

# THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 23, Number 10

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

June, 1999

## ...FROM THE EDITOR...

As the academic year winds down, so do our energy levels. But when you find a comfy place to sit and pour that tall glass of ice tea to sip as you read this month's newsletter (the last for this volume—we resume in September), I hope you'll have a notepad nearby to start gathering ideas for summer planning. The articles in this month's issue should suggest projects to implement next fall and materials to buy.

Perhaps you too want to try the e-mail mentoring Liz Buckley initiated so successfully? Or, after reading Barbara Geiger and Kristian Rickard's article, you may want rethink some of what you'll be saying next fall for tutor training and teacher orientation? Or buy that book for ESL students reviewed by Mark Dollar? Or do some reading on brain-compatible learning and how to use it in tutoring after reading James Upton's essay? Or use Jane Wilson's discussion to enhance your publicity materials and/or tutor training? Or get involved with some of the NWCA projects Eric Hobson describes?

Summer may be a quiet time, but it's also a great planning and preparing time. Have a glorious summer, everyone, filled with a variety of opportunities to recharge your batteries—and to finish that ice tea calmly.

• Muriel Harris, editor

## ...INSIDE...

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## Distance mentoring: The mentoring is in the e-mail

I am very fortunate to be directing a writing center in an English department that has both a masters and a doctoral program in rhetoric. Since all our TA's teach freshman composition as part of their assistantship, they take classes in theory and have colloquia in the teaching of writing. This happens, also, to be a department that strongly supports the writing center, considering tutoring to be an important part of learning to teach, so the graduate students customarily spend at least a semester tutoring. Newcomers to the program, those without eighteen graduate hours are assigned to the center, and they are included in the first year colloquium, "Teaching Freshman Rhetoric," even though they are not in the classroom. This semester I have been team teaching that colloquium with the Director of Freshman Composition which helps send the message that the department values tutoring. Graduate students come to the center with much support, and if their assignment returns them to the center after they have been teaching, they bring immeasurable experience to students.

One of the ways we support our graduate assistants is through a mentoring

system. Faculty who are willing, and most are, take on a graduate student. They invite the student to view and critique their teaching, and visit the graduate's class to view and discuss what is happening there. It's friendly, it's two-way, and it helps the graduate student get over the fear of having faculty view her class before the dreaded evaluation visit comes around. I believe that mentoring is very important, and so I was very interested to read Barbara Jensen's article on her tutoring program. We've had an in-

formal mentoring system in which those with experience have offered encouragement and suggestions to new tutors, especially undergraduates. However, with all we have in place, I still felt that something was missing.

For one thing, each semester I have several undergraduate students working as tutors. We do not as yet have an established class in tutoring, so their training consists of a couple of meetings before the center opens, a staff meeting each week in which we discuss articles and model tutoring, and a lot of on-on-the-job experience. Not surprisingly, they often worry that they are inadequate even though they are excellent tutors. I worry about how to give them more support.

One day when I was walking into the building that houses the Communication Skills Center, I thought how much of my life was spent inside those walls. As I joined the tutors, I thought how little they saw of the wider community of writers on our campus and how few chances they had for sharing ideas about writing and teaching outside of the English department. At least I served on various committees with faculty from other departments and met with them at university-sponsored social functions. Our graduate students are submersed in composition theory and practice, but this brought them into contact with the ideas of only a small part of the academic community, and undergraduate students have little or no personal opportunity or reason to discuss writing or teaching with faculty outside the classroom.

As I watched one of the graduate assistants go to a computer and pull up her e-mail, an idea came to me. We had been fortunate enough to join all our computers to the Internet, so now we had all the resources in that one room to enable a dialogue with other faculty. All I would have to do would be to get each of my tutors an e-mail partner from another department. It seemed like a good idea to me, but I

wasn't sure how other faculty members would respond to it.

I made a trip to our library and met with our reference librarian. I explained my project and asked if she would help me compile a list of faculty who wrote and enjoyed talking about writing and teaching. She seemed very enthusiastic about the idea and immediately grabbed our campus phone book. We ran down the names and put together a list that ranged from the Special Assistant to the President to faculty in drama, history, political science, psychology, industrial technology, and library science. I sent out an e-mail message that read:

In case you don't know me, I direct the Communication Skills Center (AKA The Writing Center) in the English Department. This semester, eight graduate students and three undergraduate students are tutoring. Throughout the semester we will have an on-going training/discussion about teaching and writing, and this is an invitation to you to join us. Our reference librarian has helped me select a list of people who write and who are interested in talking about what they do as writers and teachers. If you are willing, I would like to match you with one of my tutors. I would ask you to exchange *one* message a week with that tutor about writing or teaching. (The tutor will be instructed not to send more than one message unless specifically invited to do so.) My purpose is to broaden my tutors' ideas about who writes and why they write. I'd like them to see that they belong to an academic community that stretches beyond the doors of the Communication and Skills Center. I know you are busy, but if you can find time to participate in this experiment, would you e-mail your acceptance (or regrets) to me.

And then I sat back to await the results. Of all the recipients, only one de-

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**Manuscripts:** Recommended length for articles is ten to fifteen double-spaced typed pages, three to five pages for reviews, and four pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. If possible, please send a 3 and 1/4 in. disk with the file, along with the hard copy. Please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

Please send articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly subscription payments to the editor.

clined, saying that he was too busy that semester. The others ranged from a short “sign me up,” to two e-mail messages and one phone call from the IT instructor who was ready to start immediately and would like the tutor to visit his classes. I guess no one had ever approached him as a writer before even though he had published two books.

Getting the project off the ground involved some problems. The first step was coercing some of my more reluctant tutors to get an e-mail account. Then, as with anything that involves technology, some delays occurred. One respondent’s e-mail wasn’t working and incredibly enough, the TA with whom I matched her also had problems, so that put one pair out of commission for some time. One of my undergraduate tutors sent a long introductory message to his respondent and received an eight-word reply, followed by silence. I quickly invited another person in as his e-mail “mentor” and solved that problem. (I had hoped to avoid that problem by sending the invitations to faculty via e-mail. If they didn’t answer, I decided they didn’t check their e-mail often enough to be viable candidates.) Obviously that isn’t a fail-safe method.

The other pairs worked quite well. One of the TA’s who was having a wonderful time asked me how I had decided which people to pair up. Part of it was luck of the draw because I didn’t know some of the faculty at all, but in some case I had given quite a bit of thought to my selections. I was pleased that she asked because I had paired her with someone I knew to be of like personality, and it was nice to know that my choice had worked.

Several times, students printed out the replies they had gotten to their messages and asked me if I wanted to read them. I always declined, telling them that I wanted them to have a private correspondence, but that I would be interested to hear what ideas they

were discussing. Later one of my tutors mentioned that she liked the fact that there was no pressure behind the assignment. That made me happy that I had decided not to read any of the conversations. At each staff meeting on Monday mornings, I asked how the project was going and would they tell each other what topics they were discussing. This discussion often threatened to take over the staff meeting. I was fascinated by the range of topics and the fact that they were centering on issues of teaching and writing. This move proved to be useful when one of the respondents started neglecting a tutor. I sent him a note, telling him that I had told her I’d check to see that they weren’t having technology problems, and that she had been a little disappointed not to have anything to share at staff meetings. I got an immediate reply, explaining that he had been out of town and that he would mail her immediately, and the tutor received a long message.

In meetings, I learned that some were discussing classroom management with their e-mail mentors. One pair had discussed how one sets the classroom atmosphere and how much freedom and control the teacher has. They wrote about what to do when students tuned out in class. Another discussed the problems that get in the way of student success and students’ ideas about why one needs a college education. Another pair wrote about students’ reactions to teacher comments and how to keep standards up without discouraging growth in students, and several told me they had discussed how they assessed student writing.

My tutors also seemed to set up a different relationship with faculty, a more personal one than I had expected. All of them reported that their mentor was interested in their background, that several wanted to know what made them to decide to come to graduate school. Several commented on how busy their respondents were, and I realized that for some undergraduates this

was the first look at what instructors have to do outside the classroom. One undergraduate tutor commented that she thinks her mentor is “very much like a student in that she sometimes puts off things, sometimes misspells words.” She went on to say that corresponding with her had taken “the edge off of writing to ‘faculty’ and demystified the idea of an intellectual.” I hadn’t thought about that angle, but later a graduate student confided to me that he had experienced the same fears but had gotten over them. I was glad that when I started the project I did try to pick people who would be very accessible.

Midway in the project, I gave the tutors a brief survey form, telling them I intended to write up the experiment and needed some feedback. I was pleased that most of the tutors seemed quite happy, although I suspected this was probably in part just to be getting some e-mail. I was hoping to learn that they were getting very tangible rewards from the project and I wasn’t disappointed. One TA who was corresponding with the president’s special assistant had invited him to visit her class. (I’m not sure whether I thought she was audacious or just didn’t know any better. Of course, it turned out that he was very pleased to have the invitation.) She, in turn, was delighted by the outcome. She had asked him to speak on the 1990’s perspective of the need of a college education and he did, but since he had gone to college in the 70’s he also shared that perspective. Coincidentally, her students were reading an essay about college in the 70’s so his visit shed some added light on the subject. One TA told me she felt that she had gained a friend and that, since her respondent was our new head librarian who had not been on campus very long, she felt that mutual mentoring was occurring. Another tutor told me that writing to a member of the faculty she didn’t know was giving her a chance to ask questions that she might not ask of someone in our department. I could see the benefits of that. There

were times in graduate school when I had questions that I certainly didn't want to ask my advisor. Another tutor wrote that "it gives very insulated students a chance to get a new, fresh perspective in writing and on the university as a whole." That pleased me since it was that idea that had generated the experiment in the first place.

I had used the term "mentoring" when I explained the project to my tutors and to faculty that I enlisted, but I hadn't considered how odd an idea it was to have a mentor that one had never met. We generally think about a mentor as someone close by, one on whose actions we model our own, a person we consider wise and whose advice we trust. We may look up to a "public" figure as a person whose actions we wish to emulate, but I wouldn't call that mentoring. Sometimes, in fact, it adds up to little more than hero worship. All of the faculty in our e-mail program are "public" figures in a sense. The tutors had some sense of who they were as professors in one department or another, but I had tried to make sure that no tutor knew his or her "mentor." Thus, neither the faculty member nor the student would have any preconceived ideas or expectations about the other. Because of this, I wasn't sure whether "mentoring" was a fair term to use. None of the tutors picked up this term at first. In fact, they searched around for some word to define this relationship. In the beginning, they called their partners "e-mail buddies," and "respondents." However, as they got to know the person better, they began to use the term "mentor," and the kinds of subjects they discussed proved that they were looking at this strange relationship as one of mentoring. Often now, they discuss with their e-mail mentor subjects under discussion in the classes they are teaching and certainly ask for advice. For instance, one tutor has asked how to write a grant because her mentor happens to have written several.

This experiment has redefined mentoring for me. I now believe that mentors come in many guises. My tutors are interested in corresponding with tutors in other states, and I believe if this happens they will be mentoring each other. They were enthusiastic about continuing during the next semester, and I don't have to remind them to check their e-mail.

This electronic mentoring has helped my students feel more a part of the academic community. They each know a faculty member on a personal level, on a first name basis. They feel that person's interest in their career, and the bond that is growing between them centers on teaching and writing. I think there are strong implications in this for writing centers not connected to a department with a built-in mentoring system or not connected to a department at all. While we all, as writing center directors, try to mentor our tutors, there is never time enough to become that special one-to-one listener they all need. Often writing center directors feel themselves on the fringe of the academic community, and there is a constant struggle to become part of the wider discourse community. Electronic mentoring is a way to provide a mentor for tutors who might never link up with one. It is a way to give them more access into the academic dialogue.

At the end of that fall semester, we planned to hold a party in our center and invite all the e-mail mentors. The tutors were anxious to meet their mentors face to face, and I was very curious to hear what the faculty who have participated this semester took away from the experience. I had already heard second-hand how much some of the mentors were enjoying the program; I didn't think I would have any problem recruiting for the next year.

We did hold that party but made the mistake of scheduling it for the last week of school (time just crept up on

us). Several mentors were down with the flu and others were speaking at convocations in other states. Our attendance was small, but it was fun to see mentors and tutors meet for the first time. They seemed to have as little trouble talking face to face as they had had chatting electronically. The party was well attended by other tutors who were curious to see those first time meetings, and we all had a great time.

When I asked my tutors if they wanted to continue the project during the spring semester, their answer was an emphatic "yes." In fact, several said they would continue on their own even if they weren't required. When I e-mailed mentors asking if they wanted to continue, all but one said yes. Several mentors asked for more instructions on what they should "do," and I did give out some questions this semester that I wanted the pairs to explore. But I have been reluctant to put many boundaries on their conversations. True mentoring, I think, meets felt needs, not prescriptions.

This year we invited the mentors to visit us when we hold our awards ceremony for winners in our annual Bulwyer-Lytton contest. Each year we give awards for the worst opening sentences to a novel (as is done nationally), and both students and faculty give us some hilarious entries. Since this is at the end of April, we hoped more mentors would be able to attend and share in the fun.

I think this experiment has yielded both tangible and intangible rewards. My tutors have thoroughly enjoyed it, and several of the mentors told me that they felt they had gotten more out of it than the tutors have. Faculty in other departments had a closer look at the writing center, some of whom may have never known we existed before. We have a "face" now for many instructors.

We had one very tangible outcome. Staffing is always a problem, or I should say finding funds for staffing. When it looked as if there weren't going to be funds to keep an Afro-American tutor for the spring, I had hope that our "grow your own" program which had been providing assistantships for minority students would help. But I learned it had been canceled. However, the special assistant to the president, one of our mentors, found funds for an assistantship for her and has pledged his best to continue that support as she moves through the graduate program.

Now, I'm not saying that he wouldn't have done this had he not been part of our mentoring program, but it didn't hurt to have him aware that our tutors are enthusiastic, knowledgeable preprofessionals.

I had not planned to use the same mentors next year, but to ask them to recommend someone in their department who might be interested in being a mentor. However, several mentors have already told me they want to stay in the program. I'm very pleased because this is a program I want to keep

going. I feel quite sure that at least two of my tutors will keep in contact with their mentors, and I want others to have the opportunity to form such bonds.

Liz Buckley  
Texas A&M—Commerce  
Commerce, TX

Work Cited

Jensen, Barbara. "The Benefits of a Tutor-Mentor Program." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 21.2 (October 1996): 11-12.

## South Central Writing Centers Association

March 24-25, 2000  
Fort Worth, Texas

The conference will be hosted by Jeanette Harris, Director of the William L. Adams Writing Center, Texas Christian University, and Lady Falls Brown, Director of the University Writing Center, Texas Tech University. At this time, we are in the process of updating the SCWCA membership list. If you would like to receive future mailings, please send your name, address, telephone number, and email address to Jeanette Harris (j.harris@tcu.edu) or to Lady Falls Brown (L.Brown@ttacs.ttu.edu). We will issue a call for proposals in September, 1999.

## Southeastern Writing Center Association

Call for Proposals  
February 3-5, 2000  
Savannah, GA  
*"Vision and Revision: A Renaissance Within the Writing Center"*

Please send one-page proposals to Christina Van Dyke, The Writing Center, Dept. of Languages, Literature, and Philosophy, Armstrong Atlantic State University, 11935 Abercorn St., Savannah, GA 31419-1997; phone: 912-921-2330; fax: 912-927-5399; vandykch@mail.armstrong.edu Abstracts must be received by October 15, 1999. Submissions should be either 20-minute talks or 45-minute presentations; presenters must be members of the Southeastern Writing Center Association. For membership information, contact Peggy Ellington, Wesleyan Writing Lab, Wesleyan College, 4760 Forsyth, Macon, GA 31210; phone: 912-757-3904; e-mail: peggy\_ellington@post.wesleyan-college.edu

## Asst. Director—Academic Skills Center/Writing Lab Coordinator Western Michigan University

Immediate opening. Search extended for Assistant Director of the Academic Skills Center and Writing Lab Coordinator at Western Michigan University. For more information call Shirley Clay

Scott at 616-387-3580 or email shirley.scott@wmich.edu. Preferences given to applications received before June 7, 1999.

# Utilizing the writing center to empower student writers

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*From the time I began teaching freshman composition over four years ago, I have seen many of my students take advantage of the services provided by our university's writing center. I have always encouraged my students, regardless of their writing abilities, to visit the writing center, and I have been gratified by the positive results. However, when I became a tutor myself in the writing center last semester, I was disturbed to realize that my students suddenly showed no interest in visiting the center, despite my prompting. Enthusiasm for the writing center does seem to vary from class to class, but this seemed more troubling. It seemed specifically linked to my own work in the writing center.*

*One day near the end of the semester, I had an enlightening conversation with one of my students, Hannah, during a required instructor-student conference. She had been struggling with the writing assignments throughout the semester, and she had been unable to prepare even a rough draft for her conference with me. After working with her to write out a basic plan for her paper, I expressed concern that she have some kind of revision assistance once she had drafted the paper. I suggested that she visit the writing center.*

*"I'd rather have you look at it, Ms. Geiger," she responded. "I don't see the point in having other tutors look at it when you're my instructor and you know what I should be doing."*

*I was not prepared to respond to this comment, although perhaps I*

*should have been. Oh, I told her about the importance of seeking a variety of readers to respond to one's work. I explained that a variety of responses allows one to make choices, and these choices make one a better writer. But I didn't expect this response to convince my student, and it didn't. At one level, she was thinking very practically about satisfying the demands of a highly specialized audience. If she could consult that audience directly, then what was the point in seeking the opinions of others? (BG)*

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*I began to encourage my students to take advantage of the writing center from the first day of class. Miguel, a student who was having to retake freshman composition to replace a failing grade, showed serious problems with unfocused and unorganized drafts. I began to work with him on these problems, pointing out that while he had many good ideas, the efforts toward improvement should be focused on organizing those ideas. After spending some time with him, I suggested that he visit the writing center so that he could have other writers read his improved drafts.*

*At our next instructor-student conference, Miguel announced that he had visited the writing center twice. How did it go? I asked.*

*"I'm not sure," he said, clearly frustrated. "I worked with two different tutors, and each gave me different advice."*

*Miguel proceeded to recount the details of both tutorial sessions. After he finished telling me what hap-*

*pened, he asked expectantly, "Mrs. Rickard, which tutor is right?"*

*Since Miguel was frustrated and clearly wanted direction, I was tempted to answer his question directly. He felt more uncertain than he had before his writing center tutorials, and this uncertainty made him dissatisfied with his writing center experience. However, if I answered his question now, would he ever recognize the benefit of visiting the writing center? (KR)*

Our experiences with our students prompted us to seriously consider what exactly makes the writing center tutorial beneficial to our students. Since we are both writing center tutors, as well as classroom instructors, we began by trying to differentiate between the instructor-student conference and the writing center tutorial. We quickly found that our own tutoring styles differed from one setting to the other, although this difference had been, for the most part, unconscious.

Since our instructor-student conference lasted for 15 minutes per session, and the writing center tutorial lasted for 30 minutes, or one hour upon request, the instructor-student conference seemed more directive. In other words, we had to get to the heart of the problem quickly, so that our students felt that they came away from the conference with new advice towards revision; they rarely wanted to "chat." The students we encountered in the writing center tended to be more relaxed and more willing to simply discuss their writing weaknesses in a more general way.

We began to realize, however, that this basic difference in the atmospheres

of the conference and the tutorial resulted from more than just the difference in length. First of all, the students behave differently in these different settings. A student in the writing center may ask a tutor, "What do you think of this?" or "How does this sound?" In the instructor-student conference, the student is more likely to ask, "Is this right?" In the writing center, the student is willing to work with a tutor to articulate in writing what is swimming in the student's head. Although we try to reach the same result in the instructor-student conference, the fear of the grader often paralyzes our students. The presence of the authority figure is unavoidable in such conferences. Therefore, we may attempt to behave as writing center tutors with our students by creating a collaborative atmosphere, but our students continue to pressure us into a corrective mode.

More disturbing for us is the realization that we behave differently in these environments as well. As writing center tutors, we don't have to worry about being the authority. Regardless of our knowledge about writing, we are not evaluating these papers for grades. Therefore, our comments are simply suggestions, and our work with students is collaborative. They actually have more authority to make decisions about their papers than we do. We struggle to be collaborative with our own students, but as instructors, we often find that we cannot shed our authoritative role. We are, in fact, the graders, and we feel in some sense dishonest when we avoid a direct response. Therefore, we find ourselves telling our students, "This is good," or "This area need improvement," while in the writing center we tell students, "As a reader, I had trouble here." We allow students in the writing center to see our advice as the opinion of one reader, to be accepted or discarded, but our own students feel they cannot afford to ignore our suggestions.

Also, we seem to force students to work harder in tutorials. This, again, is a natural feature of the writing center tutorial. In instructor-student conferences, we are completely aware of what the writing assignment involves, and we know what we expect from our students. In writing center tutorials, the student must provide us with all of this information, arriving at a clearer understanding of the writing assignment through their own cognitive abilities. Our lack of knowledge also forces us into a more collaborative mode as tutors, since we should not simply direct these students according to our own ideas about writing. We are not the ultimate evaluators of this writing, and we frequently don't even know the evaluators' standards, so we must defer to the greater authority—the student.

In "Between the Drafts," in *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, Nancy Sommers discusses how students often attempt to "produce acceptable truths, imitating the gestures, and rituals of the academy, not having confidence enough in [their] own ideas" (159). Sommers points out the importance of student writers finding their "own voices" and finding their own authority and confidence with regards to their writing. The writing center tutorial has the potential to realize this confidence in our student writers, but only if it is promoted by proper use of the instructor-student conference.

*I feel rather disappointed with my work with Hannah. Her writing improved through her work in my class, but I honestly feel that she saw her goal for the class as satisfying me. The real goal of the composition class should be to develop students' confidence in their own writing voices, as well as to provide students with the tools to strengthen those voices. But it is unlikely that this will ever happen through instructor-student interaction alone. The writing center has the power to*

*return student writers to a position of authority, without which they may never realize that their own writing decisions could be the correct writing decisions if carefully thought out and applied. I now believe that Hannah could have grown much more as a writer if she had combined our instructor-student conferencing with the unique experience of the writing center. (BG)*

*When Miguel asked me which tutor was right, I saw that I faced the ultimate chance to help this student gain confidence in his own voice. I asked, "Miguel, you have two perspectives here. With which do you feel the most comfortable?" He said that the second tutor's method of organization seemed to suit him just fine. I asked why, and he spent several minutes telling me exactly why he preferred it. He did add, however, that the first tutor helped him choose active and vivid words to describe his subject. Each tutor offered different perspectives, and after Miguel asked what he should do about the two perspectives, I told him that I thought he rationalized his decisions very well. There was no reason he couldn't accept some tutor advice and reject other. This was his paper, I told him, and I understood his decisions. Miguel's attendance and grades improved. He came to class and felt "empowered" to participate. In fact, during in-class collaborative activities, he finally felt confident enough to offer help to his classmates. He continued to take advantage of the writing center, and other students followed his lead. (KR)*

Ideally, the writing center should create students like Miguel—students who feel they have something to say and the power to choose how they say it. But such results only occur when in-

structor, student, and writing center tutor understand and take advantage of this function of the writing center. Most importantly, composition instructors should be familiar with writing center theory and practice. Only the instructor, as the authority figure, can direct students to the writing center with the appropriate expectations about its usefulness. In addition, the instructor

can build on the writing center experience, promoting students' confidence by allowing them to be the authority over their writing center experience. But first, instructors must understand their role in relationship to the writing center. If instructors and tutors work together properly, students will be able to reap the rewards, recognizing their own ideas as valid and eventually gain-

ing confidence in their own writing.

Barbara Geiger and Kristian Rickard  
Texas Tech University  
Lubbock, TX

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Work Cited

Sommers, Nancy. "Between the Drafts." *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*. 3rd ed. Ed. Gary Tate, Edward P. J. Corbett, and Nancy Myers. New York: Oxford UP, 1994. 155-161.

## PROGRAM COORDINATOR University of Texas at Austin

Job No. (0) 99-04-29-01-8105 — Date available: 06/04/1999 Monthly salary: \$2332—\$2687 depending upon qualifications. 40 hours per week; work hours: 8AM to 5 PM.

### REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS:

Bachelor's degree. A combination of five years of experience coordinating a program, a project, counseling students in an academic program setting, in student personnel or teaching students in an academic program setting. (Master's degree substitutes for up to two years of the AMOUNT of experience above; however, the KIND of experience is required. Nine graduate hours substitute for six months of experience, up to one and one-half years. All But Dissertation (ABD) status substitutes for up to three and one-half years of the AMOUNT of experience above; however, the KIND of experience is required. Doctoral degree substitutes for up to four years of the AMOUNT of experience above; however, the KIND of experience

is required.) **ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED OF ALL APPLICANTS:** Experience in classroom teaching.

### PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS:

Master's degree in English. College-level writing instruction or writing consultant experience. Demonstrated excellent spelling and grammar. Excellent interpersonal communication skills. Professional demeanor.

For complete information regarding this vacancy and to submit an application over the Internet visit [www.utexas.edu/admin/ohr/empl/](http://www.utexas.edu/admin/ohr/empl/) and refer to job # 99-04-29-018105, or stop by in person during business hours: Employment Services, M.L.K.. at Red River, John Hargis Hall, Room 1.104, Austin, Texas

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## NWCA President

(cont. from p. 15)

on Composition. Plans also call for the exhibit to travel to the next Peer Tutoring conference to be held at Penn State University. If you are willing to serve as a contact person for a conference, let me know. This type of exposure benefits NWCA and the writing center community by letting others see who we are and what we have to offer them.

### Now for a short break

This is the last column until August. Looking back on 1999 to date, I am struck by several important things. First, as a community and an organization NWCA is vibrant and strong. Second, I am continually impressed with the quality and integrity with which my colleagues in this community ap-

proach their educational activities. Third, we've achieved a number of notable goals during the past six months, and I believe that such initiatives as the competitive research grants and the soon-to-exist NWCA newsletter will only serve to help strengthen this community. Fourth, there is still much work to do, and as I continue to get almost weekly requests for information about writing centers from educators working around the world, I see that one focus area in our next wave of activity will be in sharing North American writing center experience with educators worldwide.

The challenges before us are many and exciting. To engage them, how-

ever, we need to be fresh. At this point in the academic year, freshness is in shorter supply than normal, so I leave you with best wishes for your summer months. May we meet again in August refreshed. If you need me between now and August, feel free to contact me.

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518-445-7269  
[ehobson@panther.acp.edu](mailto:ehobson@panther.acp.edu)



## Book Review

*Three Crucial Words: A, An, The: Mastering English Articles*, by Alan S. Brender. Tokyo: Harcourt Brace Japan, 1995.

(This text can be ordered from Harcourt Brace Japan: Ichibancho Central Building, 22-1 Ichibancho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102; phone: (03) 3234-3912. ISBN4-8337-9008-4)

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*Reviewed by: Mark Dollar, Purdue University (West Lafayette, IN)*

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As ESL Coordinator in the Purdue Writing Lab, I spent much of the past year upgrading our collection of self-study materials. We found that many ESL students, particularly those who are here seeking graduate degrees, prefer to improve their English by repetitive learning at their own pace. Our tutors (myself included) stand ever at the ready to assist in the students' writing projects, but we recognize that durable language learning often happens only in the mind of the individual, in the quiet corners of a library, over an extended period of time. To become communicatively competent, the ever-increasing goal of L2 educators, students at some point must 'take ownership' of their instruction; they must actively determine the course of their own education in English. For the student who needs to learn English only for specific, academic purposes, self study is an attractive option that the writing center can offer.

In the past nine months, we at Purdue have been working to make this option more attractive by adding sources focused on seven skill areas: the writing process, grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, and testing. For instance, we've added books directed toward specific fields of study, audio tapes that drill pronunciation of American English, and CD-ROMs that use interactive technology to teach grammar. Since I've become a devout seeker for new additions, I was delighted to be handed Alan S. Brender's textbook on articles, *Three Crucial Words*. Although the book was pub-

lished in 1995, it was new to us; the most recent texts we had been using before this year's improvements were written in the 1980's.

Articles are crucial elements often lacking in the grammar repertoire of ESL students. Those whose native tongue is Chinese, Korean, or Japanese usually have the most difficulty with articles, since, as Brender says, "there are no similar structures in most Asian languages" (5). English articles can also be problematic for native speakers of romance languages, even though similar words exist in these languages. Of course, misuse of the articles can often have dire consequences, potentially changing the meaning of entire sentences and creating confusion for the reader (5). Brender's approach is a systematic one; students are taught in the book to examine a noun first, then to ask questions about the noun whose answers will determine specific paths (or "routes" as Brender calls them) to arrive at the correct usage. Such a system is an attempt, he says, to codify the thought processes that native speakers use to make decisions about articles (2). The book offers on the inside cover a basic map of the possible routes, with step-by-step directions.

The substance of the text is built around this system. Each chapter is devoted to a particular route and includes an explanation of the rules, a sample reading whose meaning is dependent upon certain articles, and a variety of short exercises which test the preceding lesson. I especially liked the comprehensive exam at the end of the

book, since it allows the student to test his or her progress on the whole. The chapters are clearly explained and well-designed, but I wonder if Brender's ultimate goal for the text, that students develop a native speaker's "feel" for articles (6), is really achievable with such a systematic approach. Nonetheless, this emphasis on intuition at the very least tells the student that English is not to be acquired solely in using the right system; language acquisition is not merely the process of decoding signifiers.

The only aspect of Brender's book that bothers me is his constant use of Japanese contexts in his lessons, examples, and exercises. In the introduction, for example, he offers Japanese translations of English sentences to show grammatical differences, and he makes frequent references throughout to cities, places, and people in Japan. I realize that Brender, the Director of Writing Programs and the Writing Center at Temple University in Tokyo, is writing from this context, and he most likely meant this book first as a tool for his students. However, as the book is used in other settings and by students who are not Japanese—say, by students who are Chinese—I wonder if the unceasing references to the Japanese will imply a restricted audience or be downright distracting. I hope that any future editions will show more cultural variation.

Regardless, I certainly recommend *Three Crucial Words: A, An, The* as a valuable addition to the self-study holdings of any writing center. While

its usefulness as a teaching tool within an individual tutoring session would be limited, it can serve as a supplement to the session. The tutor can direct the student to Brender's text "for further

study" of articles and then offer to give the student feedback on his or her progress. Such direction is, I believe, the whole point of offering L2 instruction through the writing center. We

should help our ESL students identify areas for improvement and then equip them to go out and continue the learning process in those quiet, expansive corners of their own minds.

## Director of English for Graduate Studies/ Writing Center Claremont Graduate University

The Director, in a full-time, permanent position, is responsible for administering both the English for Graduate Studies program and The Writing Center and for teaching three sections per year of English for Graduate Studies, a writing course for international students. The Director also conducts an English-language assessment of all incoming international students.

Administrative duties include hiring, training and evaluating tutors and adjunct faculty for both units; conducting staff development; overseeing both in-person and online tutoring services; coordinating workshops; developing budgets; maintaining a Web site; writing semester reports; and publicizing events. The position is benefits eligible; salary depends upon experience.

### Qualifications

Minimum of M.A. or M.A.T. in TESOL, English, Rhetoric and Composition, or related field (Linguistics, Education, etc.); Ph.D. preferred. At least three years of college-level teaching experience, primarily in an ESL environment. Knowledge of English language assessment techniques. Exceptional teaching skills; experience teaching writing from a

process-oriented perspective. Administrative experience that includes the hiring, training, and supervision of employees. Writing center or learning center experience preferable; excellent writing skills required. Interest in educational technology and new writing software. A record of ongoing professional development activities within TESOL, writing, or related fields. Understanding of the distinctive nature of graduate education and of the language and cultural issues related to teaching international students.

### Application Procedure

The position is open until filled. Applicants should send the following materials to Brenda Leswick, Director, Human Resources, Claremont Graduate University, 150 E. Tenth St., Claremont, CA 91711:

1. Cover letter detailing experience applicable to the position
2. Current CV
3. A minimum of three letters of recommendation that address the applicant's teaching and administrative skills.

## A suggestion for your bookshelf

*Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers and Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories*, edited by Diana George. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 1999. (ISBN: 0-86709-456-7; paperback, \$20. 200 pp.)

Order from Heinemann, 361 Hanover St., Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912. Phone: 603-432-7894; fax: 603-431-7840; <http://www.heinemann.com>

In this collection, writing program administrators—including several writing center directors—tell stories "of personal histories that intersect with their professional lives and that help them define the job of the writing program administrator." There are also essays on programs within the context of institutional realities (first year student orientation, TA rebellions, ex-

pected but unfunded programs), and in the final part of the book, essays about interdisciplinary projects, programs developed over time, and the ever-changing demands that technology is placing on writing instruction. This collection is part of the "Cross Currents" series from Boynton/Cook that will include another book (due out next year) on the politics of writing centers, edited by Jane Nelson and Kathy Evertz.

# Brain-compatible learning: The writing center connections

One of the most valuable experiences of my professional life has been involvement with writing center theory and pedagogy; my work in our writing center and my readings about writing center theory and pedagogy have made me much more effective in dealing with students in my classes and in dealing with staff in my staff development work. About four years ago, I became the part-time "Excellence Coordinator" for our high school district; my job is to facilitate systemic change to improve student achievement. Through a serendipitous happenstance, I also became the chair of our "Block Scheduling/Brain Compatible Learning" Implementation Team. The function of the "I.T." is to explore both the structural/time options for the school day and to explore the theories and strategies of brain-compatible learning. The brain-compatible learning strategies, the attempt to make formal school experiences reflect and utilize the brain's natural "learning" operations, are the true keys to any meaningful educational change, and my involvement in the exploration of these issues has been most valuable.

One of the keys to brain-compatible learning is the necessity of "reflection" time during any learning experience, and I recently found myself reflecting on brain-compatible learning and the operation of writing centers and writing center personnel. After some informal discussions with other writing center personnel, I thought a brief overview of brain-compatible learning strategies in the context of writing center work may be of some comfort and offer some guidance.

Clearly the major handicap all writing center personnel labor under is that

we have no control over the quality of the classroom environment, the quality of the assignment, or the quality of the relationship among the students and faculty in the classroom. Writing center personnel always exercise less control over the learning environment and student learning experiences than do classroom teachers, and we often have to work with students whose involvement with our efforts at assistance are less than appreciated and understood. Writing center personnel are often in a "reactive" mode to the actions and attitudes of others, and despite our efforts to expand writing center activities and strategies into classrooms, we may find ourselves with less than receptive writers who are angry, frustrated, belligerent, and/or apathetic. They often arrive because visiting the center is a requirement or "strongly recommended," and/or they believe that the center is the "fix-it" shop for their work.

Despite this difficult position in which we find ourselves, there is much to praise about writing centers from a brain-compatible learning perspective. First and of basic importance is that writing center personnel do all that we can to reduce even the perception of stress or threat which is essential for any learning to occur. All learning is mind-emotion-body-health related, and brain research shows that emotions drive learning. One of the first basics of brain-compatible learning pedagogy is that "State Mediates Meaning"; no learning can occur if the learner is not in a receptive physiological/psychology/emotional/intellectual state. In one of the workshops I have done about brain-compatible learning, we developed a celebration tee-shirt with the logo "Professional Educational State Change Facilitator," and I think this

captures what is one of the truly important tasks of all those who hope to help others learn.

Stress and fear cause uncontrollable "downshifting" by students, and in this defensive mental state, little or no learning can occur. I know that writing center personnel spend much time and effort in creating a positive and nurturing physical environment for clients, and equally important, writing center personnel work at effectively empathizing with clients and at building trust and respect; they consciously work at "state change" to make their tutoring efforts effective. The relationship among students and instructors is the key to effective brain-compatible learning environments in the classroom, and I would argue that writing center personnel have been outstanding "state change facilitators" since the first writing center opened its doors.

While not all students who seek assistance in the writing center come angry and frustrated, far too many of them do. One of most important strategies for writing personnel is to allow the client to "de-brief" before any learning can occur; this is the effective "state change facilitation." Like students in a classroom, clients often need a few minutes to discuss non-writing issues in order to relieve frustration, apprehension, and other emotions that interfere with effective learning. Briefly sharing food or drink, going for a short walk, discussing mutual interests, etc. are often effective means of changing a client's "state" to allow for more meaningful tutoring. The few minutes invested in such "pre-learning" activities most often produces a much more productive tutoring session.

One of the most effective strategies we have developed in helping clients is to try to “re-activate” a mind model of the assignment for which they are seeking help. Asking students to make a mind map of the assignment is doubly beneficial. Such work helps the client review and recall the assignment and thus makes tutor suggestions more meaningful, and such work also helps the tutor better understand the assignment and thus make more useful suggestions. We have discovered that the time spent in having clients make a mind map or become involved in some “re-activating” activity is most valuable in making the session productive and beneficial.

Once we help the client clearly understand the assignment, we use graphic organizers<sup>1</sup> to work with the client in exploring a wide variety of pre-writing activities to aid in content development and organization. Even if the organizational pattern is assigned, we find that the use of graphic organizers is effective in helping students generate ideas for personal essays or in organizing material from lectures, texts, etc. Most of our high school clients are visual learners, and we have collected and use over 100 different graphic organizers with our clients. Clients often like the graphic organizer approach because it can save time when used in lieu of several rough drafts, and we have discovered that many students like the ease of rearranging and expanding ideas on graphic organizers.

Eric Jensen argues that feedback is perhaps the most under-used brain-compatible strategy to improve student learning, and the value of honest frequent feedback cannot be overstated. Many students come to the center because they have experienced lack of success in the classroom and/or on the assignment, and regardless of what any instructor says, the “awk” “frag” “cs” and other negative comments on a paper are taken personally. Yes, writing center personnel need to be honest in their assessment of a client’s work and/or progress; however, even minimal

honest positive feedback from center personnel can have a profound effect on future learning and success in the class and on writing assignments.

I began this essay with reference to the “reflection time” needed for effective learning, and this “reflection time” is also an important component of a center conference. Brain research suggests that intensive learning time should not exceed the students’ age plus two minutes to a maximum of twenty-five minutes, and in extended conferences, it is most beneficial to have students take the time to “reflect” on the conference and the tutor’s suggestions. Students can make notes to themselves in a journal, complete a graphic organizer about the conference, etc. We prefer that students keep a journal or log of their visits to the center so that we can use the journal/log as a possible “re-entrant” activity for future assignments; we want students to make connections with previous learning and experiences.

I am incredibly far behind in my efforts to keep up with the daily findings about brain functioning and learning implications that modern technology makes possible, but I do believe that brain research will create a positive change in school structures and educational practices. Writing centers are seldom the focus of any school (although in my ideal school, all departments would be developed around a multi-discipline and multi-functional learning center . . . but that is another dream); however, I believe that writing centers already utilize many of the most beneficial of brain-compatible learning strategies. I hope this brief “reflection” has provided praise and positive feedback for those who work in writing centers and may have provided some suggestions for making students’ visits even more valuable and productive.

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<sup>1</sup> Graphic organizers are pictorial “skeletons” or forms that aid students in generating ideas for discussion or writing or that many students and instructors use as note-taking forms; those who use a process approach to learning call these “pre-writing activities.” Research indicates that students remember more with a known “shape” and more effectively utilize and better remember the content they create using the form. The brain more effectively remembers “known” shapes and the materials created or written with the shape. Graphic organizers also save time in pre-writing, are effective large/small group idea generators, and are among the most effective study/review methods. For condensed versions of our more successful graphic organizers, contact me at the address above.

### A selective bibliography

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- Jensen, Eric. *Cerebral Showcase: Introduction to the Brain and Learning*. (VIDEO) San Diego: The Brain Store, 1996.
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- Jensen, Eric. *The Learning Brain*. San Diego: The Brain Store, 1995.
- Jensen, Eric. *Completing the Puzzle: The Brain-Compatible Approach to Learning*. San Diego: The Brain Store, 1997.

### Resource addresses:

The Brain Store  
P.O. Box 2551  
Del Mar, CA 92041-1851  
Phone: 800-325-4769  
FAX: 619-546-7560

IRI/Skylight Trng. and Publ. Inc.  
2626 S. Clearbrook Drive  
Arlington Heights, IL 60005-5310  
Phone: 800-348-4474  
FAX: 847-290-6600

# TUTORS' COLUMN

## Making the sale: Helping students to "buy" writing skills

Having spent several years in a sales career before my return to college, I began my work at the writing center thinking that, in order to tutor students in writing successfully, I would have to make drastic changes to my way of relating to "customers." Students, I thought, are not looking to buy anything, and they certainly do not need to be pressured into a decision. But as soon as I started meeting with students, I realized that the sales skills I had acquired could be effectively applied to tutoring sessions.

I believe that students who are not completely confident in their writing ability *do* need to make a purchase decision. They need to "get sold" on the idea that writing is a skill that can be developed regardless of natural talent. Following are what I find to be effective uses of professional sales techniques in the writing conference.

### Courtesy.

When I think of the upcoming tutoring session as an opportunity to get a student "sold" on a writing decision, it becomes more important to me to be punctual and well prepared than if I perceive it as just one more battle in the war against flawed student papers. My attitude must be one that makes my inclination to perfect the text subordinate to the writer's actual needs and concerns.

It should be obvious that an unfriendly dismissal at the reception desk can drive a student away from the writing center for good. If a student comes in and asks for proofreading or for other types of service that I cannot conscientiously perform for him, I try to suggest ways in which I *can* help.

Perhaps I can show him how to look for run-on sentences in his paper or how to access the library catalog via a computer in order to find the information he is looking for.

The use of the student's name during the session informs him that he is not just another problem writer whose writing needs to be "fixed." It signifies that I am interested in the student as a person and that I will listen to his concerns.

I believe that the student is always looking for acceptance—she at least wants some verification that her writing efforts are not completely worthless. The customer is always right, and the student's decisions about her writing should be reinforced, rather than dismissed, whenever possible. It is simple courtesy to allow her needs and desires for the content and style of her writing to shape the tutoring session. When the student asks me if she has used a word or phrase correctly, I can try to suggest ways in which she *could* use that word or phrase correctly, instead of just telling her that she is wrong. Saying, "No, but you *can* . . ." is always preferable to just saying "No."

### Rephrasing and questioning.

The most effective sales tools are those that reflect the customer's ideas in a positive light. In the sales conference, the potential buyer's concerns and objections are clarified and then put to rest. Likewise, the student-centered tutor reacts to the student's text, not with a dictatorial speech about what is wrong with it and why, but with a rephrasing of the meaning, such as, "What I hear you saying is . . ." Or,

instead of telling the writer what he needs to say, the tutor asks a question. For example, when a paper implies a connection but does not state it clearly, the tutor can ask, "Are these two things connected? Is the connection explained?"

Voice patterns should be modulated in order to provide the most positive environment possible for student participation in the conference. I have overheard tutoring sessions in which the tutor's voice became louder and louder over time, and I perceived this to mean that the tutor was fighting for control of the student's writing. Whispering is not required, but the volume and pitch of the tutor's voice can be maintained at a level that is lower than that of the student's in order to avoid this verbal contest.

### Using body language.

Salespeople often persuade people to make positive decisions through body language, and the mirroring that the tutor uses to reflect the writer's language can also be applied to physical gestures. The idea is to put the writer at ease so that he feels comfortable asking questions and can think of his own solutions to writing problems without distraction.

First, the body language of the client is imitated. If the client is hurried and jumpy, the tutor can work quickly also. If the student acts tired out and disinterested, the tutor can lay back in his chair and wait for something to happen. In this case the pressure is now on the student to do something, namely, to take control of the session and to see that some progress is made. As simply as that, the control of the tutorial session can be given to the student.

The tutor's body language can also be used to effect change in the student's behavior. A good time to use this "lay-back-in-the-chair" approach is when a student is waiting for the tutor to provide an answer or to ignore an obvious act of plagiarism. He has been posed with a question, "What do you need to tell the reader about this scene?" or "Is this pretty much a word-for-word sentence from the book?" The impatient student, who is in a hurry to get his paper "fixed" so that he can type the final draft and turn it in, assumes that the tutor will eventually provide the answer. This is an instance when the tutor should set down her pen, sit back, and say nothing. The student will feel pressured to solve the problem himself when the tutor refuses to do it for him. The "sale" will be made, and the student will gain more skill in thinking independently every time an opportunity such as this is granted to him.

### **Offering options.**

A customer will always react more positively to a proposition when he feels that he is able to choose between several products, and it is imperative for the student to feel that he has choices from which to choose in shaping up his manuscript. If he is given only one option, he may feel compelled to adopt it, but he will probably feel resentful about it and will not have learned how to make his own writing decisions. At times I feel absolutely driven to supply the "perfect" word, the "perfect" phrase, or the "perfect" pattern of organization, but because I want the "customer" to be satisfied that he is making an informed decision, I try to offer more than one choice.

### **Demonstrating.**

When the tutor can show that she uses the same product that she is "selling," the student will believe in its value. In a recent conference, I showed a student how effective note taking could help him to avoid overquoting sources. I opened my own notebook, in which I happened to have some notes

from several sources written down. I showed him how I planned to extract and combine the ideas in the notes in order to formulate my own conclusions and modeled the way I would structure my own prose based on these conclusions. My example helped the student to see how the note taking strategy might be used and, perhaps even more importantly, it proved to him that not even English graduate students can compose original text without some analysis of their readings.

I felt somewhat vulnerable the first time I shared my own text with a writing center client, but I also realized that this is just how the student feels about bringing his paper in for my possible rejection or ridicule. I can boost the student writer's courage by exposing my own writing decisions to his potential criticism or disdain.

### **Admitting lack of expertise.**

Perhaps the most important thing I learned as a salesperson is that it is always all right to say "I don't know." I do not have to have all of the right answers just because I am in a position of implied authority. For instance, I may think I know how to cite a film in MLA style, but if I am not absolutely positive, I can grab the opportunity to say, "I don't know for sure. We had better look it up."

There are at least three positive effects that will spring from my confession of ignorance. It will be an opportunity to model fact-finding by consulting a reference book, on-line source or syllabus with the student. Secondly, I will often learn something new myself. Finally, the student will realize that it is okay to say "I don't know" instead of trying to fake her way through a writing problem.

### **Get it in writing.**

An effective way to assist change in the student's writing habits is to get her plan in writing. If the student has gotten "sold" on some specific goals for improving her writing, such as

combining more sentences or checking some facts at the library, I ask the student to write them down and to take this "contract" with her. Later, if she gets distracted from her mission, she can review the main outcomes of the tutoring session. I believe that getting the student's plan written down, as well as the date and time of her next tutoring appointment, is as good as getting "money down" on the student's commitment to getting the utmost benefit from writing center services.

### **Service after the sale.**

Receiving "service after the sale" is very important to students. If the student comes back for another appointment with me, and I do not ask him how the last paper we worked on together turned out, he will probably feel that I do not really care about how satisfied he is with my service. Why should I miss this opportunity to keep the student's enthusiasm about his progress going? If the results were not that great, I need to find out why. I will not take responsibility for the paper, but I do need to find out if there were areas that I could have addressed with the student that were more important to the assignment than I realized.

### **Repeat business.**

When you've been in "business" for a while and have truly become a professional, persuading the student to come back for another appointment will come naturally. In fact, if you give students the respect and the breathing space they need, you'll probably become a top "seller" of writing skills and writing center services.

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## NWCA News from Eric Hobson, President

The 4<sup>th</sup> National Writing Centers Association conference (April 15-17), co-hosted by the East Central Writing Centers Association, brought together over 550 writing center directors, tutors, and other interested colleagues on the Indiana University campus. The range of topics covered by the presentations was as broad as the mix of presenters was eclectic. Many conference attendees commented on the strong presence of undergraduate and graduate tutors on the program and the exciting work they displayed in their sessions. The meeting was excellent, the facilities superb. Conference co-chairs Ray Smith, Lisa Kurx, and Laura Plummer (all of the Indiana University Writing Program) deserve the writing center community's gratitude for the impressive results of their year-and-a-half preparation period.

Several NWCA initiatives were formally introduced to the writing center community at Bloomington and are worth a brief explanation:

### NWCA's Writing Center Research Grants

As mentioned in the NWCA Executive Board meeting minutes from November and in my March column, NWCA has established a competitive research grant to support research projects that deal directly with writing center topics. Although the board allocated \$1,500.00 for this fund, the results of several other activities has seen this fund grow dramatically. At the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the editors of the *Writing Center Journal*, Al DeCiccio and Joan Mullin, offered a matching challenge of up to \$1,000.00 in additional funding for the Research Grant fund. In response, NWCA is offering NWCA coffee mugs and pens in exchange for donations (tax-deductible) to the research fund. The enthusiasm for these items at the CCCC and in

Bloomington generated sufficient funds to get the entire \$1,000 match from *WCJ*. As a result, over \$3,500 in grant monies is now available.

Grant guidelines and submission criteria for this competitive grant were developed by a NWCA committee chaired by Neal Lerner. The complete guidelines and criteria are available at the NWCA homepage <<http://departments.colgate.edu/diw/NWCA.html>>, and I will gladly mail copies upon request. We hope to award the first of these research grants in the fall. The NWCA Board believes that establishing monetary support of writing center research is both long overdue and one means of helping to encourage us all to engage in needed, yet challenging, exploration of the many questions that surround writing center educational activities.

### The NWCA Newsletter

The NWCA Executive Board also approved the establishment and funding of *The NWCA Newsletter*, a new venue for communicating with the NWCA membership. This publication, which will see its inaugural edition sometime in August, has been created to provide the NWCA membership with up-to-date organizational information, news and feature articles, conference calendars, calls for papers, etc. Its purpose is to help the NWCA continue to meet its obligations to its membership by serving as a clearinghouse for writing center news and information and as an additional vehicle for carrying out the organization's needed business and service activities.

Kelly Lowe, from Mt. Union College in Alliance, Ohio, will serve as the newsletter's editor. His proposal for this project plans for a bi-annual publication for the first year or two with the publication schedule possibly expanding to quarterly within three to four

years, depending on costs and the community's response. The newsletter's format will be 8.5" X 14" and will range in length between 4-8 pages, depending on news. All regional affiliates are encouraged to keep Kelly and his staff writing center tutors/newsletter writers informed about their activities.

Subscription to the newsletter is part of NWCA membership. To ensure that you do not miss out on this new information source, I encourage you to check your NWCA member standing. Neal Lerner, NWCA Treasurer, is always willing to help you get your membership standing back on track (contact him via email at [nlerner@mcp.edu](mailto:nlerner@mcp.edu)).

### NWCA's Traveling Conference Exhibit

In an attempt to increase NWCA's presence at conferences (writing center, rhetoric & composition, faculty development, etc.), a traveling NWCA/writing center exhibit has been created and is available for display. Included in the box is an NWCA banner, display copies of current writing center books and journals (with copies of mail-in order forms), NWCA brochures, flyers about NWCA's Writing Center Research Grants and its Graduate Research Grants, as well as other items of interest.

If you think that the display should appear at a specific conference, please get word to me so that I can arrange the necessary permission to display the materials and arrange the needed personnel to handle the shipping, set-up and monitoring logistics. So far the display has been sent to NWCA regional meetings. However, over the summer it will appear at the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric, the Assembly on Expanded Perspectives on Learning meeting, and the Wyoming Conference

(cont. on page 8.)

## Calendar for Writing Centers Association Conferences

October 14-16: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Sante Fe, NM  
**Contact:** Jane Nelson, Director; University of Wyoming Writing Center; Coe Library; Laramie, WY 82072. E-mail: jnelson@uwyo.edu; fax: 307-766-4822

October 28-29: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Springfield, MO  
**Contact:** Allison Witz, Hawley Academic Resource Center, Simpson College, 701 North C Street, Indianola, IA 50125; phone: 515-961-1524; fax: 515-961-1363; e-mail: witz@storm.simpson.edu

November 5-6: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in San Bernardino, CA  
**Contact:** Carol Peterson Haviland, English Dept., California State University, San Bernardino, 5500 Univ. Pkwy., San Bernardino, CA 92407; phone: 909- 880 5833; fax: 909-880-7086; cph@csusb.edu

February 3-5: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Savannah, GA  
**Contact:** Christina Van Dyke, Dept. of Languages, Literature, and Philosophy, Armstrong Atlantic State University, 11935 Abercorn St., Savannah, GA 31419-1997; phone: 912-921-

2330; fax: 912-927-5399; vandykch@mail.armstrong.edu

March 24-25: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Fort Worth, TX  
**Contact:** Jeanette Harris (j.harris@tcu.edu) or Lady Falls Brown (L.Brown@ttacs.ttu.edu).

March 30: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Lansing, MI  
**Contact:** J. Pennington at the conference website: <http://www.lansing.cc.mi.us/~penningj/ecwca2000.htm>

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N E W S L E T T E R

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