THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

– FROM THE EDITOR –

The articles in this month's *Writing Lab Newsletter* reflect on the state of writing centers, administratively, pedagogically, and professionally. Karen Rowan reports on her study of the function and role of graduate student administrators in writing centers and finds some surprising results. Tom Truesdell, pondering his commitment to non-directive or directive tutoring, reports how he moved away from an either/or choice to find a tutoring style that benefits students. And Donna Evans looks at the "othering" of writing centers through the lens of the recent upheaval in *WLN*'s academic home. Meghan Monroe reminds us how tutoring reconnects us with our passion for teaching.

By including Donna Evans' article that begins by reviewing the events that swirled around *WLN* last fall, I found myself in a quandary. As editor, I have always felt it my obligation to keep myself and my editorship from being a subject of articles in this publication. Seems self-serving at best. But Evan's article uses *WLN*'s recent ouster as a springboard to confront the eternal debate about writing centers and their place in the academic hierarchy. In an attempt to slide out from any decision-making with the question of whether to publish an article about *WLN*, I sent the article off to readers, as usual, and relied on their decision. Again, as usual, the professionalism so many of you demonstrate as readers of manuscripts is impressive. And we're always happy to add new names to the list of readers.

✦ *Muriel Harris, editor*

BEYOND THE ANECDOTAL: QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT GRADUATE STUDENT ADMINISTRATORS

✦ *Karen S. Rowan*
Morgan State University
Baltimore, MD

In March 2005, I arrived in San Francisco having spent the previous year collecting surveys, conducting interviews, running statistical analyses, and transcribing tapes for my study about graduate student administrators (GSAs) in writing centers. I was looking forward to CCCC and, with it, my first opportunity to talk to colleagues about what I was learning. While my formal presentation was gratifying, my interactions with other participants throughout the conference were equally as enlightening for me.

Throughout the conference, I found myself describing my research to new acquaintances while standing in line for coffee or waiting for another session to start. In these moments, I was re-acquainted with the lore about GSA positions. After hearing the subject of my research, colleagues often responded with comments like, "Oh, yes, I worry about how those positions exploit graduate students!" Or, "Oh, I wish we had GSA positions at my university, but we only have master's students." I was taken aback by these responses because, having spent months immersed in my study data, I now question the validity of these and other assumptions about GSA positions. Certainly, some participants' experiences correspond with these assumptions, but many others do not. As I reflected on these interactions and my colleagues'

assumptions, I realized that they reconfirmed the purpose of my research: to provide the writing center field with baseline data about GSAs in writing centers and, in so doing, to provide our field with the data necessary to both fill in gaps in our knowledge about GSAs and help us question our assumptions about these positions.

The fact that graduate students have been serving as writing center administrators since the 1970s means that many of us in the field have worked as GSAs and/or supervised GSAs. These experiences lend us first-hand knowledge that, while valuable, is nevertheless limited in scope. Ironically, given the long history of GSAs in writing centers, there exists a very small body of literature on GSAs and almost no generalizable data about them and their experiences. Instead, much of the scholarship on GSAs is based on the authors' own experiences. For instance, Stephen Jukuri and W.D. Williamson and Johanna Brown focus their GSA narratives on the tensions that arose when their roles as administrators and as peers came into conflict, making it difficult for them to exercise their authority as administrators while simultaneously distancing them from their peers. Their experiences would seem to support Fontaine's argument, based on her own experiences, that the benefits of GSA positions come at the expense of other students and of the values and ethics of composition and rhetoric (85). On a more positive note, Daphne Desser and Darin Payne draw on their experiences to highlight the benefits of GSA positions. They contend that administrative internships can and should enhance formal course work by providing opportunities for students to put theories about administration into practice and allow students and faculty opportunities to reflect on the political implications of administration (90-1). Individually and collectively, these authors speak to compelling issues related to GSA positions; however, none draw on generalizable or broad-based data to support their conclusions, making it difficult to sort out conflicting claims.

As a response to this trend in our literature, I conducted a national survey and interview study to gather generalizable data about GSAs. For the survey phase, I gathered basic data about who GSAs are, where they work, and the nature of their responsibilities and professional development experiences. In the interview phase, I sought to learn more about individual writing center directors' and GSAs' experiences with and perceptions of GSA positions.

The study's population included writing center directors and GSAs working in institutions granting MA and/or PhD degrees in English Studies (both with and without rhetoric and composition graduate programs). I mailed survey packets including one writing center director questionnaire and three GSA questionnaires to 385 writing centers and received responses from 204 writing centers (52% response rate). Responses included 144 questionnaires from writing center directors and 129 usable questionnaires from GSAs. Of the director questionnaires, 82 are from directors without GSAs, and 62 are from directors with at least one GSA in their writing centers. Of the GSA questionnaires, 100 were completed by graduate students currently serving as GSAs and 29 by former GSAs. Twenty-two survey participants, 12 GSAs and 10 directors, participated in the interview phase.

In this essay, I will draw primarily on survey data to describe where GSAs work, who they are, and what they do. In reporting this data, I hope to question some of our commonly held assumptions about GSAs and GSA positions. Certainly, our assumptions have some basis in fact, but my point here is that the anecdotal data upon which such assumptions are based cannot be broadly generalized.

WHERE GSAS ARE—AND AREN'T

A common assumption I encountered during my research is that only writing centers in large universities with PhD programs employ GSAs. At first glance, the data would seem to bear out this assumption: of the 62 writing centers with GSAs in my sample, most are situated in public institutions (78%), classified

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as doctoral/research universities (63%), and have 10,000 to 25,000 students (43%). However, the characteristics of writing centers without GSAs are remarkably similar: most are in public institutions (75%); many are classified as doctoral/research universities (48%); and most have 10,000 to 25,000 students (48%). Furthermore, the data also reveal that writing centers with GSAs can be found in many different kinds and sizes of institutions, in small, public masters-granting colleges as well as large, private, research universities.

These data, along with interview data, suggest that institutional status or graduate program offerings are less important than local conditions in determining whether a writing center employs GSAs. For example, one interview participant explained that most graduate students at her institution work full-time and take courses in the afternoons and evenings, a schedule that would make it difficult, if not impossible, for graduate students to assume administrative responsibilities.

Other survey data indicate that funding for graduate students is a far more important factor than an institution's classification or program offerings. One of the most frequent reasons directors gave for not employing GSAs was "no funding." Further, there is a clear correlation between the overall staff make-up and GSA positions. Most writing centers report employing both undergraduate and graduate tutors (85% and 87%, respectively). Writing centers *with* graduate tutors are nearly as likely to employ GSAs as not: of the 124 writing centers with graduate tutors, 41% employ both graduate tutors and GSAs, while 45% employ graduate tutors but not GSAs. The same does not hold true for writing centers without graduate tutors: writing centers *without* graduate tutors are far less likely to employ GSAs. Only three writing centers employ GSAs but not graduate student tutors, while 16 (11%) employ neither GSAs nor graduate student tutors.

Certainly, funding and hiring practices aren't the only reasons why some writing centers don't employ graduate students as administrators. However, these data should dispel the notion that a writing center must be housed in a certain type of institution or department in order to hire GSAs.

WHO GSAS ARE

Another common assumption about GSA positions is that only departments with well-developed programs in rhetoric and composition can or should employ GSAs in writing centers. While some members of the writing center community believe that GSA positions should be reserved for graduate students in rhetoric and composition programs, others argue for the benefits of having GSAs from other areas of English studies or other disciplines altogether (see Eckerle, Rowan, and Watson for more on this debate). My survey data reveal that rhetoric and composition students constitute a large segment of the GSA population, but GSA positions are not, by any means, the exclusive province of rhetoric and composition students.

> " *In reporting this data, I hope to question some of our commonly held assumptions about GSAs and GSA positions.* "

According to both GSA and director participants, 25% of GSAs are enrolled in English programs with a focus in rhetoric and composition; five writing center directors also reported that GSAs in their centers are pursuing degrees in independent rhetoric and composition/writing programs. Roughly a third of participants in both groups reported that GSAs are literature students, and 11% of GSAs and 21% of directors said that GSAs were pursuing other areas of English studies, including creative writing. Other disciplines mentioned by participants include anthropology, biology, communications, education, history, philosophy, and psychology.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Other survey data help explain the diversity in GSAs' background. Few GSAs reported having taken courses in either writing center or writing program administration, primarily because, as most directors (80%) reported, few programs offer such courses. However, 30% of GSAs have taken courses in tutoring theory and practice and just over half have taken courses in teaching writing. Often, such introductory courses are the only rhetoric and composition courses offered in the department or university. Given the fact that many universities with GSAs do not offer extensive coursework in rhetoric and composition, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to reserve GSA positions exclusively for students in that field.

Despite the fact that not all GSAs have extensive backgrounds in rhetoric and composition, GSAs as a whole bring a wealth of experience to the writing centers in which they work. Nearly 90% served as writing center tutors before working as GSAs; one third previously held administrative positions such as online tutor coordinators, public relations coordinators, or tutor trainers. Nearly three-quarters of the GSA participants have teaching experience and have taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels as well as the college level, including a wide variety of writing courses.

WHAT GSAS DO

Two of the most common assumptions I've encountered about GSA positions are 1) that such positions are professional development opportunities for graduate students and 2) that such positions exploit graduate students. Of course, one or both of these assumptions may be true in specific contexts, but drawing the line between professional development and exploitation is no easy task. Here, I use data about GSA duties, titles/rank, workload, and time in the position as a means for broadening the scope of discussion about the line between professional development and exploitation.

As a group, GSAs are involved in every aspect of writing center administration, including day-to-day clerical work, staff and tutor training, and budget management. In some cases, GSAs' duties are focused on a single aspect of writing center administration while other GSAs have a wide range of responsibilities. The most frequently reported duty by both GSAs and directors is tutor training. Most GSAs also have some responsibility for clerical duties. However, in no case do GSAs perform *only* clerical duties. Though relatively few GSAs are responsible for budgets, many interview participants noted that directors often talk to GSAs about budget issues, letting them know what goes on "behind-the-scenes" even if GSAs are not actively involved with budgets. Duties in the "Other" category include conducting outreach, maintaining databases and other records, managing resources, conducting research projects, and liaising between tutors and the director. Ensuring that GSAs have significant administrative responsibilities benefits both GSAs and writing centers. In the words of one director, "GSAs expand the quality and quantity of services we offer, as well as gain crucial administrative experience, skill, and understanding."

Table 1   Graduate Student Administrator Duties

GSA Duties	GSA Responses		WCD Responses		Total Responses	
	Frequency	Percent*	Frequency	Percent*	Frequency	Percent*
Clerical	110	85	46	74	156	82
Staff training	97	75	46	74	143	75
Tutor training	113	88	53	86	166	87
Scheduling	100	78	47	76	147	77
Budget	31	24	15	24	46	24
Publicity	104	81	46	74	150	79
Grant writing	19	15	14	23	33	17
Conduct workshops	94	73	45	73	139	73
Technology	66	51	44	71	110	58
Mentoring	98	76	50	81	148	78
Faculty development	39	30	22	36	61	32
Other	15	12	6	10	21	11

Source: GSA and Writing Center Director Questionnaires

As GSA titles suggest, some GSAs are primarily tutors with some administrative duties, while others are primarily administrators with some tutoring responsibilities. GSA titles fall into six categories: writing center administrator, graduate assistant, program coordinator, consultant/tutor, writing program administrator, and other. Titles in the writing center administrator category appeared the most frequently in both GSA and director questionnaires; the most frequently cited titles in this category were "assistant coordinator/assistant director" and "coordinator." In some cases, graduate students' official titles are "tutor" or "consultant," but they do some administrative work in addition to consulting with writers. Thus, while many graduate students have administrative responsibilities, their titles do not always reflect this fact.

There are also some graduate students who serve as writing center directors. Among directors, only 7 of 142 participants said that they were graduate students. On questions about GSA titles (asked of both GSAs and directors), nine GSAs and five directors listed GSAs' title as "director." It would appear, then, that most GSAs do not serve as the top or sole administrator in their writing centers. However, interview participants remind us that official titles sometimes belie reality. Three interview participants described circumstances in which GSAs served as the sole or top administrator in their writing centers regardless of title. In all cases, GSAs were nominally supervised by writing program directors or department chairs but, in practice, received very little hands-on guidance or support from their supervisors.

Of these three interview participants, only one explicitly used the term "exploitation" to describe GSAs' experiences, but it could be argued that, to various degrees, the other two GSAs were also exploited, if only through benign neglect. Thus, while survey data suggest that relatively few GSAs serve as writing center directors, interview data remind us that GSAs' title or rank is not the only factor at play in avoiding exploitation.

Just over half of GSA participants responded that their they held their positions for one to two years. Almost a quarter of participants served as a GSA for two to three years, while 14% served for three or more years. The shortest term reported was one semester, and the longest was six years. Several interview participants suggested that being a GSA for more than two years would be a burden. While one GSA enjoyed his two years as a coordinator in his writing center, he looked forward to going back to "just" tutoring. He felt increasingly stressed by his administrative responsibilities and wanted to focus more on his dissertation. It is worrisome, then, that several GSAs commented on their questionnaires that they planned to continue serving as GSA for at least one more year, if not more. Indeed, one participant described his or her tenure as GSA as "indefinite." Thus, the percentage of GSAs serving more than one year may be somewhat larger than survey data suggest.

According to both GSAs and directors, the majority of GSAs work between 11 and 20 hours per week. Several GSAs noted that their time in the writing center fluctuated throughout the semester, such as one interview participant who said that he worked 50-60 hours/week at the beginning of the year, but then scaled back to the normal 20 hours/week after the semester got underway. Another GSA worked 30 hours during her second year as assistant director, but only because she was ahead of schedule in her degree program and could therefore afford to become, essentially, a part time student while she finished her thesis. Though neither of these two GSAs fell behind in their programs as a result of their time in the writing center, they nevertheless wouldn't recommend that other graduate students take on such heavy loads. Several graduate students noted that their time as GSAs actually helped them make progress academically either by providing a focus for their research or by allowing for more regular schedules than they had as teaching assistants. At the same time, most directors noted that they put a high priority on ensuring that GSAs' workload did not slow their academic progress.

WRITING [WITHOUT] CENTERS

As writing center work moves forward, with or without clear sponsorship, one thing is clear: writing center workers practice a holistic approach to writers' improvement (North 438-9), and an equally generous view of writing center work by the organizational structure surrounding it might reveal that it is, in fact, not the ugly stepchild but a welcome part of the blended and interdisciplinary institutional family. As with any valued family member, the writing center's voice, sometimes in the tone and timbre of the *WLN*, is welcome.

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BEYOND THE ANECDOTAL

Early in her book *Composing Research*, Cindy Johanek laments that composition researchers have increasingly relied upon anecdotal evidence in their research and scholarship. By way of explaining the problems of anecdote-based research, she cites a review of Sullivan and Qualley's *Pedagogy in the Age of Politics* in which the reviewer argues that the volume as a whole lacked unity and that the individual stories were not adequately connected to the larger composition community (10). Johanek notes that this criticism echoes that often leveled at quantitative research: anecdotes are now being offered for their own sake, devoid of or divorced from context, much as quantitative data is often perceived as being offered.

Although I, like many in the field, am drawn to narratives and value them as a way of making knowledge, I have nevertheless become frustrated with the anecdotal nature of many essays on graduate education and GSAs in particular. In too many cases, individual authors rely on anecdotal or narrative evidence drawn from only one context—that of the author's own program—to make broad claims about GSA positions or administrative professional development. As I have worked to show here, anecdotal evidence alone does not provide a solid basis for addressing very real concerns about GSA positions in writing centers. For that reason, I believe the time has come for our public arguments about the nature, value, and purpose of GSA positions to move beyond the anecdotal. To that end, my study represents one effort—and hopefully not the last—to provide baseline data about GSAs and their experiences so that we may better prepare the next generation of writing center directors.

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NOT CHOOSING SIDES: USING DIRECTIVE AND NON-DIRECTIVE METHODOLOGY IN A WRITING SESSION

✦ *Tom Truesdell*
Northwestern College
Orange City, IA

In most writing centers, tutors are encouraged to have confidence-building, collaborative exchanges with the writers they serve. In other words, a tutor is not supposed to be an editor who simply tells the writer what is wrong with a paper and how to fix it; instead, the tutor should foster a collaborative learning experience in which both parties equally contribute to what Kenneth Bruffee terms the "conversation of mankind." For Bruffee, writing is a displaced form of conversation—thought is internalized conversation, while writing is thought re-externalized. Because of this, writers should be encouraged to engage "in conversation at as many points in the writing process as possible"(210). If they are involved in conversation, Bruffee argues writers will be able to become masters of a normal discourse, and thus participate—understand and be understood—in the conversations of the academic and professional worlds. Still, Bruffee does not believe the traditional classroom effectively helps students become members of these discourse communities because it is hierarchical, not collaborative in nature. This is why Bruffee is such a strong proponent of peer tutoring—he believes peer tutoring is valuable "because it provides the kind of social context in which normal discourse occurs: a community of knowledgeable peers" (212).

Many writing center theorists have embraced Bruffee's argument and claimed that a minimalist tutoring approach is the best way to create this peer conversation. In his seminal article, "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work," Jeff Brooks states that a writer who passively receives knowledge from a tutor "may leave with an improved paper, but he will not have learned much" (220). Thus, tutors should not be teachers who simply pass down information by telling writers how to fix their papers, but should instead be equals who make the writer do as much of the thinking and work as possible: "The tutor's activity should focus on the student. If, at the end of the session, a paper is improved, it should be because the student did all the work" (Brooks 224). Proponents of minimalist tutoring argue that open-ended, non-directive questions are the best way to engage the student because they encourage a conversational session that will help writers become masters of normal discourse: "If, as Bruffee suggests, tutor talk should resemble the way we want our students to approach the writing process, then we must ensure that our tutors talk in open-ended, exploratory ways and not in directive, imperative, restrictive modes" (Ashton-Jones 32).

While current writing center orthodoxy tends to favor a minimalist approach, some theorists express reservations with this methodology. Linda Shamoon and Deborah Burns, for example, believe that a directive approach can be just as effective, if not more so, than a non-directive approach because it shows or models the normal discourse for the writer. In other words, once writers are shown how to do something, they will be able to express themselves more effectively because they better understand the discourse expectations of a particular knowledge community:

> Directive tutoring displays rhetorical processes in action. When a tutor redrafts problematic portions of a text for a student, the changes usually strengthen the disciplinary argument and improve the connection to current conversation in the discipline. . . . Thus, directive tutoring provides interpretive options for students when none seem available, and it unmasks the system of argumentation at work within a discipline. (237)

That said, Shamoon and Burns do not believe a directive approach should be used uniformly. Instead, they argue that writing center practices should be broadened to include both directive and non-directive tutoring, resulting in "an enrichment of tutoring repertoires, stronger connections between the

writing center and writers in other disciplines, and increased attention to the cognitive, social, and rhetorical needs of writers at all stages of development" (239).

PROBLEMS WITH CHOOSING SIDES

I agree with Shamoon and Burns—I believe that writing center orthodoxy and practice should allow for both directive and non-directive approaches. However, this allowance should not only be made within writing center orthodoxy as a whole, but also within each tutoring session. In other words, instead of conducting either a directive or non-directive session, tutors should feel comfortable conducting a session that is uses both in a complementary manner. As a tutor, the more I read tutor theory, the more I felt pressured to choose between the directive and non-directive camps.[1] Making such a decision was very difficult for me because I strongly believed in the merits of each approach. Expectedly, when I tried to exclusively use a single approach in a session, I became frustrated when I could not use the other, more appropriate approach. But the Shamoon and Burns article inspired me to try using directive and non-directive approaches in a single session. In other words, instead of a single approach, I decided to do both in an upcoming session with Jackie (actual name changed), a standing appointment I had previously met with twice. Jackie worked hard at writing – particularly for her Composition I class—but she often struggled with "not knowing what to do." Consequently, I felt that a more directive approach might be appropriate because I could show her the discourse expectations of academic writing.

THE SESSION

The beginning of our session consisted of Jackie telling me about the assignment and where she was at in her writing process. After I had a good understanding of both, I asked Jackie what her goals for the session were, and she replied that she "mostly wanted to work on grammar." Recalling what we had worked on in our previous sessions, I suggested that we read through the paper and check its organization, development, and support before looking at grammar concerns. After agreeing that this was a good plan for the session, Jackie proceeded to read the paper aloud.

Up to this point, I was very non-directive, asking a few questions and letting Jackie do most of the talking (including reading the paper aloud). True, I was directive by suggesting we look at global issues before local ones, but I was not overly-directive because I was not sure what we needed to work on. Soon after she began reading the paper aloud, however, I realized that we indeed needed to work on global issues. Consequently, when she paused to ask a question about integrating quotations, I was fairly directive in telling her what our session should focus on:

> Jackie: Am I tying in these quotes, you know, with my own words? 'Cause I'm quoting from the book, certain parts, and then I'm trying to tie it in with my own words. And I don't know if I'm doing it right because it's not sounding right to me.

> Tom: Okay, but before we get to that, we want to, you know, make sure we are answering the question and doing what the assignment calls for and that we are doing that logically and in an organized manner. And then we can kind of look at things like that; you know, if we are explaining the quotes and tying it in right with our own words.

Despite my directiveness, Jackie still believed local issues were the main problem with her paper. For example, when she finished reading her paper aloud, Jackie felt that her tense usage needed to be addressed:

> Tom: So what are you thinking? What do you think?

> Jackie: [pause] Um, now that I've read it, um, for some reason, um. I don't know; it doesn't sound right to me.

> Tom: What doesn't sound right?

> Jackie: Maybe it's the grammar in some places where, you know, sometimes I'm hearing pres-

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ent tense and then past tense. [She examines a sentence fragment and fixes it; then brings out a graded philosophy paper to show me the problems she has with prepositional use.]

After reading the entire paper, I was convinced that Jackie's paper needed to be reorganized so her argument was stated more clearly and effectively. She had a lot of good points, but they were hidden in between plot summaries and off-topic ramblings. So, after briefly discussing prepositions, I told her to put the philosophy paper away and began discussing the main problem with her paper we were working on:

> Tom: Who do you think your audience is, who are you writing for; who's going to read this?
>
> Jackie: [laughs] I guess I haven't really thought about it, but I guess it's the teacher.
>
> Tom: [laughs] Okay, that's right; that's true. Has your professor read the article?
>
> Jackie: Yes.
>
> Tom: So, your audience knows what the article is about?
>
> Jackie: Yes.
>
> Tom: The reason I bring that up is that you, like, you use a lot of good examples and points to explain how labels identify and divide us. But right now, the paper is set up, and this is probably why you were wondering whether or not you use your quotes appropriately. The paper is set up more as a plot summary, and then you have a tendency to just enter a point randomly.
>
> Jackie: [pause] Yeah, I see that[2].
>
> Tom: And that's okay because that's how you thought this through, but now we can set it up so it more, so that our examples, our points, are more prominent instead of hidden in the text, or in your plot summary.

While I was supportive and encouraging, I was also very directive in telling Jackie what was wrong with her paper, an assertion that concluded my gradual transformation from non-directive to directive tutor. Initially, in determining the goals of the session, I asked and considered what Jackie wanted to work on. When I realized that other issues needed to be addressed first, I offered my opinion as a suggestion. But when she still failed to recognize the problem, I became more directive.

William Macauley disagrees with this approach, claiming that it's a mistake for tutors "to presume that [they] understand better than the writer what the session needs to be about" (6). Although he admits that tutors can offer suggestions, he believes the writer should basically dictate what the session is about. Still, as a member of a knowledge community, I knew the global issues of the paper were much more significant and pressing. In other words, if I had adhered to a non-directive approach, Jackie and I would have ignored the main obstacle preventing her from communicating effectively in this particular discourse community.

Once we agreed that the session should focus on global issues, Jackie and I needed to decide how to proceed. Judging from the success we had in our previous sessions, I suggested we use an outline to organize her argument. She agreed, but since she wasn't completely comfortable with outlining yet, she asked me to record. I was comfortable with this because it was one less thing for her to worry about, and it gave me another opportunity to show or model outlining for her. In addition to outlining, however, I needed to show Jackie how to organize her argument better because she did not know how to do so herself. Although I did not directly tell her how to do this, I was directive in the sense that I coached her along by guiding her thoughts and keeping her on track. When she struggled to identify a point, I directed her to the appropriate point she seemed to be getting at:

> Tom: Okay, you say labels identify us. What is one type of label that the author discusses in the essay?

Jackie: [pause] Well, one is that, for herself, that she considers herself a professional, a professional woman.

Tom: A professional woman, okay . . . Do you want to talk about being professional and non-professional? When you say professional, do you mean professional versus criminal?

Jackie: Yeah. I mean I didn't think about that. But yeah, in the sense that here she is a professional, and she's entering this, you know, this facility where everyone is the criminal. [pause] The two worlds are in contrast; professional and criminal.

Tom: Okay, good. So that's one label that identifies and divides us.

Despite our progress, Jackie was still unsure about what to do next, so I explained that we needed to use examples to support and show how the labels of professional and criminal divide humans. Once again, although I did not directly tell Jackie what these examples where, I was directive in the sense that I guided her along—she came up with ideas, and I told her if they worked or not:

Tom: Now, can you think of a quote we can use to support this statement? That relates to her being a professional and how that labels and divides her?

Jackie: Uh, yeah. [pause] Well, in this paragraph here [reads a passage], but, I guess that doesn't really explain or support my claim.

Tom: No, you're right; I don't think it does either.

Jackie: [pause] How about this? [Reads another passage]

Tom: Yeah, but that has to do with being a woman. We want something about professional and criminal . . . You want to have an example that because she was a professional, she was divided or separated from the inmates. Where was she separated?

Jackie: Oh you know, there is one point here [reads a passage].

Tom: Good, yeah. I think that's a great quote because you have the professionals in suits, ties, and blazers, and they are being stared at because this is the opposition and this is something different.

Although it is couched in what Ashton-Jones calls nurturing language, I was fairly directive in showing Jackie how to organize her paper and argument. By doing so, I gave her the opportunity to work at, or practice, something with the comfort of knowing I was there to guide and correct her. As Shamoon and Burns write, "We take this to be a version of directive tutoring at its best, with periods of observation and protected practice focused upon important skills development" (235). By the end of the session, my approach had paid off—after laboring through the professional versus criminal topic, Jackie suddenly displayed an understanding of how to organize her argument. In fact, she surprised me by quickly coming up with a number of points and examples she could use in her paper:

Jackie: Okay, so I think I get the idea. So, one label and division is professional and criminal, and I just thought of another, black and white.

Tom: Perfect!

Jackie: Um, [pause] male and female.

Tom: Okay, black and white, male and female.

Jackie: [pause] I think those are the main ones that I can think of.

Tom: Yeah, and that tells me that you understand what the labeling issues are. Now, with this black

and white, when you go back and work on this, what are you going to use.

Jackie: Oh, there's lots of good stuff. Well, an example of that, let's see. [pause] Well, the fact that she mentions that the inmates in there are black, and the people that come to see them, mostly lawyers are white.

Tom: Okay, so there's a division there that when they see a white or black person, they assume that the white person is not the criminal and the black person is.

Jackie: Right. And also, there's segregation within the prison; that the white guys are separate from the black inmates.

Once Jackie began to understand "how things work," I was able to use a much more minimalist or non-directive approach because she didn't need to be shown or told what to do.

CONCLUSION

My session with Jackie shows that a writing center orthodoxy that allows for both directive and non-directive approaches is beneficial—if not necessary—in helping students become masters of a normal discourse. As Jeff Brooks writes, "Fixing flawed papers is easy; showing the students how to fix their own papers is complex and difficult" (224). To help negotiate this complexity, tutors need to be able to utilize both directive and non-directive approaches. In this session, when a minimalist approach did not work with Jackie, I was comfortable with using a more directive approach.

Some minimalist theorists may argue that I limited Jackie's voice and authority as a writer by being directive, but by showing her the discourse expectations of a knowledge community, I gave her more freedom and control as a writer: "Rather than assuming that this imitation will prevent authentic self-expression, the tutor and the student assume that imitation will lead to improved technique, which will enable freedom of expression" (Shamoon and Burns 232). By having the option to be directive and non-directive, I was not restricted in choosing the best method to help Jackie improve her writing. Not only was this in Jackie's best interest, but it also relieved the pressure I had been feeling as a "theory-conscious" tutor. Now, when deciding the best way to help a student, I am comfortable trusting my intuition. I am comfortable being both directive and non-directive. ✦

Endnotes

1. I want to note this pressure was in no way imposed through training or from my director. Instead, it was something I sensed as I began to read more and more articles on writing center theory and practice. Many of the articles I was reading seemed to endorse a purely non-directive approach to writing sessions, and I felt that any use of directive tutoring was a transgression against writing center orthodoxy. In other words, I felt that being directive—even for a moment—was the equivalent to being an editor.

2. At this point, I probably should have made sure that Jackie really did understand before continuing. In the end, I think she did understand, but at this point in the session, I made an intuitive assumption, which is not always the best strategy.

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✦

WRITING [WITHOUT] CENTERS: HIERARCHICAL HEDGING AND THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

✦ *Donna Evans*
Washington State University
Pullman, WA

Writing centers have traditionally been viewed as expendable. Beginning with shortsighted views of the historical roots of the center to the short-funded programs emblematic of marginal fields of work (North 436), writing centers and those who work in them have done and continue to do battle with the powers that be. And here lies the crux of the matter: hierarchical systems without and collaborative systems within clang in ideological discord as they vie for limited resources. The system wielding the most clout—indicated by organization-chart position—controls money, space, and ultimately, the type of work done, thus at times marginalizing the center. This structure of power, more political than personal, is all the more perplexing because an *other*wise inclusive institution sometimes practices *othering* on a vital organ within its body. Such is the case when writing centers are tucked away in basements, anterooms, side streets, and out-of-the-way buildings. Such is the case when a writing center administrator is hired as tenure-track faculty but given neither release time for nor recognition of administrative functions, making job retention near impossible. Such is the case when the type of work performed—one-to-one or group tutoring on a voluntary, rather than credit-bearing, basis—becomes an issue when mean-lean budget battles begin.

Understanding that the university is inherently a hierarchical institution, the extension of expendability to a center-friendly reinforcement like the *Writing Lab Newsletter* (*WLN*) is within the realm of possibility, and, in fact, has occurred. With Muriel Harris still at the *WLN's* helm after thirty years, the newsletter supports, informs, and serves as a forum for tutors and writing center personnel. However, Purdue University suddenly booted *WLN* from its residence (Harris), in effect casting out an integral edifice in the professional lives of countless writing center people. The announcement was sudden, with no warning, and as James Inman puts it, brings into question "the professional and ethical dimensions of how Mickey [Muriel Harris] was notified and, by association, how our community was notified and brought into action. Blindsiding someone is just terrible. Blindsiding someone despite how it would impact the entire writing center community is worse still." Thus, an administrative act seems to have been transmitted to the writing center, where the current administration had no choice but to participate in the *othering* of the publication, and, perhaps, the *othering/olding* of the retired Harris. This is a template for a practice of gen/trans (generation/transmission) in the educational setting, as similarly outlined by Harvey Kail and John Trimbur (205-6), and in its institutional practice—live from Purdue and on national display—clearly lacks a modicum of ethos that considers the heart of the community: writing centers' faculty and staffs, and the students they serve.

But in a sense, the *WLN* is the *other*, in that it has historically been sponsored by the International Writing Center Association (IWCA), not by Purdue. For many years during Harris's tenure as *WLN* Editor, Purdue provided a limited amount of support and space for the publication (Harris). Now the half-time managing editor, half-time writing center secretary has shifted to full-time secretarial work within the center—good news for the writing center—while *WLN* becomes an orphan.

More important than the outrage and disorientation felt by the writing center community, however, are the machinations behind the newsletter's dismissal. While the *WLN* has existed as an institutional stepchild, it is also a mirror of sorts for the writing center in a collective sense. What is happening at Purdue could happen anywhere, depending on finances and administrators' ideology. If writing center work is deemed less worthy than research labs, most likely—and often rightly—the writing center will receive a smaller share of money. The difference in outcome from the use of that money, however, is disparate. On one hand, a research lab spends money to generate money, thus perpetuating its purpose and evolving work in a cyclical manner. On the other hand, a writing center spends money to build writers one at a time and in small groups, face-to-face or online, and at the beginning, middle, or any other stage of writing. Thus, the writing center has less measurable product as a result of the investment, but human potential is difficult to measure. However, this raises questions as to whether the purpose of the university is to generate money or, rather, to educate students. Or, as with any critically conceived response, does a third possibility exist that includes both? Furthermore, funding dedicated to limited purposes prevents writing center work from accomplishing the mission. As the *WLN* crisis unrolls, Georgianna Miller interjects ancillary news:

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

[O]ur Dean recently told us that our instructional budget (from which the writing center's operating budget as well as the administrative course releases associated with its running came) could *only* be used to provide face-to-face classroom instruction. It looks as if everything will be okay for us [at the University of Arizona]—the Vice Provost for Instruction, I believe, is going to take over the funding of the writing center so it will be funded in a more central way, but like Mickey said when talking about the reassignment of the secretary/administrative assistant's duties, it's a way of creating a "budget cut" without actually cutting any funds, and also a pretty clear message from the Dean that he didn't believe the writing center was of value (since the Vice Provost is also an instructor from the English Dept., we were very lucky that he knew about how important writing center work is and he was the one who took an active role in ensuring that the writing center would continue).

While narrow designations in the ways in which public funds can be used is common, writing centers' already limited educational role is kept discrete through fiduciary management. Although it might make sense to a scholar/writing center administrator to do research in order to uncover better methods for tutoring and then to try some of these innovative solutions, time and money restrict possibilities. Stephen North nods at this when he writes: "And then the director, hired on 'soft' money, without political clout, is locked into an approach because she or he has to justify the expense by using the materials"(437). A need to reallocate funds does not seem to have been the dilemma faced at Purdue, but something caused a sudden change, resulting in the *WLN* being led into the forest without any advance opportunity to gather breadcrumbs to mark the way out.

Fortunately, the larger community of writing center administrators that gathers virtually on WCenter, the writing center llistserv, helped Harris and *WLN* maneuver on the rough trail, and with the publication of the October issue, the *Writing Lab Newsletter* operates from a new home, The RiCH Company, without missing a single issue (Harris, "RE: The Writing Lab Newsletter"). Richard C. Hay, founder and CEO of The RiCH Company, invited the *WLN* to join his "really diverse company":

Through all of our product lines, we strive to keep our company mission and motto at the forefront—to provide individual solutions to unique individuals….We also strive to support those communities that support us. Our WCOnline product…is currently used by hundreds of writing centers throughout the world. In return, we try to support the writing center community by sponsoring conferences and other events, and by advertising in various writing center-specific forums. The management and production of WLN fits into this commitment to the community. Even though backing the Newsletter costs more in time, materials, and money, The RiCH Company is proud to be the new home of the publication. (Hay)

Hay's interest in the *WLN* began while working as a tutor, under the direction of Peter Carino and Doug Enders, at Indiana State University's Writing Center, and it continues with his new commitment to the *WLN*:

With the exception of the editorial content and layout of the Newsletter (which is, thankfully, still in the very capable hands of Muriel Harris), we are handling all aspects of the production and management of WLN….[W]e already had many of the structures in place….[and] at the moment that WLN found itself without a home, The RiCH Company was really the only place that could pick up the publication without delaying publication. This is not to say that a university couldn't be home to the publication….But, at that moment, we were ready to help keep the Newsletter in the hands of the community that treasures it. (Hay)

Already *WLN* has an attractive new Web site, and transition-related problems are being resolved (Harris, "The Writing Lab Newsletter"). The Web site offers subscribers access to subscription tools, as well as credit card renewal and invoicing capabilities, and soon the archives are expected to be updated and made searchable (Hay).

The *Writing Lab Newsletter's* escape from the forest ends the immediate crisis, but not before encountering a specter looming large over writing centers: a witch in a gingerbread cottage seems poised beside the path to undo the hope and investment professional writing center administrators and tutors have made over the years. If *WLN* is viewed as representative of a consortium of writing centers, then loss of the publication would mean loss of professional training, resources, innovations, and some forfeiture of community. Stranded in this way, writing centers felt the oppression—real or imagined—of disapproval and disavowal. As a collaborative schema in a hierarchical system, any writing center may perceive its function similarly—vulnerable to *othering* and ousting. With this in mind, it makes sense to pursue more permanent funding, with flexibility in spending planned into fund acquisition. Grant applications should reflect rearticulated missions involving research and outreach, whether conducted in the institution, community, or elsewhere. North's disappointment in English faculty's understanding of writing center work must be recognized, and ongoing education must take place. Writing center work should involve the training of tutors and teaching assistants in a two-pronged approach that prepares them to participate in either Bruffee's Brooklyn Plan, Haring-Smith's Writing Fellows Program, or both (Kail and Trimbur 204).

*T*UTOR'S COLUMN

REFLECTION: HOW THE WRITING CENTER REKINDLED MY PASSION AND PURPOSE TO TEACH

✦ *Meghan Monroe*
Central Michigan University
Mount Pleasant, MI

In "Preparing Future Composition Teachers in the Writing Center," Irene Lurkis Clark notes that "The Writing Center environment enables tutors to become directly involved with process teaching, to interact with students in a variety of pedagogical roles, and to gain important insight into the nature of writing assignments and teacher response" (347). I'd say that's putting it mildly, and I think I can top that. My year spent in the writing center environment has taught me more about how students work through the writing process, how they conceptualize assignments, how to respond to student essays with positive language, and basically, how to improve my own writing than I learned in the 25 years preceding this semester. Yes, it's shocking but true. It is also because of my work in a writing center that I've decided to pursue a Ph.D. in Composition and Rhetoric so that I may teach Composition and Basic Writing courses at the university level and hopefully continue to work and/or manage a writing center. It took a while to come to these conclusions. But as it is with most journeys—there is more to the story.

Since the beginning, well, technically since 1999 when I signed on to do an English major at a Big Ten university, I had a lot of trouble finding my niche. I liked reading novels, plays, poems, and theory; and I also enjoyed writing. At the time, I wrote primarily poetry—intense pieces with very little scholarly merit. My essays reflected my inclination towards poetic language as well. I privileged art before meaning, and today I sometimes look back with amazement at my language choices. Yet even though I enjoyed my courses and found interest and meaning in my work, I didn't feel compelled to focus on any particular field. Seeing as both of my parents had been teachers in public schools for over 30 years, and I had always regarded teaching as one of the most important jobs an individual can have, I entered the university's College of Education. This is where I met some of the most effective professors I would ever have the privilege to meet. I thrived in my education courses, reading ahead, researching topics apart from classroom assignments, and generally learning all that I could solely for my own fulfillment (and also so that I could one day hopefully be an effective teacher). Yet when I paused for a moment to imagine myself actually teaching high school students, I had a hard time doing it. I couldn't say for certain that teaching high school was something I really wanted to do. I pressed on—giving a presentation at the 2001 conference of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English. The theme that year was "A Passion and a Purpose: Teaching Poetry in the Secondary Classroom." Secretly, I felt I had a passion for the poetry but not for the classroom. I figured my desire to teach would pop up when I least expected it—like jury duty.

The year-long student teaching experience was a lukewarm success that ended in a teaching certificate, students' pleas for me to stay, and near total burnout on my part. I was extremely lucky to teach good-natured kids. I just couldn't stir up the passion for teaching when it seemed like 50% of each hour was sacrificed to classroom management. (I said they were good-natured, but not quiet and academically focused.) Since I look young, and looked even younger then, am short and have a soft voice, they saw me as more of a peer than a teacher. They couldn't completely handle having a young teacher, and I wasn't sure of the best ways to handle them. Although I managed to teach them a few things despite their resistance, the passion and what little purpose I had was drained. It took a year of waiting tables, substitute

teaching, and reading novels without having anyone to discuss them with to build up that passion for literature and writing and make me long to return to the university environment.

When I began my studies of literature at Central Michigan University in the fall of 2003, I enjoyed aspects of every class. Subconsciously, my work with teaching composition, composition theory, and the opportunity I was given to teach Freshman Composition were what I cared most about. Yet oddly enough, I was still focused on finding my niche within literature as if I had blinders on that prevented me from considering composition as my field of study. I really did enjoy teaching Freshman Composition and found it hugely rewarding. I wanted to help my students feel the pride and power of authorship, as I felt I had a responsibility to them as their first university writing instructor to make the path as clear as possible as they engaged in the process of academic meaning-making. It wasn't until I began working in the writing center that the idea that had been there all along finally clicked in my head.

I was sitting at the kitchen table in my apartment, writing a paper and trying to think of which historical period I would dislike studying the least when it finally dawned on me. Composition was what I enjoyed the most but for some reason had been fighting for years. In the writing center, I loved working with diverse students both in face-to-face and in online sessions. I loved doing my research on positive language and its role in responding to student writing. I even love the administrative work and the record keeping. But most of all, I love that with new students whom I meet, I get the opportunity to help strengthen their writing abilities, help them find their voices, clarify their ideas, and basically bring them peace of mind and improve their day.

Lastly, my semester in the writing center has brought me greater confidence in my abilities as a consultant and has helped me to see my appearance as less of a hindrance and more of an asset. When I was a student teacher, I longed to have the physical appearance that would command respect (maybe even a little fear) when I entered a room. I envied the big, older looking male student teachers who commanded collective attention with their booming voices. I was jealous of the teachers who were in fact my age or younger but were treated by other teachers as equals, while security guards told me to "get back to class" when I'd step out of my room during prep hour for a drink. In the writing center, however, all of those feelings changed. Because of my youthful look, I now feel like students are able to feel comfortable talking to me as someone on their level who understands them. The younger students see me as someone nearer to their age, so they are likely to talk honestly with me. My appearance actually helps me because many students see me as someone with whom they can relate. This relationship makes teaching writing and collaborating on revision work that much easier for me. I never thought I'd be able to say that. The writing center environment has revealed this to me.

My work and research in the writing center is preparing me for a career as a Composition scholar and teacher while in a collaborative and dynamic environment. Truly, this is just the beginning of my relationship with English, Teaching, and Composition in the world of academia. My story has barely begun. I look forward to the chapters that follow.

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Work Cited

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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>.

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Feb. 23, 2007: Baltimore-Washington Regional Writing Center Directors, in Prince Frederick, MD
Contact: Karen Rowan at 885-443-4141 or karensrowan@gmail.com.

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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/>.

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March 15-17, 2007: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Bowling Green, KY

Contact: Barbara Toth**,** 419-372-8319; btoth@bgnet.bgsu.edu.

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March 30-31, 2007: 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>.

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April 27-29, 2007: 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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Oct. 25-27, 2007: Midwest Writing Centers Conference, in Kansas City, MO
Contact: Thomas Ferrel at ferrelt@umkc edu. Conference Web site: <http://www.usiouxfalls.edu/mwca/mwca07>.

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June 19-22, 2008: European Writing Centers Conference, in Freiburg, Germany
Contact: Gerd Braeuer at braeuer@ph-freiburg.de; Conference Web site: <http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/eng/>.

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