THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

– FROM THE EDITOR –

In this month's *WLN*, you'll find articles written from fresh perspectives for many of us. John Harbord, working in a Hungarian university, examines the actions he took and the factors at work that saved their Center for Academic Writing. Some of the politics involved are universal and familiar, some very local to that institution. Jane Cogie reviews an edited collection of essays that includes discussions about writing centers branching out to collaborate with libraries—a promising way to interact with other services on campus and provide students with integrated tutoring for research papers.

Anna Habib, writing from the perspective of a tutor in an American university who is not a native speaker of English, offers advice to native-English speaking tutors. And finally, Marcy Forman reflects on what might be missing or less effective in distance tutoring.

This issue also contains job announcements that should be of interest to those who are looking for new positions and also for those of us who are curious about what writing center job descriptions might include.

Finally, if you are still having *WLN* subscription problems or still being inundated with exta copies of issues, please let the RiCH Company support staff know. You can contact them at support@writinglabnewsletter.org.

    ✦ *Muriel Harris, editor*

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SAVING THE WRITING CENTER: A CASE STUDY

✦ *John Harbord*
Central European University
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It is in the nature of academic support units that senior administrators are more likely to make cuts there when under financial pressure than axing more prestigious parts of the university. Writing centers are all too often threatened with closure or staff reduction, and all too often have to marshal resources and arguments to ensure their continued existence. This is what happened to the Center for Academic Writing at Central European University (CEU): in early 2004 the rector of the university suddenly informed us that he was considering closing down the Center entirely. A year later, he announced publicly that he had changed his mind and that the Center would remain with full staff. Six months after this, we were at last (after eight years petitioning) allocated new, comfortable, above-ground office space. This short article seeks to analyze the strategies used in successfully campaigning against closure, in the hope that some of these may be of use to threatened writing centers in the future.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CENTER

As the Center for Academic Writing, and CEU itself, differ slightly from the typical U.S. situation, it is important to describe the context. CEU is an American graduate university of social sciences and humanities, recognized by the Hungarian state. Students come from a wide range of countries,

most typically Central and Eastern Europe, and 95% have English as second or other language. Most come to complete M.A. studies in one academic year—a very intensive program. These students are thrown into an education system rather different from what most of them have previously experienced, coming from universities where writing, especially research writing, is largely neglected as a skill. Most departments at CEU demand a considerable amount of research writing, as would be expected in a U.S. graduate program, and many students arrive ill-prepared for such a challenge.

Our Center is different from many U.S. writing centers in being a writing program and center combined. The Center is independent and not attached to any department. Originally, it was a language support unit, also responsible for teaching other languages, and though the shift to teaching writing began in 1996, the name was not changed until 2003. The same professional staff of eight teacher/consultants, including the director, teach graduate writing courses in different departments and tutor the students we teach. Most work twenty-four hours a week, time which may be spent teaching, designing, researching or reviewing materials, tutoring students, consulting with faculty in departments to refine support needs, or other duties.

A further feature of CEU which is absent from many U.S. universities is that several departments, as well or instead of using the Center's services, also have an in-house writing instructor, who is a member of the department and has full faculty status, half of whose position is dedicated to teaching academic writing. The overlap between our duties and those of the departmental writing instructors has in the past been slightly unclear, tending towards rivalry. This heavily influenced our situation, but as it may be less relevant to other writing centers, I will not dwell on it in detail here.

DEALING WITH THE THREAT

In February 2004, the rector announced quite unexpectedly that, given the increased level of English among the student intake, he felt the university could manage without a writing center. He stressed he was very happy with the quality of our work; however, due to the difficult financial situation, it was essential to make cuts. Our survival was also to an extent set in competition with the departmental writing instructors, as it was unclear whether one party might survive at the other's expense. This potentially is made more difficult for us to gain the support of faculty in departments, as by voicing support for us they might be undermining the status of a colleague and risking that the department lose a half position. Few of us were optimistic for survival, and in the next six months two staff left the Center for more secure employment. Nevertheless, we planned an extensive campaign of resistance, including strategies described below.

SUPPORT FROM FACULTY IN DEPARTMENTS

We arranged to attend faculty meetings in every department and present our case. In departments that did not hold regular faculty meetings, the director of the Center met heads of department to plead for support. In most departments we were heard courteously, and faculty asked for suggestions as to how they could help. We were ill-equipped at the time to answer this question and therefore asked their advice. Several faculty offered to put together a petition and send it to the rector, but in reality, this never happened, largely because those involved could not agree on the wording. Those who supported us strongly wanted a more forceful wording (that the Center should not be closed, nor its staff reduced), while those who were more ambivalent agreed only to a very soft wording (that the issues should be carefully reconsidered). The entire Sociology department (all faculty and students) did act unilaterally, signing a petition and sending it to the rector, but it is not clear what impact this had.

One senior professor wrote a strong public letter of support addressed to the university community. Others made private appeals to the rector or spoke in our favor at the university forum and senate. All

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing.

of this doubtless had some impact, but again it is hard to assess the extent of any individual statement of support. It is probably fair to say, however, that public letters of support carry more weight than private ones, as the administration cannot pretend they do not exist. As one of my colleagues put it, 'if a tree falls in a forest and only the rector hears it, then does it make a sound?' Most importantly, we benefited from the support of a senior professor and former pro-rector whom the rector greatly respects and who is a strong advocate of writing support. He petitioned directly on our behalf, and also advised us on strategy, notably that we should use official channels, such as the university Planning and Budget committee (P&B), the academic forum and the senate, more than informal channels such as student protests. On his advice, we frequently sent new documents and evidence to the P&B justifying our existence. He also knew who were the people high up advising the rector to save money by cutting the writing center, rather than their own pet projects, and was able to counter their arguments. His support was probably the single most important factor.

STUDENT AND ALUMNI SUPPORT

We put our case to the Student Council. They were strongly supportive and sent a petition signed by more than half the student body. Separate from this, the students of the Environmental Science department on their own initiative sent a separate petition to the administration, signed by all students in the department. Student representatives also voiced support at the meetings of the academic forum and senate. All this did no harm, but it is not clear how effective it was. We also wrote to all alumni we knew personally and asked for their letters of support. Quite a number of these were sent, though the rector said he would not take them into account, preferring facts and figures that could show the necessity of our existence. As CEU is a very young university, the support of our alumni was not as extensive or as influential as it might have been in the case of a well-established institution.

DOCUMENTATION AND ARGUMENTATION

We compiled a cost/benefit analysis highlighting the losses that would follow from a closure of the Center, the most prominent being:

- The university would lose some 1250 hours of individual writing support and about 900 hours of taught courses per year, as well as publishable materials for graduate writing courses in various disciplines.
- The overall quality of papers and theses would be lower. In consequence, either minimum pass standards would need to be lowered, or the number of failing students would increase.
- Faculty in departments would have to deal with their students' writing problems individually, which would eat into their research time, negatively affecting their publication rate.
- The poorer ability of its alumni to write adequate research and policy after graduating would reflect negatively on the university's reputation worldwide.
- If removal of writing support led to a more stringent admissions procedure, the university would no longer be able to accept those students it claims a mission to help but whose language skills are poor (in our case, from students from Central Asia).

> *"Probably the three most important factors in determining the survival of the Center at CEU were the support of influential faculty, the appropriate use of statistical evidence to support our case, and the CCCC award."*

We also referred to the university's mission to the wider community (in our case the East European and former Soviet states), showed how we support them with outreach work and what would be lost if we were

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closed, and how this might impact negatively on the university's image. We referred the administration again to the highlights of the end-of-course feedback we had gathered over the last seven years, showing how much the students value our services. If at the time we had had the results of exit surveys (taken when students leave the university), we would certainly have supplied these. We conducted the exit survey for the first time in May 2005, taking advantage of the fact that graduating students were required to come to the Center to have leaving forms signed, and asked them to fill in a questionnaire at the same time. Student responses to the question about how they benefited most from tutorials were very significant in dispersing the idea of the center as a grammar garage for non-native speakers:

- 82% - Improving the structure of my papers
- 46% - Becoming more aware of suitable academic style
- 46% - Correcting my grammar
- 42% - Improving my logic and argumentation
- 41% - Clarifying my ideas
  (Other responses less common)

Whenever new figures or facts that supported our case could be found, we sent these to the administration, constantly referring courteously to our hopes that these figures would help persuade them of the indispensable value of our services. Qualitative comments from students were also used. For example, a Ph.D. student sent me an e-mail after a consultation on a conference proposal saying "you helped me to see clearly what it is I want to say." I forwarded this message to the rector, referring to a comment he had made earlier to me about clarity of argument in academic papers. All in all, we felt it was important not to allow the administration to forget us.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

IWCA president, Jon Olson, wrote a letter to the rector in support of our cause. The rector did actually reply, but I don't know how much the appeal influenced his decision. More importantly, Jon drew our attention to the CCCC Writing Program Award for Excellence, which we applied for and won. We publicized both that we had been nominated to submit a bid (not difficult, but no one in the university knew that), and that we had subsequently been successful in winning the award on the university-wide mailing list, sent to all faculty, staff and students. We also publicized our success on the university Web site, in the official magazine, and in the local press. A former student and user of the Center who is now a journalist rang the rector at home (I don't know how she got his number) and asked for his comments. I think the CCCC was the clincher, in that it became quite difficult for the administration to close a unit that had been awarded an accolade that places it on a par with established universities in the U.S.—an achievement few of our degree-awarding departments in our relatively young university have managed so far. However, it might not have worked if we had not spent the previous year campaigning.

CONCLUSIONS

What recommendations can be made then for writing centers hoping to stave off closure? Probably the three most important factors in determining the survival of the Center at CEU were the support of influential faculty, the appropriate use of statistical evidence to support our case, and the CCCC award.

The support of senior faculty in departments whose students benefited from our services and who did not want to see that service lost was perhaps *the* key factor. Senior administration are more likely to listen to one respected professor or head of department than to one hundred students. The claim "our department needs this support" inherently carries much more weight than the student claim "I need this support." Senior faculty also have access to and understand the "proper" channels for persuading the administration.

Such supporters are not going to be won overnight, however. In order to ensure that the writing center has influential friends who value its work and are in a position to plead on its behalf, it is essential for permanent writing center staff to develop and maintain relationships with the degree-awarding departments they serve. Attending departmental meetings to market the writing center's services as responding to departments' needs, as well as meeting faculty members individually to discuss what qualities they hope to see in good student papers for their courses are valuable opportunities to raise faculty awareness. This may extend to hearing about individual students who in the professor's opinion need extra support and discussing how to ensure such support is both offered and accepted. Such meetings foster dialogue and the feeling that the writing center is keen to work *with* departments in achieving *their* goals.

Besides the above, the writing center should also look for opportunities to raise its profile amongst faculty and administration by organizing and hosting academic events such as public lectures, seminars, conferences, open writing workshops and so on. The opportunity to establish informal contacts with faculty (eg., sports, social, and cultural events) should also not be underestimated where it presents itself.

The second preventative measure, which most writing centers probably already take, is to keep accurate and up-to-date statistics in a form that can be processed to give a clear picture of the importance of the center's role in terms that senior administration can understand. Student feedback and exit questionnaires can also play an important part here, especially if the questions are appropriately phrased. A statistically supported statement that 80% of students found tutorials relevant to the writing needs in their discipline may be more powerful than a statement that 90% found tutorials generally useful, or that tutors were friendly.

As regards the winning of awards, clearly not every threatened writing center is going to be able to do this, and if they did, it might look a bit suspicious. Nevertheless, being selected for an external seal of approval is always valuable. The CCCC award is only available to institutions that teach, but there may be other awards out there that writing centers can apply for. Like students we help with statements of purpose, we are in the business of selling ourselves, and the better we do that, the more likely we are to survive. It is not, however, a zero-sum game. When one writing center wins an award for excellence, this does not reduce the survival chances of others. On the contrary, by raising our profile and showing that we are in pursuit of excellence, we raise the chances of other centers to follow the same path, showing that excellence is also their goal, and that for all of us, our own excellence is in the service of, and furthers that of the university and the academic community as a whole. ✦

Notes

1. Adapted from cost/benefit analysis submitted to senior administration, February 2004.

2. For further details see <http://www.ceu.hu/writing/facts.htm>.

3. While such individualized attention is more typical of graduate programs, it need not be completely absent at the undergraduate level.

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WRITING CENTER DIRECTOR U. OF NORTH CAROLINA AT PEMBROKE

Assistant Professor and Director of University Writing Center. Full-time tenure-track position, beginning August 2007. Doctorate in Composition/Rhetoric required; ABD applicants near completion considered. Primary responsibility is to oversee all areas of Writing Center administration and service. Position has 2/2 teaching load in the Composition Program. Rank and salary commensurate with credentials and experience.

Send hard copies of application letter, curriculum vitae, three letters of recommendation, and copy of transcripts to Dr. Susan Cannata, Chair, Writing Center Search Committee, Department of English, Theatre, and Languages, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, P.O. Box 1510, One University Drive, Pembroke NC 28372-1510. For information about UNC Pembroke and the department, see the university Web site at <www.uncp.edu>. Committee will begin consideration of candidates November 10, 2006, and continue the search until the position is filled. AA/EOE. Women and minorities encouraged to apply.

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BOOK REVIEW

Centers for Learning: Writing Centers and Libraries in Collaboration, ed. James K. Elmborg and Sheril Hook, Association of College & Research Libraries (October 2005). $28 (paperback).

✦ Reviewed by Jane Cogie, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL

Centers for Learning: Writing Centers and Libraries in Collaboration focuses on the problems that can arise in writing center-library collaborations and yet the great potential such initiatives hold for promoting information literacy that engages students in "[critiquing] and [creating] knowledge." Information literacy based not on "mastering content" but on "navigating information systems" (5) becomes particularly important in a world in which the borders between disciplines have become increasingly blurred and the available research sources have become increasingly varied and difficult to evaluate. In such a context, most readers would agree with the editors, teaching and learning that interweaves effective research and writing processes is essential. Registering this need, the editors propose that libraries and writing centers are in a strong position, given the greater confidence and credibility they have attained, to move beyond "artificial academic boundaries" (28) and risk joining their significant resources to help students develop and integrate research and writing abilities.

In the opening two chapters, the editors—Elmborg in the first chapter and Hook in the second—emphasize the naturalness of writing center-library collaborations through "[illustrating their] common practices and shared theories" (vii)—such as the shared process-based approach of the two fields, their shared social constructionist view of learning, and the complex relationship of both fields to classroom instructors whose students visit the library and the writing center. At the same time, both Elmborg and Hook recognize the forces that may work against such a collaboration—such as the absence of a tradition of peer tutors in library instruction, the lack of awareness of the library as a contact zone, and, perhaps of greatest impact, the privileging of competition over collaboration in higher education's reward systems. To address the volume's dual audience, in their chapters each of them explains theories and related practices already quite familiar to writing center readers, such as the recursivity of the writing process (7-8), Bruffee's arguments for peer tutoring as a resource in the social construction of knowledge (13, 15), and the centrality of the focus on higher order thinking skills in writing center tutoring (31-32). Nonetheless, these two chapters are valuable in that they introduce readers from writing centers to the use of related theories and practices in teaching libraries. For instance, Elmborg makes clear the relevance of both Bruffee's and Vygotsky's theories to scholar librarians, such as when he cites Carol Kuhlthau's renaming of Vygotsky's familiar term to suit library practice: "the zone of proximal intervention" (13). And Hook draws out how essential the ability to access stored memory during the research process is to the ability to invent during the writing process (22-23); in making this connection, she taps into the "pedagogical intersections" of library and writing center work (22). Despite time spent on familiar writing center theories and practices, then, both chapters develop in helpful detail the basis for collaborations between the two disciplines.

The crossing of boundaries between writing centers and libraries is reflected not only in the specific writing center-library collaborations narrated in *Centers for Learning* but also in the co-authorship of most of its chapters, which, as Elmborg and Hook suggest, "allow(s) the reality of each collaboration to emerge" (vii). Indeed, most of the chapters entail the co-authors setting forth the process and consequences of their collaboration, with an emphasis on the benefits, evolving realities, and lessons learned

from the point of view of each discipline. Despite the limits of the volume's predominantly "show and tell" approach, the dual—and sometimes multi-voiced—perspectives on a range of collaborative configurations provide ideas and cautions for possible future collaborative projects. Thus, the volume is likely to hold some interest even for individuals who already have experience with joint library-writing center ventures. Instances of this variety include a chapter by Colleen Boff and Barbara Toth on the creation of their collaborative pilot program, Research and Writing Project Clinics, to assist first-year students with the recursive process of inquiry; Sarah Leadley and Becky Reed Rosenberg's discussion of their decade-long writing center and library collaboration in a multi-sectioned class that serves as a gateway to upper-division courses; and Carolyn White and Margaret Pobywajlo's chapter on a three-way collaboration linking the library, the learning center, and two English instructors in an effort to overcome the inadequacies of the traditional single-session method of library instruction and its disconnection from the context of a specific assignment.

One chapter that registers the multiple perspectives of a collaborative project explores the value of an institute to support the development of graduate-level research and writing skills, as part of a writing skills improvement program. The chapter is made up of individual sections authored by Donna Fontanarose Robuck, an assistant director of the writing skills improvement program; Kamolthip Phonlabutrea, an international PhD student; Pat Younghal, both a writing skills improvement program instructor and Phonlabutrea's tutor; and Sheril Hook, who at that time was an English and Theater Arts librarian. However, each author, rather than recounting her individual role in setting up and sustaining the institute, explains her insights into the beneficial effects of the institute's one-to-one tutorials on the development of Phonlabutrea's academic voice. This focus provides for writing center readers a gratifying example of the benefits of one-to-one collaboration and is likely to offer new perspectives on sustained student-tutor collaborations to readers from libraries. A more unusual collaboration is also narrated in a multiple-voiced chapter, which sets forth differing perspectives on the creation of an archive to house materials from the University of New Hampshire's writing program. The archive was initiated to preserve the artifacts collected by Robert Connors in his role as an historian of composition/rhetoric until his death in 2000 and is intended to serve as an ongoing resource for composition/rhetoric students and scholars. Yet in this chapter, the individual narratives—by Cinthia Gannett, Elizabeth Sloba, Kate Tiradbassi, Amy Zenger, and John C. Brereton—make it clear that the collaborative process of establishing the archive was itself a learning experience for all involved. For instance, Slomba, the archivist, speaks of learning from the English Department the importance of archiving such seemingly unimportant documents as student essays written for a composition course, and Tirabassi and Zenger, the English TAs assisting with the project and serving as assistant directors of the WAC/Writing Center, emphasize what they learned from Slomba about the value of archiving as a process and its practical implications for structuring documents in the WAC/Writing Center.

In several chapters, the authors move beyond their own narratives to help the reader see how differences between the two disciplines can limit the type or degree of power sharing and collaboration possible when individuals from the two disciplines work together. For example, Boff and Toth reveal the differing expectations in the two disciplines concerning the depth of expertise needed to assist students with academic work. And Casey Reid in her narrative of her own experiences as both a peer consultant at a library reference desk and as a peer tutor in a writing center suggestively explores two potential models for writing center-library collaboration in the light of the contrasts between the more hierarchical traditions of the library and the more collaborative traditions of the writing center.

A few other authors, in addition to Reid, break from the more predominantly narrative approach to raise issues about the nature of collaboration within the university's territorial system of rewards. One of the most helpful chapters in this regard is the chapter by Lea Currie and Michele Eodice. In emphasizing the need to have a campus culture that "invite[s] and recognize[s] collaboration" (45), these authors suggest the way in which one collaboration can beget another and thus the important role that the ethos of a campus can play in promoting productive and sustainable collaborations. Following John Seely Brown's advice that predictions come to fruition not by "[looking] ahead [but by look-

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ing] around" (44), they set the process of their own evolving project in the larger context of change that they have observed at their institution and in the even larger context of related collaborative projects at other campuses. Through these larger frames, the authors make the reader aware that, in order to succeed over time and promote wider institutional change, cross-disciplinary collaborations need to be more than just a sharing of space ("the 'space is space' trap," 47) and more than just a venture between two individuals; rather the individuals and the entities they represent need to be an active part of the decision-making, institution-changing fabric of the university and, indeed, part of the ongoing conversation of both disciplines. Such "looking around" proves to be a dynamic process that involves commitment and a sharing of power on a wider scale than between writing center and library.

Indeed, in a number of the more purely narrative chapters, the authors reveal other collaborative practices as central to their individual coming together, in a sense adding to Currie and Eodice's perspective that one collaboration begets another. The chapter by Leadley and Rosenberg provides a valuable example of this phenomenon. In their narrative, these authors reveal the barriers that they had to overcome in the three revisions of their multi-section, upper-division class, which ultimately evolved into a course team taught by the writing center director, the librarian, and an instructor and focused not so much on the research and writing process as on "inquiry, or the research problem" (69). In telling this story, they emphasize the central role that a university initiative played in the successes of that evolution: "the campuswide inception of teaching circles" (69) that allowed the library and writing center staff involved in the collaborative course, for the first time, not to outnumber faculty in discussions of the course configuration.

Other chapters that track the evolution of an individual program emphasize the important role that can be played by location, suggesting that the "space is space trap" can serve at least as a beginning for a more genuine collaboration. For instance, Judy Arzt, in one of the volume's few single-authored narratives, highlights how the collaboration of librarians with the Academic Resource Center's tutors and herself as the Center's director began in large part because of the Center's location in the library. However, she also shows that, after the Center was forced to relocate, the relationship was nonetheless sustained not only because of the strength of her interests shared with the librarians but also because of her institutional membership on the Library Advisory Committee. Location also played a role in Michele R. Giglio and Constance F. Strickland's writing center-library collaboration at a small liberal arts college. In accounting for the success of this partnership, however, they emphasize the even greater role played by their mutual willingness to "[let] go of territoriality and self-interest" (142).

By the volume's end, the value of challenging territoriality within institutions of higher learning has also been endorsed either explicitly, such as in the opening chapters by Elmborg and Hook and Currie and Eodice or implicitly by Leadley and Rosenberg and Boff and Toth. In returning to issues of territoriality in the volume's final chapter, Nathalie Singh-Corcoran and Thomas P. Miller explore the means through which this impediment to genuine collaboration is perpetuated by "the subordination of teaching [to research] and the marginalization of service" (209). They emphasize as well the need for libraries and writing centers to go beyond the pursuit of professionalization in seeking to advance the institutional position of their services. In this emphasis, they stress that writing centers and libraries will succeed in shifting the climate of higher education from competition to collaboration only if they are willing to see their response to shared challenges as itself a recursive process of collaborative inquiry, which must inevitably be ongoing. The authors in this chapter thus draw together an underlying theme in the volume: that individuals in libraries and writing centers increase the strength of their collaborative agendas within their own domains and within the institution as a whole when they risk learning from and sharing power with other disciplines willing to emphasize service to students. ✦

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing.

CULTURAL AWARENESS IN THE TUTORING ROOM: ALLEVIATING "CULTURE SHOCK" IN STUDENT WRITING

◆ *Anna Habib*
George Mason University
Fairfax, Virginia

I come from a multilingual and multicultural background. This diverse background was essentially inflicted on many Lebanese because of the country's seventeen year civil war which forced families to migrate. My family fled to the island of Cyprus where I was educated in a Lebanese school that had opened a branch on the island for the many Lebanese refugees. Cyprus was, at the time, a safe haven for refugees from surrounding war-torn countries among them: Russia, Serbia, Bosnia, Kuwait, Iraq. The Lebanese school system replicates the French Lycee system that emphasizes, as I like to call it, regurgitation rather than critical thinking. We were forced to memorize knowledge rather than create knowledge. When I moved to the States and attended a high school in New Jersey for two years, my culture shock was somewhat alleviated by the much more relaxed educational system. My sister and I breezed through our homework. Reading comprehension wasn't a problem since my mother is American and raised us speaking English as well as Arabic and French. For once, I understood what I was asked to read for homework; the style was accessible and the voice was compelling. I was used to reading dense, theoretical arguments in French and Arabic that were presented in a voice and style that alienated me because they were addressed to an audience of intellectual peers rather than students who are only beginning to explore their curiosity in the various disciplines. Writing was more difficult however because I was conditioned to mimic the 'voices' of the experts and regurgitate definitions and knowledge rather than construct my own knowledge and practice my own voice.

Allow me to move ahead several years to my experiences tutoring in the writing center. As a graduate student tutor, with an American accent, my clients never questioned my authority. There is no way my clients or students can know that I did not learn English as a first language in school, that I have developed my knowledge of the English language through conversation and dialogue with my mother, and that our English teachers, in our French school, only taught us how to assert that "This is a table" or that "It is, indeed, a beautiful day." Unless I tell them, my clients or students will never know that I didn't learn English grammar and syntax, and that at age 10, I would correct my English teachers in class because their syntax was often incorrect. In my early tutorial sessions with clients whose native language is not English, I never mentioned my multilingual background. Even if I could hear that their sentence structure or argument structure were directly translated from French and/or Arabic, I didn't vocalize this observation because I worried that they might start speaking to me in French or Arabic, thus defeating the purpose of a tutorial on an essay in English. Or that it might decrease their trust in my ability to help them sound and write like "native English speakers." A few weeks into my first semester in the writing center, after being in sessions with many students from Korea, Japan, the Middle East, and several other countries, I began to feel frustrated that I was withholding my shared "non-American" culture from my clients. I often understood exactly where they were coming from, what their struggles were in terms of translation and structure, and I began to see that it was more than just an English as a Second Language issue; it is a trans-cultural translation issue. What I was seeing was culture shock on the page.

I started to realize that what was needed was a reader-responsible versus writer-responsible reconciliation. My clients were finding themselves trapped in a discourse that was misunderstood in their new

Writing Center Coordinator Purdue University Calumet

Full-time, tenure-track Assistant Professor, Composition/Rhetoric. Ph.D. in hand. University teaching with three years of administrative experience required.

The faculty member will have administrative FTE to coordinate a writing center. The Writing Center Coordinator will hold primary responsibility for hiring and staffing decisions, mentoring, supervision, and training, textbook selection and curriculum development processes, and membership on the Committee on the Freshman Year.

The Coordinator teaches two courses per semester. Teaching involves composition courses in the Freshman Year and graduate courses in rhetoric/composition and pedagogy. The successful candidate must also be willing to teach interdisciplinary courses in the School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. The successful candidate will have the opportunity to contribute to the development of a rhetoric/composition track for graduate students in our M.A. program.

Submit letter, C.V., three letters of recommendation, and transcripts (unofficial ones accepted at this point) to: Writing Center Coordinator Search Committee, Department of English & Philosophy, CLO 217, Purdue University Calumet, Hammond, IN 46323. Review of applications begins December 1, 2006, and will continue until the position is filled. Purdue University Calumet is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer.

cultural context. I could see their frustration and understood that they were focusing all of their energy on grammar and syntax, insisting that they only needed help with grammar and that their professor must have given them a C- *because* of grammar. But when I looked at their professors' conclusive comments on their essays, I realized that while the grammar was clearly a concern, the argument and organization was a priority. I know that's not a ground-breaking discovery, but what I want to focus on is the inability of these English as a second or third language writers to comprehend this difference. They do not see that their organization is a problem because they are often excellent students in their native countries on scholarship or fellowships at George Mason. They *know* how to organize their thoughts and very likely make brilliant arguments and observations in their own first languages. What they don't know, and rightfully so because I don't think tutors mention this enough, is that organization and argument is different in English than it is in Arabic or Korean or French or Mandarin. How could these students understand that unless they are explained the difference?

After observing countless frustrated clients come in to their sessions feeling confident with their newly developed knowledge of English grammar rules and seriously committed to improving their recurring errors, I decided to explain the differences between a writer-responsible culture and a reader-responsible culture. I shared with them my experiences in a reader-responsible education system where textbooks felt like they had been written by scholars for scholars rather than by educators for learners. I began by visually charting the difference.

I drew a pyramid for the writer- responsible culture where the argument moved from the specific thesis statement and claim to the supporting arguments to a larger question. I then showed them what I imagined a reader-responsible text to look like; I drew several smaller circles and wrapped a bigger circle around them, explaining that the reader is responsible to unify all of the isolated circles. The reader makes the connections; the writer only presents the possibilities. In essence, the reader-responsible text is inductive, leading the reader into a detective role. The purpose is implicit; the language is connotative and the audience awareness less defined. Writer-responsible texts are more deductive, where the reader is presented with a roadmap for the essay in the form of a thesis statement, topic sentences and clear transitions. The language of a writer-responsible essay is more denotative and explicit.

The concept of a clearly defined argument that appears in the form of a thesis statement was completely foreign to me when I moved to this American writer-responsible culture. I didn't understand why a writer would want to be so obvious and overt. Wasn't writing so multi-layered and complex that it was intended to serve as a mystery that may or may not be solved, like my past history textbooks or literature reviews? If I stated my point in the first paragraph, why would someone want to keep reading my essay? In fact, I heard this question echoed many years later as I stood at the other side of the classroom. My 101 student from Ethiopia wondered if it wouldn't be insulting to our readers to bore them by uncovering the mystery in the first paragraph.

This was the same confusion that I saw with my international clients in the writing center and it was this confusion that pushed me to share my multilingual background and establish a compassion for and solidarity with their experiences, providing instruction beyond the misplaced comma or the dangling modifier. I helped them see the culture they were writing in and into which they were writing. I tried to articulate the shift in responsibility in the writing process, from reader to writer. I asked them to draw their essays into the reader-responsible chart I mentioned earlier: the bigger circle wrapped around the smaller circles. I asked them to write their main arguments into the smaller floating circles and

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing.

then had them find the unifying link. What am I, your reader, supposed to infer from these isolated ideas? How do they relate?

Seeing their main points in these isolated circles helped them to understand the experience of their reader. This is what your reader sees, and when your reader isn't used to making the leaps or connecting the dots, the reader simply feels lost and assumes that the essay is filled with logical fallacies: hasty generalizations, faulty cause/effect relationships, unclear transitions.

I also tried different exercises with my clients, asking them to state the central idea of each paragraph and then combine them with a plus sign, designing a sort of equation: This+ This+ This+ This = The thesis statement.

Or, I would ask them to tell me the *story* of their piece, and I would transcribe it because often when they tell the story, they are including the logical train of thought, the transitions between ideas.

I felt like my clients appreciated these exercises because I told them how much they helped me to think about navigating between the two writing cultures. Non-native speaking tutors represent a success story for them: a person who was able to adapt, to overcome the culture shock and the consequent writer's block.

I have, of course, also run into some challenges when I share my cultural background with clients. Often, they assume our shared experiences will immunize me from my role as their tutor and somehow make me more of their friend and comrade. I once had a conservative Muslim woman from Saudi Arabia begin our first session, after I had mentioned that I was from Lebanon, by asking me why I worked. Not why I worked as a tutor, or a teacher, but why a woman would work at all. I sensed the tension between this conservative Muslim Arab woman and myself, a non-conservative Christian Arab woman. I quickly dismissed her question by muttering something profoundly unprofound about financial support and that I appreciated my experiences and grew from them. Without further due, she quickly accepted my answer and began speaking to me in Arabic, asking me to edit her paper even though I had already explained to her that the writing center isn't a proofreading service. Somehow our shared cultural and linguistic experience became more important than our different religious ideologies. She pleaded with me to help her, as her Arab sister. She would pay me to write her papers, or edit them. I declined and never saw her again. This same scenario repeated itself with several other clients who spoke either French or Arabic and felt as though our common language would somehow overcome the boundaries of the tutor/tutee dynamic.

What struck me most about these experiences wasn't the fact that the clients challenged my authority or that my shared cultural/linguistic background

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represented a hopeful possibility for them; what I can't stop asking myself though is "why this is happening?" Can it stop happening when our clients whose first language is not English are trained to think of writing across cultures as grammar-based, and when tutors somehow reinforce that belief, always looking at the sentence-level concerns first because they hinder meaning? There is something that needs to happen in ESL instruction (that I see both in the 101 classroom and in the writing center, and that has been echoed by fellow TAs) that will help our clients whose native languages are not English to understand that they are adapting to a new culture, not only through language, but through discourse and rhetoric. Could it be that our role as tutors is to help our clients see that the focus and responsibility has shifted from the reader to the writer? That their "voice" no longer has to feel like a mimicking act, regurgitating and echoing the teacher's words or the scholar's inaccessible language. That "voice" now depends on and is shaped by a general audience, and that the curiosity and exploration of the writer must propel him/her towards a purpose that a reader can quickly grasp without piecing the puzzle together and deducing meaning. That the writer determines the purpose of the text, rather than leaving the text open for interpretation by those who choose to engage with it.

When I first came to the U.S., I didn't understand the concept of audience. Our audience was never defined; I always wrote for my teacher, repeating the information rather than engaging with it. We were meant to learn the form and the arguments through and through before contributing to the conversation. It isn't until after freshman year in college, after the French baccalaureate, that students are supposed to articulate and design their own arguments.

I think it is important for us as tutors to see that our role with speakers and writers of English as second and third languages is to ease the culture shock first and then define the run-on, otherwise we are doing our institutions a disservice because we aren't hearing the plethora of international voices since we haven't been trained to *look* for meaning as reader-responsible cultures have; we've been told to *hear* meaning, as it is relayed clearly and concisely, and then be in dialogue with it. But how can we join the larger international conversation within the United States if we're still speaking, albeit in English, a different language?

So coming from this multicultural and multilingual background has helped me to intuit when my students who are learning English as a second or third language need to be shown the difference between their own writing culture and their new writing culture. We need to reconcile the two cultures by filling in the gap. Our role then grows and includes more than grammar and language instruction; once the culture shock is alleviated, the writer's block and insecurity will dissipate. While I've been trying to help students write in and into their new culture, I have been struggling with a question that I will leave you with: Should we teach and expect writer responsible essays from our students or should we learn reader-responsible approaches so that we aren't enforcing one upon the other, but we are finding a ground for dialogue and conversation? ✦

TUTOR'S COLUMN

CONVERGENCE: AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT LONG-DISTANCE TUTORING

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Chocolaty warm air mixes with the smell of floor wax as I open the basement door of the library. I walk down to the open doorway at the end of the hall, heading for the Tutoring—Learning Center (TLC) at the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point (UWSP). For the past two years I have been a peer tutor for the TLC's Writing Lab. As I get closer to the doorway, the noise increases and I can see the Writing Lab is full of early morning activity. I enter the open doorway to join the other students milling about, fueled on fresh baked cookies. Some are checking the binder at the front desk for appointments; others are sitting at a small table waiting for their appointments, while a group of peer tutors are gathered around a large conference table talking. We congregate at this table while we wait for our learners; this waiting area is more than just a place to sit. While we wait, we play Scrabble, do homework, and form new friendships with people we might not meet if we were not at the TLC.

Tutors and learners come from all the disciplines at this small midwest university. Our conversations around the table with other tutors and in the booths with our learners have increased our ability to relate to others in a variety of disciplines outside of our own. The administrators of the TLC worked hard to create a people-focused center to not only serve the learning needs of students but also create a community for the students. In light of the current trend toward on-line writing labs, I wonder about the future of the TLC's Writing Lab. Our culture is quick to accept technological advancements as a replacement or an "upgrade" to the way we had done something before. But as we use the upgrades, we run the risk of losing benefits the old way provided. As writing lab administrators question what technological approaches to implement, it is important to consider, "the powerful sway that technology-linked educational programs hold over the public through a deeply rooted cultural assumption that technology holds the answers to problems" (Hobson 481).

As our culture moves toward an acceptance of receiving education through electronic media, it is imperative that administrators of writing labs find ways to serve the needs of students who cannot come to the lab. Administrators may view offering an online writing lab as a simple solution. Some students may view going to the lab as a hassle or think an online writing tutorial will save them time; such students may opt to use electronic tutoring services instead of going to the lab. But, using distance learning programs to serve all students, replacing physical writing centers, would be a great loss indeed. The tutors, learners, and administrators at writing centers have the ability to form learning communities; it is the strength of that community that helps students learn. The TLC is a unique part of the UWSP campus. Because the TLC has one of the oldest writing labs in the country, the people at the learning center have created an atmosphere conductive to promoting relationships while helping a variety of students across the disciplines. Students interested in working on improving their writing can participate in a semester-long independent writing course referred to as the "English '57 Series." The students can repeat the course three times for credit. Students who take English '57 have the opportunity to improve their writing skills by working one-to-one with a peer tutor on whatever kind of writing they choose.

When the need arose for the TLC to help two students who couldn't attend programs on campus but wanted to participate in the English '57 series, I was asked to tutor in a new pilot long-distance tutoring program. Because I feel interacting in-person with people is the most effective way to get to know and help the learner, I decided not to interact with the two learners strictly by e-mail. I "met" with each learner over the phone several times a week. Though I did not work solely through computer communication with the learners, my experience has shown me that the more distanced we are from each other, the more this distance creates and intensifies problems.

The two learners who became part of the TLC's extended community had very different reasons for seeking a long distance learning program. The first student (Sandra, as I will call her) was a full-time middle school teacher working on a master's degree who needed an independent writing class. She lived over 60 miles from the campus and couldn't find this type of class in her area. The second student (Molly) was a full-time student who had a baby very early into the semester. She was unable to bring her newborn to daycare and could not commit to weekly appointments at the TLC. She had completed one credit in the English '57 series, and she thought a two credit English '57 long-distance program would work for her. My sessions with Sandra and Molly were held in the evenings. Sandra and Molly e-mailed me their writing prior to each over-the-phone tutorial. Just as Sandra and

Molly had different reasons for enrolling in a long distance learning program, I experienced challenges different from those I met tutoring students face-to-face at the TLC.

In general, during face-to-face tutorials, there are minimal distractions. Sometimes the center is humming with the noise of a dozen students reading papers out loud and triumphant calls by the Scrabble players. Once the session is underway, though, the noises seem to vanish, and the learner and I can concentrate on the task at hand. At home both Sandra and Molly contended with distractions during our sessions, though they were of a very different nature.

Most of the time when I talked to Molly, she was holding her baby or had her baby very nearby. If her baby was sleeping, she would talk in a hushed tone, and if she was holding her baby, she would struggle to juggle her baby, read her writing, or make notes. After a few sessions, I grew concerned about her not making substantial revisions in the story she was writing. In each session we discussed many different areas of her story for her to work on, but each time I received her revised writing, I noticed she only had made minimal changes. We would end up re-discussing the same areas several times. I wanted her to progress in her story, so we would have time later in the semester to work on other areas in her writing. At the beginning of one session, I asked her why she hadn't worked on a large part of her paper as we had previously discussed. She told me she was only making a mark next to areas in her paper that needed revision. So when she went to revise her writing, she would find the mark but had forgotten what it referred to. If Molly and I had sat together in the booth, I would have noticed her mark-making right away and could have encouraged her to make more detailed notes to refer to later.

Sandra on the other hand, was very distracted by her responsibilities as a middle-school teacher. This led to her not calling at our scheduled times, sometimes not calling at all, or not e-mailing her writing to me on time. Sandra seemed to see her independent writing class as a low priority and an easy responsibility to forget. I grew concerned she that wouldn't fulfill her independent writing contract. I decided to send her an e-mail outlining what she needed to accomplish and the time frame she had left to complete her English '57 requirements. After I sent the e-mail, she made a point to call on time and to call to reschedule the appointments she knew she couldn't keep.

In the beginning, there was a noticeable difference in Sandra's level of commitment compared to Molly's. Even though at first Molly's revisions were slight, she always e-mailed me her writing on time and was home for each phone session. This could be attributed to Molly's prior experience with the TLC. Molly also made a point to come to the learning center with her baby to participate in the orientation each English '57 student is required to attend. Each English '57 student is also required to sign a writing contract at the orientation that outlines what the learner wants to accomplish. I was able to meet Molly face-to-face when she came in for her orientation. But, because Sandra lived so far away, we never met. She wasn't able to come to campus for an official orientation, and she filled out her contract by an e-mail. The difference in Molly and Sandra's attitudes towards their writing commitments may have been influence by one key factor. Molly physically went to the TLC, met the people she was responsible to, and therefore felt responsible to fulfill the contract she signed. Even though Sandra filled out an online contract, she didn't physically sign it or meet with anyone at the TLC. She was unable to establish a beginning relationship with me or the other people at the learning center. Because she never met anyone at the learning center, I think it was easier for her not to feel a personal responsibility to her tutor.

In Eric Hobson's essay, "Straddling the Virtual Fence," he tells a true story about an experience from his colleague's writing center. This story is a good illustration of how easy it is for students who have not met their tutor face-to-face to feel no personal connection to the tutor or their writing responsibilities. When an administrator asked a tutor how her online tutorials were going, the report was as follows:

> The tutor mentioned that the process was slow and that she really wished she could talk (f2f) with the client in order to push the discussion to a needed level of depth about the project. Sensing the tutor's need to return to the tutorial, the director moved on.

> Two students were using the center's computers in the adjacent room: one printing a paper; one "talking" online. Glancing at the screen, the director realized with a jolt that the student was talking to the tutor sitting less than twenty feet away, a situation the tutor was not aware of.

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The student had opted for the online tutorial because, "I wanted to be able to leave anytime without feeling guilty. And I thought I could just get my questions answered and not have to talk about all that other stuff the tutors always want you to talk about, like who I'm writing to and why I need more info." (486)

These experiences show how the distance between tutors and learners can lead to impersonal relationships that impact the quality of the tutorial. When students don't know their tutor, they don't feel a personal connection to the tutor and are more apt to "not feel guilty" about leaving appointments early or not keeping their appointments.

Another challenge I dealt with was how to get necessary information to Molly. Tutors at the TLC have many resources immediately accessible to help their learners in a variety of writing areas. Tutors can go to the wall of reference books to look up information or gather specific handouts on a variety of topics such as study skills or writing prompts for poetry from two large filing cabinets. Tutors are also able to help learners in the booths on the computer. Tutors and learners can sit side by side, and the tutor can easily show the learner how to navigate library resources for research or use various program options to create stationery and résumés. For tutors and learners, having these resources available is extremely helpful and efficient.

Molly had minimal experience writing a résumé or business letters. So, for part of her English '57 writing contract, she decided to begin putting together her résumé and write a complaint letter. Not only did she lack experience in writing these types of documents, she also had little knowledge of how to use the options in Microsoft Word to create the necessary professional appearance for each document. We discussed what written elements each document should contain, but when the time came for me to tell her about the visual elements—I was stumped. Had we been in a booth at the TLC, I could have easily shown her how to create professional stationery for the complaint letter on the computer and give her handouts showing the many ways to lay out a résumé. I tried to describe a simple résumé and talk her through creating stationery, but she was struggling to create the visual elements I was describing. These were things I knew she needed to see first. After a frustrating session, I wondered how I could help her learn how to create these visual elements.

What I decided to do was put together a packet I could mail to her that contained various handouts on résumés and typed step-by-step instructions that explained how to create stationery. This way she could see the résumé layouts I was describing and read step-by-step instructions on creating stationery. Although I figured out a way to get her the information, it would take days for the packet to get to her. I called Molly and told her I put the packet together for her. Instead of waiting for the mail, she decided to stop by the TLC to pick up the packet, thinking she would get the information sooner. Unfortunately, it was a week before Molly was able to stop in and pick it up. Molly eventually got the information she needed; Sandra was able to successfully complete English '57; and I am now able to see the following: Flexibility and adaptability are fundamental to the idea of a writing center. Both literally and ideologically, writing centers are places that leave their doors open, places that cultivate the exchange of ideas, places that are receptive to experiment and expansion (Clark 561).

We are at a unique juncture in the way we provide tutoring to college students. Administrators must decide whether or how to use technology in a long-distance tutoring program. Although our culture is quick to accept new technologies as "must haves," we must realize that, "Technology does not drive change per se. Instead, it merely creates options and opportunities for change. It is our collective response to technology that drives change" (Saffo 269). From this perspective, we can see technology as a means to increase our ability to serve students unable to come to writing labs while retaining the valuable face-to-face interaction that can only happen in the physical writing center. Just as the waters of two rivers converge into one, we need to consider how to merge technology into our writing labs, so physical place and virtual place can work to together to best serve the needs of all students. ✦

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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

February 8-10, 2007: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Nashville, TN **Contact:** E-mail: SWCA@Comcast. net. Conference Web site: <www. mtsu.edu/~uwcenter/swca2007>.

March 3, 2007: Northern California Writing Center Association, in Sacramento, CA **Contact**: Cheryl Smith at smithc@saclink.csus.edu and Dan Meltzer at melzer@saclink. csus.edu. Conference Web site: <http://ncwca.stanford.edu/>.

March 30-31: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Radnor, PA **Contact**: John Nortlof, e-maiL jnordlof@eastern.edu, phone: 610-341-1453. Conference Web site:<http://www2. mcdaniel.edu/mawca>.

April 12-14, 2007: South Central and International Writing Centers Associations, in Houston, TX **Contact:** Dagmar Corrigan at corrigand@uhd.edu. Conference Web site: <http:// ahss.ualr.edu/iwca>.

April 27-29: Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association, in Bellingham, WA **Contact:** Sherri Winans at Whatcom: <http://faculty.whatcom. ctc.edu/swinans>. Conference Web site: <http://www.acadweb.wwu. edu/writingcenter/PNWCA.htm>.

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