in their shoes but because they were non-traditional and I was non-traditional, we at least had something in common to start building on. What all three students found is that unlocking that secret is a joint project. When we worked together, using our background and our prior knowledge together in a form of group collaboration, I was able to help them use their prior experience to learn to conform.

In her book, Grimm evaluates the ability of writing centers to become a place where "tutors and students can learn to negotiate with a culturally specific way of writing while acknowledging the culturally diverse literacies that have always been part of American life" (49). I would argue that the first step in acknowledging the culturally diverse literacies would be to have a staff that is culturally diverse. The non-traditional students fear that the "younger tutors" will not acknowledge the other culturally diverse literacies that are a part of American life—a part of American life non-traditional students have lived in and been successful in for most of their adult lives. Grimm also states that "writing center people often catch glimpses of the gaps between academic expectations and student's cultural experiences, but generally they believe that students need to learn academic literacy because . . . well, because if they don't . . . it will hurt them in the long run . . . because that's the way things work . . . in the real world" (29). Non-traditional students bring to the writing center a whole new range of cultural experiences, experiences that if discussed and dealt with in the right manner, can help these students to write better papers. These students have a virtual library of information and experiences available to them that traditional college students do not have. The tutor they work with must recognize these experiences and help students use the experiences to their advantage. This is why they enter the writing center looking for someone whom they can relate to, and this is why the non-traditional students I have worked with in the past six months wanted to work with a non-traditional peer tutor. The students believed I could help them use their prior experience as a springboard to write better papers. This is why matching non-traditional students with non-traditional peer tutors is so important. By matching non-traditional students, and for that matter, all students with peer tutors who have similar backgrounds and experiences, writing centers are offering their clients a much greater opportunity to succeed. By allowing them to choose from either traditional college students or non-traditional college students, writing centers open the door to taking the initial fear out of the student and allowing that student to get to the task at hand: writing the paper. I do not want it to be interpreted that there is no way a non-traditional student can be helped by a traditional tutor, I simply believe that if we as writing centers are offering "peer tutoring," students should be able to choose to be tutored by one of their peers.

I won't stand here for one minute and tell you that working with non-traditional students is easy. The non-traditional students are the hardest to work with because they want to put all their experiences in the paper or they have absolutely no idea where to begin, but, in the end, they are by far the most rewarding. The difference lies in their desire to be back in school. It lies in their desire to succeed and prove something not only to themselves but also their families. They are here by choice. Most have already had a "real job" and want to expand their horizons. Unfortunately, the writing we as universities are preparing them to do is not the writing that will help them succeed in the business world. Chances are they will not be asked to do a literary analysis after graduation, but the *processes* their instructor and tutors are helping them learn to follow to get a final *product* will help them succeed. I know this because I walked in these shoes. Without the help of DeDe and her ability to steer me away from worrying about commas and steer me into worrying about my argument and my claims, I would not be a graduate student now. She walked me from the product-oriented world to the process-oriented world.

Angie Smith
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Commerce, TX

Works Cited

Grimm, Nancy Maloney. *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times*. New Hampshire: Boynton/Cook, 1999.

Haynes-Burton, Cynthia. "Thirty-something Students: Concerning Transitions in the Writing Center." *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. Ed. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood. New York: St. Martin's, 1995. 103-108.

A writing center shows students how to get rid of those midnight, blurry-eyed paper due blues

Note: The following is a print version of the multimedia interactive session, "How to Creatively Publicize Your Writing Center," presented by Del Mar College at the IWCA 2002 Conference in Savannah, Georgia. The presentation focused on a highly successful student recruitment campaign called, "House of Paper Due Blues."

How "The Blues" was born

It all began with a scrap of paper. It was an old flyer that read, "Got those paper due blues?" A colleague placed it on a co-worker's desk with a yellow sticky note, asking her if she could update it "Millennium" style. From this flyer, the idea for a unique student recruitment campaign took off and the "House of Paper Due Blues" was born.

The high notes (brainstorming)

We put our heads together and began to brainstorm ideas. Our publicity goal was two-fold:

1. To let students know, in a fun way, about our many free services

2. To let students know that we could relate to the pressures of having a paper due

And this is how we creatively achieved our goal: Using the theme "Paper Due Blues," we first created new flyers to post on campus. But then we began thinking of other possibilities, more than just a print advertising campaign. Next, two colleagues wrote an original blues tune, with guitar, called "Paper Due Blues." The song was just the ticket to reach students!

What we needed was a public performance. The audience was a given: students; the place was a given: the student center; and the time was a given: 12 to 1 p.m. (lunch time). One song wasn't enough, so we asked the College's Jazz Band if they would perform, too.

Now, we had the special event: we would transform the student center into a blues café.

- Round tables set with "menus" of Writing Center services
- "Blue plate special" items such as magnets and buttons
- Coffee and blueberry muffins
- Jazz band
- Original "Paper Due Blues" tune, featuring the WC Crew
- Raffle prizes

The mid notes (hard work)

During the next six weeks, we set out

- Making arrangements with student services for tables, stage, microphones;
- Obtaining donations for the coffee and pastries;
- Borrowing decorations (silk plants, easels) from other departments;
- Creating the items (buttons, magnets, menus) to go on the tables;
- Securing raffle prizes from local businesses;
- Coordinating with the College's Jazz Band;
- Publicizing the event on and off campus (College Relations Office, school newspaper, weekly campus newsletter, flyers, campus-wide email, campus photographer);
- Ordering banners (bought one; the other free, compliments of Pepsi) and yard signs (10);
- Ordering "Got those paper due blues?" t-shirts and creating "back-stage" name tags for the WC Crew;
- Inviting guests (distributing press kits to the Council of Chairs and Board of Regents);
- Rehearsing once a week

And this is how the "House of Paper Due Blues" turned out . . . go to <www.delmar.edu/engl/wrtctr/blues> to see our Blues Photo Jam.

The low notes (cost)

Ah, what about the costs. Did we have a budget?

- We started with a $100 credit with Aramark, the campus food service. That would cover the coffee.
- As we looked at our options, we realized that we could get a lot done in-house or for free.
- The event cost a total of $330. That might sound like a lot of money, but it's not when you break the cost down.
- We were able to present a special recruiting event that reached 300 students for approximately $.91 apiece.

And that's not the end of the story. . . .

"The Blues" pay off (statistics)

Was the publicity campaign worth it? We started to see the results immediately from the "House of Paper Due Blues":

- The date chosen for the event, February 27, was perfect timing because of Mardi Gras in New Orleans. So, our "House of Paper Due Blues" was a great tie-in with local media, receiving TV coverage.
- Tutorials almost doubled. In Spring 2001, when we held the event, we had 1,335 tutorials. The following Fall 2001, we had 2,255 tutorials.
- In fact, that fall, we had a record number of overall student visits in the Writing Center: 13,093.
- In addition, faculty and staff from all departments, as well as administrators and Board of Regents, frequently approach us, asking us when the next Blues Tour is going to be.

Hit the road

And now we can say, "Blues Tour II Takes Writing Center Crew to Savannah, Georgia!" At our IWCA session, we displayed photos from the actual student recruitment event, presented a Power Point presentation, performed our original blues tune, and handed out information packets. The audience members were very receptive. As we mentioned in the session, we are obviously not professional performers and, in doing a live performance, stepped out of our comfort zone as writing tutors/instructors, but the butterflies were worth it to reach students.

In sum, don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. You can do this same type of event on your campus, using your College's resources, thus keeping costs down. The key is to carry out the publicity theme, whichever one you choose, from beginning to end. We hope that, after reading this article, you will have the ideas and information that you need to creatively publicize your own writing centers.

And, that's a wrap!

Linda Eubank, Carrie Buttler, Roycelin DeLeon, Rachel Perkes, Margot Sorrell, Carolyn Stradinger, and Yvette Valdez
Del Mar College
Corpus Christi TX

THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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

Address Service Requested

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Purdue University