# THE WRITING LAB
## NEWSLETTER

## ...FROM THE EDITOR...

For those of you planning your regional's next conference, please send me announcements by May 15 so that I can include them in the June issue of WLN. If you don't have all the details nailed down, a brief announcement, with complete information to follow next fall, will help those who have to plan their travel budgets now. And for those of you considering the IWCA 2006 Summer Institute, there's information here on p. 5.

Also in this month's issue Carol-Ann Farkas examines of some long-held assumptions held by students, tutors, and teachers. Lisa Lebduska finds more ways to help tutors professionalize by considering how outreach materials should be written. Aesha Adams reflects on her teacher/tutor persona and how her tutoring has influenced her teaching. Similarly, three tutors who are English education majors examine what they gain as tutors that will enhance their future teaching of writing, and three reviewers bring their different perspectives and contexts to bear on the second edition of Ben Rafoth's collection, *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*.

So, grab some coffee, relax, and enjoy the voices of some colleagues discussing writing centers.

• *Muriel Harris, editor*

## ...INSIDE...

## Idle assumptions are the devil's plaything: The writing center, the first-year faculty, and the reality check

Nothing is more comfortable than an unexamined assumption; like an overstuffed sofa, it's easy to sink into one but very hard to get out of. For example, at my school, both faculty and Writing Center tutors take it for granted that the Center plays a central role in teaching writing in all the courses of the first-year curriculum. Both groups agree that the Center offers vital support to students negotiating the unfamiliar territory of college-level writing. But are we agreeing to something that exists only as an assumption? Many first-year students visit the Center—they account for about 25-30% of our "business"—but more do not. I would argue that the Center's ability to attract and help students in their first year of college writing and college adjustment is hampered by a disconnect between what is taken for granted and reality: we have a clash of expectations coming from all sides. Students, faculty, and tutors all assume they want the same things from the Writing Center, and will get them;

everyone means well and assumes they've been doing well; but from interviewing individuals from all three groups, I have found that there are huge differences between perceptions, expectations, and action.

In the tutors' perceptions, first-year students come in with a variety of expectations and assumptions, but generally are not really sure what will happen in the Center, why they're really there, or what the writing process really is. Tutors feel that some students have an exaggerated sense of their own abilities; that others are overwhelmed by the task of writing; that large numbers are actually very badly prepared for college-level work. One large problem the students have goes beyond understanding writing to how they become acculturated to college life: they don't really understand how and why student services like the Center work (especially the ratio of budget to operating hours); and they are tripped up by their own developing, but often still-limited time management skills. The result is that, from what the tutors hear and perceive, students expect the Center, like the Security office, to be open at all hours, and to have openings in the schedule to accommodate any student who comes last minute—and are frustrated when they can't get appointments when and how they want them.

Once at their appointment, students appear to the tutors to struggle to articulate what they want from their visit, and often ask for help with "grammar" or with "checking things over." The tutors, all sharing similar, comfortable ideas about the writing process, assume that the students are the ones making false assumptions, erroneously believing that writing is a mechanical, surface business, that, like math or science, is either right or wrong, and that their need is for someone to identify their mistakes and tell them simply and concretely how to fix them.

Students' other main request is for help in getting started, deciphering their instructors' instructions and comments. However, few students bring in assignment sheets—only partly because of their own work habits; apparently, many instructors give their assignments orally. So the students try to explain the assignment to the tutors, who in turn have to spend a lot of time questioning the student. The result of what the tutor understands is necessarily an interpretation. All of our tutors have taught in the classroom before and know how *they* would handle writing assignments but can't be completely sure their methods are the same as the instructors', especially those in other disciplines; thus, the tutors try to keep their comments fairly broad, so as not to lead students down a specific path which might really be a misdirection. Tutors subsequently notice that the students feel varying levels of frustration. Their perception is that the students want to be told what the instructors want, and what they must do to be correct: to the tutors, the students seem very impatient and baffled when they are instead met with more questions, instructions about ideas when they *know* they need help with grammar, or instructions to rewrite the whole paper. In this last case, the students are especially skeptical—it's not that they're lazy, the tutors feel, but that 1) they don't understand the writing process well enough to know why they should have to rewrite a whole paper, and 2) they don't want to do a lot of *radical* revision when they can't be sure the tutor's instructions are the same as the instructor's.

The tutors are sympathetic to the students, yet are not sure what they could be doing differently. As I said, they know how they would like the students to draft or revise; they assume the first-year faculty share, and thus teach, similar ideas about the writing process. But hard evidence is elusive, based only on how the students present themselves during their visits; from the stu-

dents' reports, it can be hard to tell what, of all possible writing issues, an instructor thinks is a priority for a given student, or if the instructor has any specific expectations about what the student will get from the visit.

One key problem, that no-one had really noticed until we went looking for it, is that the tutors and faculty don't actually know each other. Everyone has assumed that Center-faculty communication has been sufficient, when in fact there has been none, except through the indirect medium of talking to the Center's director (that's me). The Writing Center is, of course, in the basement, two to three floors away from the Arts and Sciences offices, and so tutors and faculty rarely cross paths, and almost never communicate; few tutors and faculty members have met. Although faculty are invited to provide the Center with copies of assignments and syllabi, the levels of compliance with this request are fair to middling. From the tutors' point of view, they have been assuming that inquiries about faculty assignments and criteria would be unwelcome, that it might be seen as an infringement of territory, a questioning of the instructors' methods. They feel it is up to the faculty to make the first move—or the Center's director, who has made overtures to the faculty which have not been taken up (although everyone thinks it's a good idea). And of course, under our present policies, confidentiality rules prevent random discussion of individual student work anyway, unless the student requests a written report from the session. Instructors almost never make follow-up inquiries of tutors about these reports.

From the point of view of the faculty though, my interviews with them reveal further potentially misleading assumptions. These faculty members tend to assume that their students (should) understand their assignments—given orally or on paper—well enough to explain the criteria suc-

cinctly to the tutors, when both tutors and students find this is not the case. The faculty also assume that the tutors will give the students the same kind of advice about writing, revision, use of sources, synthesis, etc.—and the tutors do, but again, without being *sure* what the faculty want, the tutors respond to student writing somewhat conservatively and generally. Faculty have told me that they see the tutors providing the same service to students that they would themselves if they had the time—but both tutors and at least one faculty member believe that the students may be reluctant to take too much advice from someone who does not have the power of the *grade* to lend authority to their comments. The instructors like the idea of conferring with tutors, but aren't sure how or whether to contact them (and again, concerns about student confidentiality interfere here as well). Faculty opinions of the tutors vary, from seeing them as providing a service, to being colleagues: tutors themselves aren't sure how any of the faculty view them, but do report that some faculty seem to see them as a fix-it service, and not as equals. And again, these are only perceptions, since each party assumes that the other knows what each is up to, and that the other wouldn't welcome communication anyway.

For this particular project, I interviewed my own first-year composition students—a small, but outspoken sample of about forty-five. Their comments were revealing, confirming my suspicions of just how much we've all been off in our assumptions about what we're doing in our efforts to teach our students writing. From my conversations with other faculty, and my own classroom practice, I know we all put a lot of effort into explaining our writing assignments and the writing process itself, including the value of feedback from other readers like those in the Center. We all *mean* very well. And yet, as the tutors have reported, and I discovered in talking to my students

about this, there is something getting in the way of students *believing* us.

I found that relatively few of my students had actually visited the Writing Center, native speakers far less so than non-native speakers. Of those who had not gone, some weren't even sure where the Center was (though it was on the tour at orientation); some felt they didn't need the help, and many didn't want anyone, peer or professional, to see their work because they were so insecure about it. Most were reluctant to get help from people who were not me; they wanted to meet *my* expectations, not those of others. Which suggests that the students' understanding of the writing process is not the same as their instructors' or tutors: *we* all understand that feedback from varying sources can be helpful, while at the same time, what matters is for the student to find her own voice, her own ideas. But our students, so worried about GPA, and so steeped in an outcomes-oriented culture, may feel they can't afford to mess around with ideals: they want to do it "right" or not at all, and right is what the instructor—the one with the A's and the F's—says.

This attitude is no doubt reinforced by the problem that students, both those who have not been to the Center and those who have, have no idea who or what the tutors are; they're pretty sure they're not students—"they look too old"—but aren't sure what else they could be. They assume they must be professionals of some kind, and were reassured when I said they were—but some students seemed hurt when I tried to explain the part-time, temporary nature of the tutors' position: "You mean, helping students is not their career? You mean, they might not be coming back?" Most of the students assumed the tutors were part of the faculty in some way, although they weren't sure how; but they figured that surely, tutors and instructors must be in frequent communication—or should be. However, without being certain of the tutors' status in the community, the students were again skeptical of taking a chance on what they might have to say.

For the much smaller number of students who had actually obeyed my exhortations to "just go!!"—almost all reported that the experience was not what they had expected. Some had gone assuming they would get help with grammar—despite the fact that I had tried to shape my own comments on their papers to emphasize ideas and structure rather than mechanics—assuming the latter is not as important as the former. When the tutors did exactly what so many of us have been trained to do, and focused on the content rather than the grammar, the students felt they were not getting the help they asked for. However, the students were not aware that they could in fact set up regular appointments to work on grammar separately, although I assumed they knew, having told them at least once (!). Other students reported that they had gone to the Center expecting to be told what to do to get an A— and again, were frustrated when the tutors seemed to sidestep this question. Many students assumed the tutors had been fully briefed on all assignments by the faculty. Their general sense was that whether or not they felt—assumed—that they understood the assignment fairly well, the tutors did not. As a result, the students felt they had to "waste" time explaining the assignment, answering tutors' questions about the criteria. Then, some felt the tutors were giving them generic advice, rather than advice specific to their papers (have you done an outline? Have you checked your thesis?)—again, not understanding how there could be a writing process, a theory of writing that supplies general principles that can be applied to specific writers' work. Other students were frustrated, as the tutors sensed, by the tutors' questions about the student's ideas: they wanted answers, not more questions, and not more revision. Students were wary of doing too much revision based on the tutors' suggestions, because they were not convinced the tutors knew enough about what I wanted to offer feedback that would get them better grades (even when they had drafts with them that I had marked). And if students

had been to the Center but had not gone back, it was for this reason—they would rather follow my comments alone than risk doing something I wouldn't want.

So, the only person who has had correct assumptions in this whole tangle of relationships is me, insofar as I had a fear, and made assumptions based on it, that everyone else had incorrect assumptions about what everyone else was supposed to be doing, and why and how. We could easily solve this problem by following E.M. Forster's famous dictum, "Only connect!" (147) and yet it's precisely because we haven't been connecting—but have imagined we were—that we've ended up assuming more about our effectiveness in teaching writing than is really the case. On the one hand, the Writing Center tutors have a pretty good sense of how the students respond to their visits, and sympathize, but can't do more because of their sense of disconnection from faculty. They need to know more about the faculty's assignments, and criteria, and would find it really helpful to feel welcome to communicate with faculty, if not about specific students, then at least about general pedagogical expectations. On the other hand, faculty like the idea of the Writing Center but are not making optimal use of it. Faculty teach the writing process, explain it, give assignments designed to get students to engage in it; but for many students, what we assume should be enough instruction is not. We tell them what the Writing Center does, where it is, that they should go—for some faculty, that they must go—but many students still don't know what the Center is for (let alone where it is!) and how they can make use of it.

I've also begun to suspect that perhaps our students are simply suffering from information overload, especially at the beginning of the year. The Writing Center's promotional efforts are focused on the orientation period and

first weeks of class; our instruction in the concept of the "writing process" tends to be most intense at the start of the semester—then we all assume that since we've told the students, they've got it. Nope. I think our timing is as much an unlooked-for culprit as our other assumptions.

The point of this study has not been to discover new methods and tricks to get students to make more or better use of the Writing Center as part of their initiation to academic writing and life in the academy. In fact, I have all along been consulting my trusty *Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*, my IWCA *Writing Center Resource Manual*, my collection of *Writing Lab Newsletters* and *Writing Center Journals,* and have earnestly followed the experts' tried and true advice, attempting to involve both tutoring and faculty colleagues as much as possible—and have subsequently been bemused when first-year visiting rates have stubbornly refused to budge upwards. Here was my big, unexamined assumption: that doing "right" things automatically compels others to provide desired outcomes. This epiphany is what led me to wonder to what extent other unexamined assumptions, especially my own, were getting in our way—and once I went looking for them, there they were. What I, the tutors, and the composition faculty have to do to improve our students' engagement in the writing community we had assumed we had established—is to do everything we've been doing, with one fundamental change. We can see places where we need to do some things differently, some things more, some things on a different schedule; but most importantly, we have to make sure that the only assumption we operate on is that taking things for granted is no substitute for taking action.

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## Review of *Tutoring Guide*

chapter, "Recent Developments in Helping ESL Writers," for instance, suggests strategies for tutors to ensure ESL writers' ownership of their papers, and explains how to negotiate directive and non-directive approaches to tutoring ESL students. Ritter grounds her suggestions in theory and offers further readings that will introduce tutors to writing center theory regarding ESL students. Similarly useful to my tutors will be Carol Briam's chapter, "Shifting Gears: Business and Technical Writing," and Beth Rapp Young's chapter, "Can You Proofread This?" (a perennial concern for all writing tutors).

The range of contributors to this volume, from seasoned writing center theorists to current writing center workers and recent peer tutors, contributes to the accessibility of the articles as well. Student tutors will likely welcome chapters such as "Tutoring in Emotionally Charged Situations" written by former tutors Corinne Agostinelli, Helena Poch, and Elizabeth Santoro both for its topic and authorship. *A Tutor's Guide* will be a particularly apt addition to our tutor training materials— one that will, I hope, inspire our tutors to incorporate more theory into their already admirable practice.

## IWCA Summer Institute, July 23-28, 2006
## Stanford University

• New to directing a writing center?
• Starting up a new center?
• Looking for new directions for your writing center?
• Planning a writing center career?
• Interested in learning and sharing with writing-center colleagues?
• Ready for more sustained writing-center discussions than conferences offer?
• $500 tuition + travel & lodging

  Join us for an intensive week of stimulating presentations, discussions, mentoring, and fun with writing center colleagues from around the world. The institute will provide a mentoring network of professional contacts, including both new directors and a range of veteran writing center professionals. Leaders are drawn from both large and small colleges and universities, community colleges, and secondary schools, with specialties that range from technology in the writing center to peer tutoring and writing across the curriculum.

*Co-Chairs*
Michele Eodice, University of Kansas
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*Workshop Leaders*
Al DeCiccio (Rivier College)
Lisa Ede (Oregon State University)
Michele Eodice (University of Kansas)
Scott Miller (Sonoma State University)
Clyde Moneyhun (Stanford University)
Janet Swenson (Michigan State University)
Sherri Winans (Whatcom Community College)
Lisa Lebduska (Wheaton College)
Jenny Jordan (Glenbrook North High School)

**Online registration at: http://swc.stanford.edu/iwcasi2006/**

## Calendar for Writing Center Associations

April 7-8, 2006: NorthEast Writing Centers Association, in Nashua and Amherst, NH
  **Contact**: Leslie Van Wagner, e-mail: lvanwagner@rivier.edu.
April 8, 2006: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Annapolis, MD
  **Contact:** Chip Crane, e-mail: cecrane@usna.edu;  Leigh Ryan, e-mail: lr@umd.edu: and Lisa Zimmerellli, e-mail: lzimmerelli@umuc.edu. Conference Web site:  <http://www2.mcdaniel.edu/mawca/conf_2006.htm>.
April 29, 2006: Pacific Northwest Writing Center Association, in Corvallis, OR

Contact:  Conference Web site: <http://www.acadweb.wwu.edu/writepro/PNWCA.htm>.
June 24-26, 2006. European Writing Centers Association, in Istanbul, Turkey
  **Contact**: Dilek Tokay, email: dilekt@sabanciuniv.edu. Conference website: <http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/ewca2006>.
October 25-29, 2006: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in St. Louis, MO
  **Contact**: Susan Mueller at smueller@stlcop.edu or Dawn Fels at dfels@earthlink.net. Conference Web site: <http://www.ku.edu/~mwca/>.

# Classical rhetoric and the professional peer tutor

"Writing sucks. Yeah, we know, but we can help."

My Provost was reading to me over the phone. "Lisa, I have a writing center poster in front of me that I was hoping you could explain."

So much to say, really.

About tutor autonomy. About creativity. About keeping my untenured position as director of Worcester Polytechnic Institute's Center for Communication across the Curriculum.

After explaining that I hadn't seen the poster before it was circulated, assuring the Provost that others would be removed, and sharing a brief laugh with him, I began considering how tutor training might include professionalization that did not transform tutors into automatons.

A shared challenge faced by those of us who work with tutors is the issue of ongoing development. Once tutors have completed their initial training—whether through workshops, pre-semester meetings or an entire course—the question of how to continue tutor development remains. While some ongoing training necessarily addresses administrative issues such as scheduling, record-keeping and even room protocol, and other training rightfully consists of pedagogical exchanges such as tutorial debriefings and creative play exercises, we need not think of training in binary terms: administration versus pedagogy. Rather, certain administrative artifacts from the tutors' professional roles—namely, texts of introduction and tutorial reports—may be used as a way to combine professionalism with pedagogy, and, in doing so, enhance tutors' development as both tutors and writers.

Peer tutors who compose writing center materials share a struggle with directors who must write annual reports. As Andrea Zachary notes, directors "sometimes are at a loss on how to write for our professional audiences" (1). According to Zachary, "Applying basic strategies of technical writing can be beneficial for writing center administrators who write professional and technical documents" (1). While the same approach might be used by peer tutors who are developing writing center publicity and completing tutorial reports, I wish to suggest that directors complicate this strategy during tutor training, infusing it with an introduction to classical rhetorical principles that allow tutors to consider the communicative contexts in which they operate.

Kenneth Bruffee's oft-cited caution against constructing peer tutors as "little teachers" has perhaps led many in the writing center community to back away from notions of peer professionalism as we struggle to keep tutors in that liminal space in which they are neither entirely pure student nor mini-teacher and are, as Muriel Harris put it, "in the middle" ("Talking"). While producing proscribed documents or filling out tutorial forms threatens to construct tutors as "little administrators" (a notion even more frightful than "little teachers"), working through the rhetorical issues surrounding writing center professional documents allows tutors to maintain the precious liminal quality described by Harris. Additionally, composing "professionalized" materials can provide tutors with the time and space in which to explore, reflect and collaborate about who they and their peers are and are becoming.

Much of the writing-center opposition to certain forms of professionalism stems from Harvey Kail's and John Trimbur's 1987 "The Politics of Peer Tutoring," in which they contrast the "educational consciousness" of two models of peer tutoring: writing-center and "curriculum-based" (5). The writing-centered approach employed "publicity and word of mouth"—talk of successful tutorials, student-to-student—to attract tutees (6), whereas the curriculum-based model, in which tutors were attached to a specific course (also known as designated or dedicated tutoring) with guaranteed clientele, offering, in Kail and Trimbur's words "operational efficiency" (7). Kail and Trimbur rejected this curriculum model, asserting that it "installed" tutors in a power grid as transmitters of received knowledge, thereby preventing them from collaborating as peers (8). Kail and Trimbur concluded that the curriculum-based approach was "administratively more efficient" but that the writing-center model was ultimately more educationally effective, better at developing students and allowing them to "probe the traditional relationships of teaching and learning" (10).

Although I support the need for tutors to explore the traditional relationships of teaching and learning, I would nevertheless argue that the instruments of administrative efficiency—writing center publicity and tutorial reports—need not exist exclusively as conduits of hierarchical power. Indeed, when incorporated into tutor training sessions rather than positioned as necessary evils—the analysis of such documents may actually enhance the exploration of the traditional relationships that they would seem to reify.

Including tutors regularly in the analysis and/or design of outreach materials can do more than simply keep the center running. Indeed, when presented as issues to be debated and explored rather than as fact-based rules to be followed without question, consid-

erations of professional communication can contribute to the robust development of the tutors and the life of the center itself.

While most writing tutors receive ample guidance in meeting their tutees face to face (see, for example, Meyer and Smith; Gillespie and Lerner; Capossela; and Clark), few seem to receive similar guidance about written introductions. In my experience, though, inviting tutors to craft individual statements of introduction for writing center Web sites or to classes for whom they would tutor proved to be infinitely valuable. James Kinneavy's translation of *kairos* for composition provides an especially useful frame for approaching such statements. As Kinneavy explains it, *kairos* is "the appropriateness of the discourse to the particular circumstances of the time, place, speaker, and audience involved" (84). One *kairotic* moment for tutors, then, would be the moment at which they meet potential tutees—through Web sites, flyers, posters and introductory e-mails.

Because writing center outreach materials are both informative and persuasive, I have found it helpful to combine technical writing strategies with classical rhetorical principles in tutor training, an approach that allows tutors to recognize professional contexts and connect with the broader education in academic writing that they have already received. At the same time, working through the rhetorical issues raised by the composition of professional documents allows tutors to maintain their individual approaches to tutoring.

During our tutor training workshops, I asked designated tutors to compose letters of introduction to their respective classes. We began with a modified version of John M. Lannon's "Audience and Use Profile," which advises writers to answer a range of questions about their audience, from their prior knowledge about their topic, to their

probable attitudes toward the writer and the intended effect of the document (33). The tutors, who were attached to an interdisciplinary course asking students to write about social/technological issues, developed a rich discussion as they engaged the following questions.

Who were the students in the course with whom the tutors would be working? What did they know about writing in general and about their writing for this course in particular? What might be some of their fears, concerns, and pre-dispositions about writing?

While potential tutees were what Lannon refers to as the "primary" readers of the introductory letters, the tutors were well aware that there were secondary readers—faculty and administrators—as well. The knowledge and understanding of these secondary readers further informed our discussions of audience. What, for example, was the instructor's attitudes toward tutoring? What needs did this faculty member have? Did the needs of these various readers ever conflict? And, if they did, in what way?

By using the concept of an audience profile to compose their individual letters of introduction, the tutors were able to begin identifying the complexities surrounding tutoring itself. However, the primary purpose of technical writing is usually to convey information, whereas the tutor introductory letter has a distinct persuasive component, so our approach to the audience profile had to be modified somewhat. The readers of an introductory letter—potential tutees—are not always convinced of tutoring's usefulness, even if (sometimes especially if) they have been required to visit the writing center. And, even if they are convinced of tutoring's benefits, they might have a much narrower understanding than the tutors of what those benefits entail. Some, for example, might be thinking solely in terms of raising their grade or placating their instructor. The introduc-

tory tutoring letter or e-mail, then, should persuade as well as inform. To facilitate this idea of persuasive professional materials, I also introduced (or in some cases reintroduced) tutors to the Aristotelian concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos—persuasive appeals to shared values, reason, and emotion.

We continued with a group brainstorm about constructing an ethos in a letter of introduction. How would they create a credible persona for their readers? What elements of their character and experience would make them credible in this particular context? These questions, to which we returned each time a tutor composed a new introduction, allowed us to see the dynamics of tutoring in general and their own evolution in particular. Several of the tutors immediately offered their student credentials: their majors, classes they had taken; one student wanted to include his G.P.A. (a notion the other tutors quickly rejected). Others started talking about qualities they possessed: an interest in writing, an ability to listen. When I pointed out that "ethos" also included the ability to connect with one's audience, the discussion turned more empathetic and tutors considered ways of identifying with the struggles their potential tutees faced.

Of course, *how* to identify with an audience is another issue. Although the ethos of the "writing sucks" poster certainly connected with some readers, empathizing through what Trimbur refers to as "unionizing" (23), the tutors in this instance had broader audiences. Once it appeared on a public poster, the communication between tutor and potential tutee mushroomed to include larger and more diverse audiences, including those who would not wish to "unionize" in quite the same way.

After we had brainstormed the various possibilities for creating an ethos, we turned to discuss the possibilities for logos. Would an appeal to their peers' logic work in this kind of letter? Was there, in other words, a logical

reason for working with a peer?

Finally, we began discussing pathos and to what extent an appeal to their readers' emotions would be effective and ethical. Would they, for example, appeal to humor: "I write good. Come work with me," as someone suggested? Or would they appeal to fear: "Work with a tutor or risk getting the grade you dread." The discussion turned lively as we sifted through the possibilities, recognizing that effective appeals in commercial advertising were not necessarily the approach for a writing center. Although no one argued that we should frighten students into visiting the writing center, the reasons why we shouldn't do so provided us with a rich exchange of who we were, why people write, and why they write collaboratively.

Engaging issues of classical rhetoric and professional communication is an equally effective approach to teaching tutors about tutorial reports. Although Kail and Trimbur propose that the writing-center model, relatively devoid of administrative influence, is a means of "demystifying the authority of knowledge and its institutions" (11), the tutorial report, when presented as an artifact of authority, may actually be a means of demystifying that authority. To a certain extent, of course, tutorial reports conduct authority. As Boquet observes, "They prove our usefulness institutionally. They compose us."(23). And in many cases, the "forms" that Boquet describes can counter the generative, thoughtful environment that directors strive to create. These forms, Boquet explains, "write the students that we tutor, reducing a dynamic interpersonal exchange to a mimeographed sheet full of circles and checks" (23). Particularly in an era of tutorial management software, in which the record-keeping process is becoming increasing automated—less thoughtful, less seemingly complex, more hurried—the tutorial report has more reductive power than ever before. It is still possible, however, to resist

this inscription somewhat by using tutor training to analyze the form within its rhetorical context. Such moments allow us to slow down the documentation process, to enter what Anne Geller characterizes as "epochal time in the writing center" whenever possible.

The tutorial report is a hybrid genre, attempting to serve multiple purposes and often written for multiple audiences. In some writing centers, tutors complete tutorial reports, and, if they have received the tutee's permission, send them to the instructor. Sometimes the tutees receive a copy and sometimes a copy is kept on file. In these cases the report has multiple audiences including the instructor, the tutee, the director, and the tutors who work with the tutee in the future. The decision about what the tutorial report should do is an example of the "tradeoff" that Harris outlines, noting that writing center administrators must often make choices and that such choices are always inevitably context-specific ("Solutions" 167). Ultimately, however, the tutorial report offers yet another vehicle for tutor socialization.

Tom Hemmeter emphasizes the importance of tutorial reports, despite the potential risk of turning the tutorial into a classroom service (42). For Hemmeter, the report provides an opportunity to demonstrate the quality of peer tutoring, particularly when the report is written with "objectivity, tact, completeness, and mechanical correctness" (43). Hemmeter recommends working with tutors to avoid evaluative statements that could cause a conflict with the instructor while also altering the tutor's role into something into should not be (44). As with writing letters of introduction, tutors might again work through an audience analysis profile as a way of understanding the factors surrounding the tutorial report itself. Why do we keep tutorial reports? Who reads the reports? Why? How have tutorial reports been used in the past? How might they be used in the future?

Tutorial reports, like letters of introduction, are nevertheless artifacts of persuasion, designed to convince faculty and administrators that the center is indeed doing good, responsible work. They also, as Boquet notes, protect the tutor, serving to document sessions that "stray from the norm" (23). Analyzing the ethos of such documentation can again prove to be an especially rich discussion. What elements of the report construct the tutor's ethos, making him or her a credible writer in this instance?

What are the considerations of pathos? Tutors sometimes, for example, wish to appeal to an instructor's sympathy, using the tutorial report to discuss a peer's efforts ("Jessica worked very hard on this paper.") While the desire to empathize with the writer is a desirable trait, expressing that desire as an evaluation of the writer's effort again puts the tutor and the center in an awkward position. And, as a rhetorical appeal, an appeal to sympathy might be questioned for its effectiveness, particularly as tutors return to the purpose of the tutorial report. Ideally, the report is not designed to win sympathy for any particular student but stands instead as a means of describing the efforts made during the tutorial.

Finally, a tutorial report presents an opportunity to unfold the logos of the tutorial itself. A tutorial report can make visible the hidden logic of a tutorial session—why, for example, a tutor chose to work on a particular aspect of a paper, or how it is possible to devote an entire session to the discussion of a thesis statement. So, while on the one hand the tutorial report represents a relationship between learning and authority that education should continually question, at the same time it presents an opportunity to scrutinize that relationship.

On a practical level, then, professional documents such as outreach materials and tutorial reports are an insti-

tutional necessity that keep writing centers accountable and viable, but they need not be regarded as a necessary evil. They can, by contrast, be positioned as professional artifacts, documents of an organic literacy that must be continuously re-evaluated and reconsidered in light of the changing rhetorical contexts in which we all take part.

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## Road less traveled

When writers return to the writing center and demonstrate gradual improvement, we see the positive effects of our mentoring strategies. As future teachers, we recognize the value of these techniques within the writing classroom and will implement them frequently, practicing student-centered teaching.

**Conclusion**

There is a difference between hands-on mentoring experience and the artificial role-playing that occurs in methods courses. All three of us remember the bored faces in the audience during microteaching simulations, since other students cared little about the ideas we were presenting. Microteaching shows us how to make lesson plans but often fails to teach us how to adapt to our students. Tutoring, on the other hand, provides real experience because the student involvement is, for the most part, voluntary. We are tutoring for a specific purpose; both the tutor and the writer want to improve the writer's

skills. Experience in the writing center offers unique benefits that may not be available for education students who do not have the opportunity to tutor writing before teaching writing. Oftentimes, English education majors fail to consider writing center employment, or as Robert Frost would say, they fail to take the road "less traveled by." And as we consider our future careers as English teachers, our writing center experience "has made all the difference."

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# 𝒯UTORS' COLUMN

## "Where's our teacher?" Reflecting on peer tutoring and teaching

I arrived dressed in khakis, a white blouse, and a scarf. I remember deliberating a long time about what to wear because I knew that it was the first day and I worried about making an impression as "the teacher." Now, you would have thought that the scarf would have given me away since most first year students don't wear them. I came in deliberately late (about 5 minutes or so) and took a seat in the only empty chair available—right in the front. I didn't have to pretend to be flustered or nervous—I really was because doing this "activity" was definitely a risk for me, given my usual introverted self. Although I have since forgotten his name, I'll never forget the smile on the face of the young man sitting to my left. It seemed to say: yeah, it's been a rough day for me as well. It's all right that you're late. It's going to be okay." I sat for a few minutes and noticed that the class began to rustle and bustle with nervous energy. One burly, athletic-looking student in the back of the room (who I would have trouble with later in the semester when he made a paper airplane and threw it across the room the day my assigned mentor came to observe my teaching skills) said out loud—"Where's our teacher"? Wouldn't it be funny if *he* didn't show up?!

At that moment, I stood up, walked to the front of the room, picked up a piece of chalk and wrote: "Welcome to English 15. Ms. Aesha Adams." You could have heard a pin drop—I certainly thought I heard every jaw drop as I stared at a classroom full of blank faces. I could only assume they were shocked because first of all, I looked so young (how else could I have pulled it off?); secondly, I was female;

thirdly, I was African American and fourthly, I was a young, African American woman!

After introducing them to Penn State's Introductory Rhetoric and Composition Course, I proceeded to tell these eager yet baffled students why I engaged them in that activity. I said, "I want to blur the lines of distinction between me, the teacher and you, the students. I want you to realize that I don't hold all of the knowledge about writing and rhetoric. You all have something to bring, something to teach me as well."

Thus began my first day of teaching first-year composition, a milestone event for my tenure as a graduate instructor at Penn State University. As I reflect on this first day and the ways in which my teaching practices have since evolved, I have come to realize that I have been indelibly marked by my experiences as an undergraduate peer tutor at Marquette University. As evidenced by my speech to the class, I strove to create an environment that valued diversity and fostered collaborative learning, dialogue, and interaction between and among all participants. I thought of myself as a "coach" or a "mentor" to my students, encouraging them through a variety of assignments, readings, and activities, to become self-reflexive of their writing, a skill I acquired as a peer tutor. Although it was my first time teaching college students, I gained confidence and expertise knowing that I at least knew how to begin to respond to student writing because of the ways in which I was trained to respond as an interested, engaged reader during tutoring sessions. In fact, in the early days

of my teaching I found that my comments almost always took the form of questions on student drafts. Furthermore, I thought of my one-on-one conferences with students during office hours as mini-tutorials because I always wanted the student to maintain ownership of her writing while helping her take a step back from her writing and become aware of her rhetorical choices.

However, as the aforementioned paper airplane incident demonstrates, I ran into problems later in the semester with maintaining my "authority" as the teacher and handling student resistance when I attempted to "redraw" the lines of distinction between teacher and student. Perhaps I was overly optimistic (and naïve) in thinking that the writing center and the writing classroom were identical spaces—there are different expectations, different institutional constraints, and different power dynamics in operation in a writing classroom. Muriel Harris makes a similar observation in "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors." She claims "tutorial instruction is very different from traditional classroom learning because it introduces into the educational setting a middle person, the tutor, who inhabits a world somewhere between student and teacher" (28). Students therefore respond differently to tutors than to teachers, according to Harris, because tutors can occupy a third space, a space outside of the evaluative pressures of the classroom (28). Therefore, despite all the blurring of boundaries and distinctions, my students would in some way still perceive me as "the teacher"—I held the grade book; I assigned grades to the papers; I marked students tardy; I,

in some ways, was viewed as a representative of the institution, who with the slightest stroke of my hand could make or break a student's GPA. Furthermore, I believe that there were times when my students wanted a "teacher" and not a "tutor"; while my office hour conferences were fun, interesting, and satisfying (at least to me), to resist being directive and tell students what I expected seemed unethical. In other words, acknowledging students' rights to their rhetorical choices was fine until I had to assign a "C" or some other grade to those choices.

Finally, I struggled with how much of a "peer" I could or should be to my students without losing their respect**.** Peter Elbow surmises that "even though we are not wholly peer with our students, we can still be peer in [the] crucial sense of also being engaged in learning, seeking, and being incomplete" (332). For Elbow, it seems, "peerness" is a rhetorical stance or pose that teachers can adopt to demonstrate that they are also lifelong members of the learning community even while they simultaneously insist on upholding classroom standards. Elbow calls this "embracing contraries" and claims that it embodies the struggle of "good teaching . . . because it calls on skills or mentalities that are actually contrary to each other and thus tend to interfere with each other" (327). As I grappled with how to blend the expertise and confidence I found in my sense of self as a tutor with my newfound role as a composition instructor, I also struggled with how to remain student-centered and maintain my authority within my classroom. I wanted to eschew the image of the teacher as "the" ultimate authority figure, but I also needed to know how to deal with students throwing paper airplanes across the room.

I realized, however, that I had a limited view of what authority is and where it should come from. Although writing centers and writing classrooms

are not identical spaces, like the writing center, the writing classroom is a space where multiple subject positions converge and multiple roles are negotiated. Brian Street and James Gee refer to these multiple positions and roles as "multiple literacies." Street argues that rather than think of Literacy (capital "L," small "y") as a neutral, technical skill, we should think of literacy as the ideological, social and cultural practices that individuals draw upon to make meaning of a variety of verbal and extraverbal texts. James Gee demonstrates that literacy not only involves multiple ways of knowing but also multiple ways of being—ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that are particular to a discourse community. For me this includes my sense of self as a "teacher"-"preacher"-"singer"-"sistah"-"scholar"-"student"-"writer"-"tutor." The list goes on and on. I could draw upon each of these different ways of being, knowing and showing, to assert my authority to teach.

Indeed, as my teaching has evolved, I have worked to make these literacy practices more explicit in the classroom. For example, I often begin my composition courses by soliciting students to sing a call-and-response gospel song in order to illustrate the ways in which their participation is integral to the success of the semester.

My first semester experience as a composition instructor demonstrates the multiple subject positions, multiple voices, and multiple roles we as lovers of, users of and practitioners in writing centers occupy and employ as we enter new spaces. I often wonder if my students were asking the same question at the end of the semester: "Where's our teacher?" If so, I'd like to think that it was less because they thought I did a poor job of teaching them about writing and more because they began to think differently about what it meant to be a student in a composition classroom taught by a peer tutor. Despite my encouragement, many of my students did not visit the writing center

that first semester. But, they didn't have to because the writing center visited them. In the words of Wendy Bishop: "You can take the girl out of the writing center, but you can't take the writing center out of the girl."

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# Book Review

## Ben Rafoth, ed. *A Tutor's Guide*: *Helping Writers One to One*. 2ⁿᵈ ed. Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 2005. (184 pp., paperback, $21)

### Reviewed by Ron Scheer ( University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA)

I like this book and plan to put a copy of it on every table in my writing center for consultants to read during down times. There are easy-to-find answers and easy-to-use strategies for dealing with most of the day-to-day issues that come up for them between staff meetings.

As with Rafoth and Bruce's *ESL Writers*, I appreciate the general absence of jargon and theoretics that tend to plague rhet/comp literature. My consultants (none of them students of rhet/comp) can easily access the plain language discussions of issues raised and benefit from the practical advice given. References to further readings are nicely covered in annotated bibliographies and endnotes.

Rafoth has smartly directed his contributors to reflect on the complexities of their topics by taking on counter arguments and posing their own reservations in a separate section of each chapter, "Complications," which opens the topic to further points of view without muddying it with the ambiguities that typically infiltrate and challenge our understanding of the writing process.

Of the 17 topics covered in the book, I'd characterize 40% as in a basic, need-to-know category for new consultants, 40% as beyond-the-basics and illuminating for experienced consultants, and 20% as neither of the above.

In the first category, I'd include Macauley (negotiating expectations), Harris (reticent writers), Severino (international ESL writers), Ritter (ESL and correctness), Zemliansky (advanced writers), Trupe (organization and reader-based writing), and Young (proofreading).

For consultants with some experience, I like Munday (consultants who get too confident in their own routine), Agostinelli, Poch, and Santoro (dealing with emotional consultations), Rafoth (critical thinking and analytical writing), Greiner (consulting on unfamiliar subjects), Cooper, Bui, and Riker (online tutoring), and Dossin (plagiarism and techniques for writing up research).

Of those I felt ambivalent about, maybe Briam (business and technical writing) would head the list, and for reasons that have more to do with the scope of the topic. Blurring important differences between workplace, professional, and technical writing, the discussion oversimplifies its subject. Meanwhile a missing topic my own consultants would benefit from would cover the subject of personal statements, which they see a lot of.

If I have a quibble, it's with an issue larger than this book. It has to do with the use of gender-sensitive pronouns. It would seem to the casual reader of this book that writing centers are chiefly staffed by women and used by female students. An obsession, I guess, with grammatical correctness prevents us from using the pronoun "they" in a singular sense, though we are unconfused by its use in nonacademic writing and speech.

I raise the concern in the context of writing centers because male students have to overcome more resistance to voluntarily seeking or offering help as writers. Whenever the literature suggests that males are infrequent users of writing centers, this pattern is indirectly reinforced.

Reservations aside, however, I think Rafoth has put together another useful, readable, essential book that I intend to use extensively in the Writing Center at USC.

### Reviewed by Laurie JC Cella (University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT)

Ben Rafoth's *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, now in its second edition, is still an essential text for a well-rounded practicum syllabus or tutor training. I have used the first edition a number of times, and the students I taught found the articles both useful and practical. When asked to explain, novice tutors say that this book covers the most important issues they face: how to engage reluctant writers, how to avoid proofreading while still valuing this essential element of the writing process, how to effectively address ESL concerns, and how to push students to think more analytically as they write.

In response to my informal survey, tutors remarked that they liked Muriel Harris's "Talk to Me: Engaging Reluctant Writers" best because Harris captures an essential tutoring dilemma: how to get a shy/reluctant/overwhelmed student to open up. New tutors say they often struggle to begin a comfortable dialogue with a student,

and Harris's article offers strategies for breaking the ice and establishing a good rapport.

Tutors also find Jennifer Ritter's article on ESL tutoring strategies particularly helpful; her description of global versus local errors and negotiated meaning has become a standard reference at our writing center. The second edition includes Carol Severino's article "Crossing Cultures with International Students," a thorough examination of the way writing assignments are based within American culture and rhetorical expectations. Severino suggests that tutors allow their international students to ground their writing in their own cultural experiences. The addition of Severino's article adds a necessary depth to the discussion of ESL and international student writing.

This tutoring handbook is unique in that its contributors represent a wide scope of tutoring experiences, from well established directors to undergraduate tutors. When my colleague Anita Duneer and I co-taught the tutor practicum class, we noticed that our students loved Alexis Greiner's "Tutoring in Unfamiliar Subjects," not only because she gave them confidence to approach writing from different disciplines, but also because Greiner was an undergraduate tutor herself when she wrote this piece. Tutors like to see their peers in print.

The second edition extends the discussion of generalist tutoring with the addition of Pavel Zemliansky, who argues that writing center tutors should respect the rhetorical conventions of different disciplines. However, Zemliansky emphasizes the importance of writing as a central aspect of the learning process, no matter what the discipline. He suggests that tutors have the capability to assist writers in advanced classes, as long as tutors reinforce a view of writing as "exploratory, experimental, and adventuresome."

Finally, I like the addition of Carol Ellis's article "Developing Genre Discourse: Graduate Student Writing," because her essay is engaging and honest about the difficulties of writing successfully on the graduate level. This essay would be particularly useful for an undergraduate tutor who might be nervous approaching a session with a graduate student writer. Ellis makes plain that all writers need prodding in order to achieve their writing goals.

On the whole, what I appreciate most about these contributors is that they work hard to practice what they preach. Their essays are self-reflective, thoughtful, and enthusiastic about writing and the teaching of writing. Taken together, these essays represent an important component of any tutor training class.

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### Reviewed by Kim Donovan (Southern New Hampshire University, Manchester, NH)

Ben Rafoth's *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One* addresses an issue that has perplexed me in my particular professional situation. I am a writing tutoring coordinator housed within a university learning center that serves a tiny liberal arts school and a larger, well-established business program. Hence, tutors are largely business and hospitality majors, with the exceptions of the occasional liberal arts student and the rare English major. Such a situation has created a tension in my recruitment and training of undergraduate peer tutors between three points: (1) balancing an engagement with writing center/composition theory and practice with (2) my tutors limited time and interests and with (3) other tutoring and training in which these Learning Center tutors are often engaged. The approachable, pragmatic approach of the essays in this expanded second edition of *A Tutor's Guide* will be immediately useful in helping me address this gap in my tutor's training.

Of course, it would have been great to have used the first edition five years ago when I started training tutors at my university. However, it was only after trial and error that I realized how difficult it was to bring writing center and composition literature into training. Stephen North's seminal "The Idea of a Writing Center" left tutors confused—after all, they didn't work in a writing center. Other articles like Patrick Hartwell's important "Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar" did not impress the English major I gave it to, a diligent and open student. Because he was so intimidated by the piece, he never finished it. And so on. Without graduate tutors or other professional tutors, I am my tutors' lone liaison to the world of composition. Unlike their willing adoption of ideas from Neal Lerner and Paula Gillespie's excellent *Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* and other pragmatic guides, these tutors have resisted theorizing of their tutoring, which I think has truncated their growth.

Both the length and the structure of the pieces in "A Tutor's Guide" promise to create a more accessible experience for my tutors. These articles can be read before or during training, or during the inevitable slack times that occur in our walk-in tutoring schedule. Chapters all follow a similar organization, with the subtitle "Some Background," "What to Do," and "Complicating Matters" setting up the reading usefully for tutors. Each article is accompanied by an annotated suggestion for further reading, which will serve well to connect pragmatic concerns to theory in a digestible way.

The subjects as well address tangible concerns my tutors have on the job, and promise to help tutors understand that best practices in tutoring need to be tied to theory. Jennifer J. Ritter's

# The road less traveled: English education majors applying practice and pedagogy

Let's face the facts—the market for English teachers isn't exactly what it used to be. Getting by with a teaching certificate, a passion for Shakespeare, and an ability to quote Frost won't quite cut it these days. As a trio of English education majors currently employed at our university's writing center, we have found there is at least one way to enhance your resume: tutor in the writing center. This is not an advertisement for writing center employment; instead, it is an in-depth examination of how writing center practice helps to extend pedagogy in valuable ways, making writing center tutors potentially stronger teacher candidates. Specifically, we learn valuable and transferable skills in the writing center, including flexibility, subject knowledge development and retention, effective grading practices, communication skills, and the need for respecting students' individuality.

## Flexibility: Developing multiple writing strategies

Our current education methods courses attempt to shift our strategies away from prescriptive practices, the idea that one specific method will allow all students to achieve a specific goal. Our professors stress the primary purpose of the writing teacher: to teach students "writerly strategies that will help them shape and refine those ideas into effective texts. Essentially, what process pedagogy would provide for students is an ever-expanding repertoire of strategies for enhancing their own ways of producing texts" (Kirby, Kirby, and Liner 15). Likewise, we've discovered the purpose of tutoring is to help writers find out what works for them—to create options rather than limitations. We must "avoid creating clones of [ourselves] and avoid teaching [our] processes as if they are tried and true methods of approaching any

writing task" (Gillespie and Lerner 20). Therefore, students can take a suggested strategy, but rather than fixating on it, they can adapt the strategy to best meet their unique needs.

In the past, teachers emphasized the use of specific strategies in their writing instruction. The 6-Trait Scale, for example, teaches students to evaluate a written work based on six components: ideas, word choice, conventions, sentence fluency, organization, and voice/presentation. While this strategy can be efficient, many researchers feel that the disadvantages highly outweigh the advantages. The 6-Trait Scale has grown "institutionalized" and "industrialized" as teachers imply that "6-Trait papers are a genre," restricting students to writing to the scale or for the grade (Kirby, Kirby, and Liner 229-230). These strategies can encourage prescriptive teaching. While our professors discourage the use of such strategies, they are often still used in the classroom. For instance, while Jodi completed fieldwork for one of her methods courses, her field teacher felt the 6-Trait Scale would provide her students with a checklist when examining their own writing. While similar strategies have been discouraged in our education program, teachers serving as mentors to student-teachers may still practice these strategies to some extent.

As tutors, we stress the need to adapt to varying ability levels and writing processes. However, our writing center experience has taught us there is no single proper strategy that works for all writers. In the writing center, we see that writers vary in their ability levels, writing processes, and writing styles. Various students can interpret and tackle the same assignment quite differently. Jodi recalls tutoring Manuel

and Sheila, two political science students coming to the writing center with the same argumentative essay assignment. Manuel treated the assignment like a checklist, creating a structured essay with limited personal voice and systematic paragraph organization. Sheila, on the other hand, demonstrated a creative approach, inserting her own voice effectively and varying paragraph structure. They wrote completely contrasting essays, reflecting their unique systematic or creative approaches, yet Jodi recognized that both styles could be effective. A novice teacher may be tempted to standardize the writing process for all students. Tutoring guides often warn against this danger of prescriptive tutoring. According to Gillespie and Lerner, "Oftentimes, we aren't even aware of how prescriptive and controlling our teaching behaviors can be" (20). This is precisely where the difficulty arises for many English teachers.

## Subject knowledge: Retaining and using writing skills

When tutors apply knowledge gained in prior courses, writing center sessions are more effective. According to Carol David and Thomas Bubloz, when students who failed freshman composition used the writing center to improve grammar skills, instructors "found a statistically significant improvement in grammar skills on post-tests after the students in their sample had received individualized instruction focusing upon error correction and increased understanding of grammar rules" (as qtd. in Jones 5). Without fully-skilled tutors (and future teachers) who are constantly using and practicing their skills, student writers may experience minimal improvement. Many English courses may aim to teach about grammar, such as our university's Grammar of Contempo-

rary English. While this course is crucial for English majors, many of the concepts are likely to be forgotten if they are not practiced. Non-tutors are not regularly using or explaining the skills learned in the class, whereas we are constantly making use of class ideas. Shannon remembers one instance where she tutored a good writer named Ashley who had been in her grammar class about where to place commas and semicolons. "I knew this stuff at one point," Ashley said. "I just forget it because I don't use it everyday." Shannon told her she understood. She said, "The only reason I can explain it to you is because I use what I learned in that class almost daily." Like Shannon, teachers with writing center experience will be better prepared to explain these concepts to their students.

## Effective grading: Forming an open dialogue

In many teacher-preparation programs, grading student work receives a reasonable amount of attention. The issues of grading are inevitable and must be addressed. However, teachers in their first year often gravitate toward a surface-level assessment of student work—grading for shallow errors such as grammar and spelling mistakes. These mistakes can easily be quantifiable and transferable into a percentage or letter grade. Novice teachers lacking practical experience often jump on the bandwagon of the crazy correctors just because it's how they were taught as students—and it worked (Clark 348). Teachers who have writing center experience, on the other hand, have a keener instinct about the effectiveness of such surface correction, which usually has two negative outcomes. First, students may think that if they correct the teacher-identified mistakes, they've purged the paper of error and need no other revision. Second, students may perceive the comments as negative, even if the intent behind the comments was not. English education major tutors in the writing center don't grade papers. Instead, tutoring students helps

us see the effectiveness of giving feedback to grow the writer rather than to justify the grade.

Picture the average student walking into the writing center with a "D" paper loaded with red marks. Not only does this student suffer from unwarranted stress and anxiety about his/her "writing sins," but he/she also views the subsequent itemized correction of these mistakes as a way to "finish" the paper (and enjoy a stress-free weekend). After the red-marked errors from a "D" paper are corrected, the student thinks he/she should receive an "A." Maggie had an experience with a basic composition course student named Allison who viewed her paper through this very lens. She brought in her red-stained draft and requested that Maggie go through each "wrong" area and make it "right." This, Allison told her, would give her the "A" she thought she deserved. Maggie reminded her that she was there to comment on her paper as a whole and then discussed some of her writing issues, but ultimately directed her to her professor. This session taught Maggie how to handle such students, but more importantly, as a future English teacher, Maggie witnessed what happens when teachers evaluate to justify the grade by marking every minute grammar error. Students may stop enjoying writing and become teacher-directed writing zombies who create error-free drafts with no real meaning behind the words. Tutors in the writing center learn that when teachers systematize their evaluation techniques, writers, in turn, systematize their writing techniques. Teachers thereby limit writers' abilities to emphasize their own critical thinking skills and to enjoy the writing process.

In addition, students can also misinterpret teacher corrections as negative feedback: "There is a problem of students' perceptions of teacher intent behind the comments" (Harris 38). The thought of student response to comments doesn't cross the mind of teachers if they have never had the experi-

ence of verbalizing the comment face-to-face. Even though a written comment might have been very good constructive criticism, it is challenging for students to view it positively. Teachers who've been tutors are used to seeing a visual human reaction to feedback and realize its importance. If Shannon were to circle a statement during a tutoring session and question if it was the student's thesis, she can see immediately if the student even knows what a thesis is. By contrast, if she were to do this at home—away from the student—and return the paper the next day, she may have no idea if the student understood or not. It is clear that teachers cannot physically meet with all students to maintain constant dialogue about writing, but teachers who've worked in the writing center are more apt to recognize the importance of this open dialogue and may feel more comfortable with conferencing and journaling about writing itself. They will also be more likely to limit their comments in the margin and write students prose letter responses or explain evaluation in person.

## Communication skills: Working with colleagues and students

Collaborative skills are developed in the writing center environment because we are encouraged to ask each other for help. Shannon remembers an instance when she was working with a student in the writing center whose introduction began with a series of open-ended questions. Shannon, unsure if this technique was appropriate, asked Maggie for her feedback. Such collaboration with fellow employees will be necessary in the school system because teachers don't have all the answers, so it is crucial to seek help from other sources.

Furthermore, tutors have the chance to hone their communication skills, not only through one-to-one exchanges with students, but also through public speaking opportunities. For instance, our staff of 20 gives over 50 individual classroom presentations each fall semester to all freshman level composition courses, introducing our services.

We also give presentations entitled "Thursday Tutor Talks" in which a specified subject, such as documentation formats or writing successful essay exams, is discussed. Additionally, we often present at regional, state, and international writing center conferences. This experience is valuable to potential teachers since their everyday routine will consist of public speaking.

### Respecting individuality: Understanding teacher and student roles

Muriel Harris says, "Classroom syllabi assume a homogeneity that doesn't exist, a 'one-size fits all' situation" (39). Too often, teachers who create writing courses disregard the great variance in the writing capabilities of their students. While teachers recognize the importance of personalizing writing through the use of student-centered activities, such as writing workshop, writing center tutors have the potential to further individualize the process when they become teachers. We are encouraged to practice Socratic Questioning, asking the writer questions rather than offering mere advice (Jones 11). This technique prevents us from doing too much of the writer's work and increases the writer's self-evaluation tools. Highlighting the text or giving the pencil directly to the writer also encourages the apprehensive writer to actively participate.

Jodi recalls tutoring Jim, a freshman English student nervous about his first visit to the writing center. As Jodi began reading Jim's paper silently, he shuffled through his class notebook. Sensing his anxiety, Jodi asked if he would like to read his paper aloud. He reluctantly agreed, and after reading his paper he seemed much more at ease when discussing Jodi's suggestions. By reading his paper aloud, Jim avoided the awkward moment where he "waits for a diagnosis," equating bad writing with sickness or disease (Gillespie and Lerner 30).

Using such strategies enables the tutor to maintain the peer/peer relationship nurtured in the writing center.

This experience serves as an asset to future teachers because we understand the difference between a mentor and an all-the-time authority figure. The communication between the mentor teacher and student is often less threatening than between the authority figure teacher and student. Novice teachers without mentoring experience may try to jump into the authority figure role.

A novice teacher with writing center experience will acquire useful tools that a teacher without writing center experience may not have obtained in methods courses:
- Asking questions rather than feeding answers
- Focusing on organization and thesis rather than lower-level concerns
- Desiring improvement in the entire writing process rather than immediate surface improvement
- Utilizing communication strategies that mentors use during peer/peer sessions

# THE WRITING LAB
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