

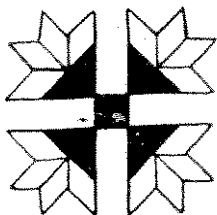
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Vol. II, No. 10 (June, 1978)

'Tis June at last and time for all of us, including the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER, to regroup our forces and take a summer break. While you are off recuperating, re-stocking your lab, and planning for next fall, we hope that you will also set aside some time to write something for next year's newsletter, perhaps an article which shares with the rest of us some successful technique you use, an overview of how your lab operates, some problem (s) you've encountered and perhaps even solved, some materials you've developed or used, etc., etc. So many of our readers have written to say how useful the newsletter is to them, but it can continue to be so only if we all participate in the sharing of ideas. I look forward to hearing from you this summer!

Please send your articles, names of new members, and donations of \$2 (with checks made payable to me) to:

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A 4 C's Report:
Materials Development

In the special interest section for writing lab instructors at the recent CCCC meeting in Denver, twenty directors met as a sub-group on materials development. The participants heard three varied approaches to materials development: (1) an auto-tutorial approach, (2) a two-year college approach, (3) a university-wide approach. The exposure to such diverse methods gave the group many ideas for their labs.

Mary Epes (York College - CUNY) described in depth the auto-tutorial program (which will be on the market, hopefully, within two years) used at her college. The program is self-paced, requiring that the student spend a minimum of five hours to complete the units: the units that she described were on sentence structure and mechanics. The units begin with an introduction to the error and then ask the students to work a series of exercises to give them practice in recognizing that error. To give the students further practice in identifying the error, they are then asked to find it in the context of a paragraph. These exercises, requiring that the student re-write a given paragraph, give the student valuable editing exercises. Not until the final stage are the students asked to write a paragraph of their own. The students' progress is "audited" periodically by a tutor who checks the students' writings which are recorded on a special type of sheet that makes duplicate copies - one for the file, one for the student. Ms. Epes' system is quite elaborate, so I encourage others who have auto-tutorial types of centers to contact her for further information.

Louise Clara (South Georgia College) offered a solution for those who are in two-year programs and need help in materials development. Basically her approach is based on a system of record keeping and a workbook which is devised to help the students to work on their own. The students' progress is recorded by showing the number of errors they are making on particular papers. The students are asked to work on material in the area in which they are making the most errors and then to see if they have mastered it. Although the majority of the workbook is exercise oriented, the student are asked to create their own sentences and paragraphs and check with the tutor if a problem arises. Ms. Clara will be glad, I am sure to send the material on her center which she gave out at the convention.

The Center I direct (East Texas State

University) has the advantage of having six doctoral or master's level graduate assistants and two undergraduate tutors. Although we primarily work with students one-to-one and with their own writing, we found that students at times need additional material to supplement their basic understanding of a concept. Our material is concept-oriented rather than error-oriented (e.g., if a student is making fragments, he learns the concept of the sentence). We have made our own handouts which first explain the concept in the simplest terms, then give exercises which help students gain confidence in the mastering of the concept, and then ask them to create their own paragraphs demonstrating the mastery of the concept. I explained the process that we go through in creating these handouts in the December 1977 issue of the Writing Lab Newsletter. I will be glad to explain in depth this process or send some of our handouts to those who are interested. I feel that our method allows us to strengthen a handout and gear our materials to the students' needs throughout the university.

Lil Brannon
Director of the Writing Center
East Texas State University

A 4C's Report: Writing Lab
Possibilities at the Small
College/University

This sub-group was made up of directors from a wide variety of programs, from one that was completely automated to others relying mainly on personal tutoring. Motivating students was a concern of several directors, in one case because the automated program was very unpopular and the director had no power to change the program (we discussed ways of trying to survive and grow as a professional in a repressive setting), in other cases because directors wanted to attract more students to their labs. We discussed ways of bringing lab services to the students in dorms and student centers and ways of drawing them to the labs. Although these concerns are not peculiar to small colleges and universities, the opportunities to win what we all agreed was critical, faculty support, may be greater in a small school.

Funding labs was discussed. One director struggles to secure funds for lab services within an institution that will not match funds for grants, should they be secured. Labs need to consider including resources to provide help to learning disabled and ESL students wherever advisable and possible.

Mildred Steele presented a way to use the

services of a computer to support and coordinate faculty and tutors' efforts to help students and to monitor students' skill progress throughout their college experience.

The lively and concerned members of the group were helpful to one another. Most seemed to feel that the meeting of Writing Lab directors should become a regular part of the 4C's program.

Leone Scanlon and Mildred Steele
Clark University Central College

Writing Lab Staffs: Four Labor Pools

What follows is a kind of tool, a checklist, for anyone concerned with staffing a writing-lab-whether it be a lab still in the "dream" stage trying to decide what kind of staff is best, or an already established lab trying to expand or diversify. Its purpose is simply this: to lay out, in one space, all the options I've found (or read about or imagined) for providing a work force in a writing lab, and provide a cross-checklist of four areas in which the relative strengths of these options might be compared. I'm not going to go--very far, anyway--into my own prejudices about which kind of staffing is best. For one thing that would take up too much space; for another I've got to save something for my dissertation. I'll restrict myself to a blank chart (see p.5 and some brief remarks, questions, and suggestions regarding each of the headings on that chart.

Before I begin that, though, let me just point out that I'm writing about staffing what I call a student-centered lab--as opposed to a materials-centered one (or to the traditional classroom, which is teacher-centered). The difference is simple enough. In the materials centered lab, the direction of development is toward increasing the student side of the student-teacher ratio, i.e., developing material that allow fewer people to deal with more students (the Comp-Lab Project Lab is a fine example--see the March 1978 Newsletter). The direction of development in the student-centered lab is the opposite; the movement is toward a one-to-one student-teacher ratio (or, as a matter of pedagogical principle or efficiency or both, toward small group work). Both kinds of labs have to worry about personnel, but it's pretty clear that the student-centered-model--if only for reasons of quantity--has to worry more.

First, then, I'll run through four of the "areas of consideration;" there are others, or at least other ways of presenting these--in fact, I think the best way to conduct this kind

consider all the strengths and weaknesses of each kind of staff separately. That way things that won't fit onto simple charts don't get left out. But this format will do for starters.

Cost

The big issue facing all labs. Assuming there's any money available at all, I think one main question will be between quantity and quality of instruction: is it better to have 10 tutors at \$2.00/hour, five at \$4.00, or two at \$10.00? Will there be a difference in quality? Assuming that that question is answered--empirically or administratively-- here are some suggestions for keeping costs down: (1) get outside money for tutors: work-study, General Studies money already ticketed for tutoring or study skills work, CETA, SEEK, EOP; (2) get people who are paid by the departments--faculty on released time--or people paid mostly in "soft" money--T.A.'s, especially, who get large tuition waivers; (3) balance your staff with people who pay to work for you, i.e., for-credit tutors from English Education (or any department--it's perfectly legitimate to run a course in writing/tutoring; see Ken Bruffee at Brooklyn College--check back issues of the News-letter) tutor and generate their own (please genuflect) FTEs; (4) book your tutors for more than a single student per hour--some schools (Iowa, Hunter) aim for up to five; train your tutors for group work, then spend time (but not money) trying to properly mix students; (5) if you think you can take it, try volunteers.

Continuity

Short term: How many hours per week can a tutor put in? How many at a time? Will the lab be staffed most fully at peak times? Suppose you think a student needs instruction an hour three days per week for two weeks--will your staff be able to accommodate him? How much preparation time can you expect from tutors? (One suggestion: if you have tutors who only work a few hours, consider posting special drop-in hours to make fullest use of them.)

Long-term: What's the expected term of any tutor's stay? How will a rapid turnover affect instruction? Do you train a staff that won't be around very long (a semester or year) differently from one that will be around longer? (The great danger, so far as I can see, in heavy, short-term staffing, is that the lab director or directors do less teaching and more administrating--again, the quantity vs. quality of instruction issues.)

How much expertise of what kind should a tutor in writing have? Assuming that there are two areas of expertise involved--tutoring and writing--selection procedures will have to be devised to try and identify them in prospective tutors. For the tutoring part, this might include checking the person's reaction to a poorly written theme (anger? disgust? none?) or some role playing: "Here's my paper; I got a D, but the teacher's a jerk. Right?" Directors I've talked with who use these kinds of procedures say that while they really can't pin down exactly what qualities a good tutor or prospective tutor has, a few hours of this very intensive work will tell whether the qualities are present or not. It's also a good headstart on training.

Expertise in writing is harder to define. Many directors think that an understanding of some grammar is important; many tutors think so too, but not, I found, for the same reasons. Every lab must decide how important the terminology of any grammar is to be (Willis Pitkins' Lab at Utah State, for example, relies mostly on his "discours blocs" system to talk about the language); are most of the customers, for instance, going to be non-native speakers used to learning English the way we learn French?

Should the tutor himself be a good, active writer? I must admit that I've been surprised--given the emphasis on 'educating' faculties in writing--at the number of tutors who don't write. A large part of the impetus for developing writing labs comes from our increasing recognition of the value of thinking about writing as a process, and of creating situations in which it can be taught that way. Surely it doesn't make sense, then, to have tutors only reminiscently familiar with the process, at least as they go through it.

Will the staff be expected to contribute to the development of materials and procedures in the lab, and if so, would some kind of expertise make them more valuable in this respect?

Is the lab in a position to look for people with any special skills--training in reading, TESL, learning disabilities, curriculum design, writing in particular disciplines? Could the lab benefit by inviting such people (or other graduate students especially) to use the lab as a place to do research of some kind (case studies, special materials design, reading-writing connections)?

Training

Closely related to expertise, but not the

same thing--no matter what kind of staff you assemble, some training will have to be done. In materials-centered labs, most training is introduction to the materials and procedures; as far as I can tell, most pre-tutoring training in student-centered labs amounts to the same thing. Learning about how to deal with students and students' writing generally takes place in-service--both informally, catch-as-catch can--and in weekly meetings. There are a growing number of exceptions, though, as people get to know just what it is you can teach somebody about tutoring before he/she starts to do it. I expect training manuals will soon be available--to some extent, they already are (see, for example, a copyrighted but unpublished Working in a College Skills Center: Resource Materials for Teachers, Bill Bernhardt, Staten Island C.C. and Elizabeth Farber, Essex C.C.). The ideal, of course, is to write your own.

Here are some of the questions that have to be asked about training: Will you be able to insist on training before the semester begins? Will tutors be paid for their training time? To what extent will the staff be able to train itself (say you develop a self-instructional kit for tutors to work through on their own time)? Will there be a minimum level of competence that tutors must reach before they're turned loose on students? How much time will you or someone else have or need for observation, consultation, or checking files and progress charts? Will there be any tutor evaluation that will help them improve in specific areas--anything more than an end of the semester "Did the tutor help (a) A lot (b) Some (c) None?" (which is valuable for showing administrators, but not for helping tutors)?

The Four Main Labor "Pools"

Undergraduate: Plentiful; can be taken on as volunteers, for credit, or for pay. Models for peer tutoring available (see especially Mark Smith's "Peer Tutoring in a Writing Workshop," Xerox #76-9320). Can come from a variety of disciplines.

Graduate Students: Dwindling supply from English departments (though more of those left are interested in teaching writing), but there are still many in other departments. It's usually possible to get T.A. lines for labs--it's good teaching experience. At least one school I visited offered graduate credit for a course through the lab (Iowa). Grad students might also be hired independently; in New York, at least, CETA

money seems to be available.

Professionals: Full-or part-time; likely to be more expensive, but you can demand higher academic qualifications (advanced degrees, background in reading, teaching experience). They provide the greatest potential continuity.

Non-Professionals: I include faculty here--most of them must be very part-time and the tutoring is not their primary interest. It's very good to involve them (from any and all departments), but they may need help with the tutorial situation. Self-instruction and workshops can help. They may come as volunteers, for pay, or on released time.

Other non-professionals might include faculty wives or husbands and any other qualified and interested community people. I'm surprised no one has yet gotten federal money to help bring retired teachers and college students together.

The rest--deciding which of these options is open to you and why--is up to you. The chart is a visual aid for plotting the situation at your particular institution. You might use a 1-5 rating system: Got a lot of bright undergraduates willing to work for free a few hours each week? Give them a +5 under cost, +4 under training, a +3 or +4 under expertise, and a +1 under continuity. You get the idea.

Which kind of staff is best? The one you can get. Oh, ideally, in the spirit of the truly student-centered writing lab, you might be able to mix and match all these kinds of staff, fixing up each student with what he needs. But the realities of lab life are harsher than that (though I don't mean to sound like "Little House on the Prairie")--and I say again, don't let good teachers get kicked upstairs, be turned into full-time administrators. Try and find the point at which quality and quantity in instruction get along--to me that almost always means letting teachers teach.

For each school, each lab, each director, there's a model for staffing that will work best. I hope that this chart will help some one person figure out what that is. If I can be of any help, I'll try to answer specific questions. Just send a note to:

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	COST		CONTINUITY		EXPERTISE		TRAINING
	Short-term	Long-term	In Tutoring	In Writing			
UNDERGRADUATES							
Volunteer							
For Credit							
Paid							
GRADUATE STUDENTS							
T.A.s							
Paid							
PROFESSIONALS							
Full-time							
Part-time							
NON-PROFESSIONALS							
Faculty							
Other							

A 4C's Report:
Setting Up a Writing Lab

The discussion group on Setting Up a Writing Lab in the Special Interest Session for Writing Lab Directors at 4C's was led by Stephen North (SUNY at Albany), who is writing his dissertation on writing labs, and by Kathryn Osterholm (Clarion State College) and Phyllis Sherwood (Raymond Walters College, University of Cincinnati), both directors of writing labs.

Steve pointed out that in doing his research on writing labs, he visited or read about numerous labs. His research indicates that writing labs cannot be neatly classified. All labs differ because of the myriad of variables in purpose, staff, clientele, and institution. He provided dotted-line flow charts delineating the services the labs can provide and the staffing and materials which can be used. The participants in the discussion group could then fill in the lines which represented what they wanted or had in their own labs.

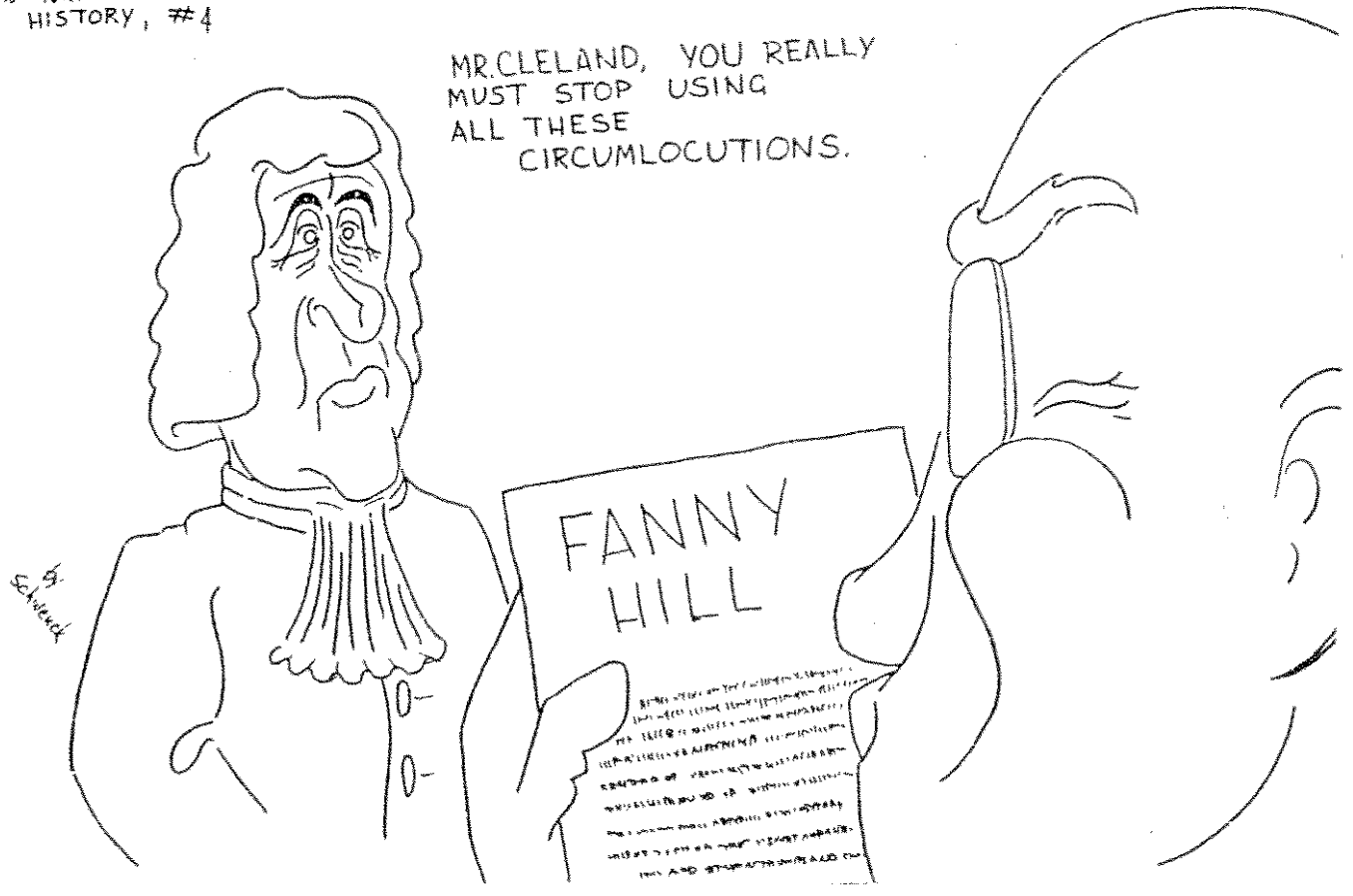
Kathy and Phyllis pointed out that, although all labs do differ, several factors involved in setting up a lab are constant. First of all, the person or people establishing a lab must do a great deal of public relations work with ad-

ministration and faculty in order to get support. At the same time, they need to establish the scope of the lab which will be determined by available staff and tutors and the needs of the students. Both directors agreed that a budget, although it is helpful and eventually becomes a necessity if the lab is successful, is not necessary in the initial stages of starting a lab.¹ Materials can be provided by asking English faculty members to donate complimentary text books, or materials can be designed to fit the particular needs of the students. The lab can be staffed by faculty members who are willing to donate their time.

If money is available for materials and tutors, both should be selected carefully. Many programmed materials are available, so prospective ones should be previewed in order to determine which one or ones would be most useful for the types of students who will be using the lab. Peer tutors should be selected not only on the basis of knowledge, but also on the basis of personality. Once the tutors have been selected, they should be trained through workshops which teach them how to deal with students on a one-to-one basis and which include skill review sessions.

Even in the planning stages of setting up a

GREAT MOMENTS
IN WRITING LAB
HISTORY, #4



writing lab, time should be taken to establish ways to keep accurate records and to evaluate the lab.

Phyllis Sherwood
Raymond Walters College

and

Kathy Osterholm
Clarion State College

¹At Clarion State College, the Writing Center began last fall in a 9' by 11' room with a staff of three peer tutors and one faculty member. By the end of the following semester the staff had grown to include three more tutors and one graduate assistant. Finally, because of the initial success of the Center and the cramped quarters (and some consciousness-raising), we acquired a small building on campus to house the Writing Center. A similar situation at Raymond Walters College resulted in the faculty's consensus to give up their lounge for the Writing Lab.

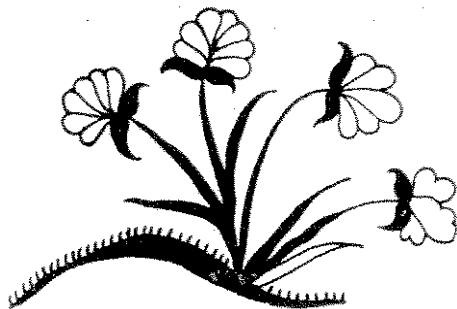
Experimental Program at Odessa College

In the fall of 1978, the Odessa College Writing Lab will expand its open lab program and offer formalized instruction through a series of 1-hour lab courses. The courses--Spelling, The

Simple Sentence, Coordination and Subordinatic Mechanics, Style and Diction, and The Research Paper--will assist all students, regardless of academic achievement, with specific writing problems. Students will meet in small, informal classes two hours a week for five weeks; the courses will be offered three times during the regular semester so that a student may enroll the courses(s) he chooses as particular needs become apparent. Students receive one hour of institutional credit upon successful completion of a course. No texts are required; minimal lab fees for the materials used in the courses permit the lab to operate on a self-sustaining basis.

My concern is to find an instrument which will reasonably test the success of the individual courses to be offered. My colleagues and I have already developed pre-and post-test to measure student progress in mastering specific concepts for the individual courses. However, I am interested in follow-up testing and would like to know if any other lab has found a means of gathering data to measure students' subsequent performance. I would appreciate any help that can be offered to assist me with this inquiry. Please write c/o Department of Literature and Language, Odessa College, P.O. Box 3752, Odessa, Texas 79760.

Lynn Whitson
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