

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Vol. III, No. 1 (September, 1978)

HAPPY NEW SEMESTER to you all, and a hearty welcome to all the new faces who joined our group during the summer. Although the supplementary mailing list in this issue is so long that it threatens to overtake the whole newsletter, I opted, finally, to continue including the names of new members. My reason for doing so is that I've heard from some members of our group that these lists help them locate and make contact with nearby labs. Helen Naugle, who has taken on the responsibility of supplying complete mailing lists of all our members upon request, also reports a steady stream of letters asking for this list. We are obviously a gregarious group!

In this issue you'll also find Susan Glassman's article (p.5) describing a book and materials review that she will edit for the newsletter, and Richard Mason's article (p.1) explaining his plans for coordinating the Materials Exchange table at the Special Interest Session on Writing Labs at the 1979 4C's in Minneapolis. Also, Schwenck (a.k.a. William Demaree) returns with more Great Moments in Writing Lab History.

I look forward to including your contributions in future issues of the newsletter. Please send your articles, names of new members, and donations of \$2 (with checks made payable to me) to:

Muriel Harris, Editor
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West Lafayette, IN 47907

MATERIALS EXCHANGE TABLE AT 4C's

The Writing Lab Director's Special Interest session at next spring's 4C's meeting will

include a table for display and exchange of lab materials. Richard Mason, Michigan Technological University, will be responsible for organizing the table. The procedure will be as follows:

1. Donors of materials are to fill out a standard form (included in this issue) listing and describing materials. This is to be mailed to Mason as soon as possible.
2. Donors are to bring the materials with them to Minneapolis and turn in at the table. Where possible, materials are to be in standard manila folder(s), identified by school and individual. A yellow pad (with school and individual) should be included for names and addresses of those requesting copies. (If you are not going to Minn., send with someone, or mail to Mason at Michigan Tech. address ahead of time.)
3. Donors are to pick-up materials and yellow pads before leaving meeting. (If you are not attending, or are leaving early, the pads will be mailed to you.)

At this point, the criteria for materials are wide open: anything that the donor believes others might find useful. We may later have a space problem. If so, we will adjust at that time--somehow. On that rather tentative note, we solicit your participation, cooperation, and indulgence.

Address questions or whatever to Richard Mason, Humanities, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, Michigan, 49931.
Bus. - 906-487-2447; home - 906-482-1295.)

Richard Mason
Michigan Tech. University

TO: Richard Mason
Humanities/Language Lab
Michigan Technological University
Houghton, Michigan 49931

Date: _____

FROM: (name) _____
(school) _____
(address) _____

MATERIALS FOR EXCHANGE TABLE:

(List and describe briefly as to type, size, content, etc.)

(use additional sheets if necessary)

- I will bring materials to Minn.: Yes___; No___. (If no, mail to above address well before meeting date.)
-- I will be able to send copies to those so requesting: Yes___; No__.

Signature _____

An unusual fact caught our attention as we prepared our winter quarter summary for the Writing Clinic at St. Cloud State: more students had come on their own initiative than had come by referral from their instructors, fourteen more, in fact. This seems a small number but it stands out because in our previous ten-year history, students coming through referral have dominated the attendance figures by a ratio of up to three to one. What, we wondered, had caused the sudden change? Little else had altered.

However, with the notices sent routinely to instructors at the beginning of each quarter, we had included a new item: a bookmark for each student. Printed on the small slips of orange paper were the name, location, hours, and telephone number of the Writing Clinic as well as the notation that help was free and individual. Apparently the bookmarks have served as needed tangible reminders for students. Although instructors have always explained the Writing Clinic to their classes, it seems probable that many students have not remembered this oral explanation and, thus, have not come to the Writing Clinic unless prompted by the instructors.

We plan to continue giving bookmarks in

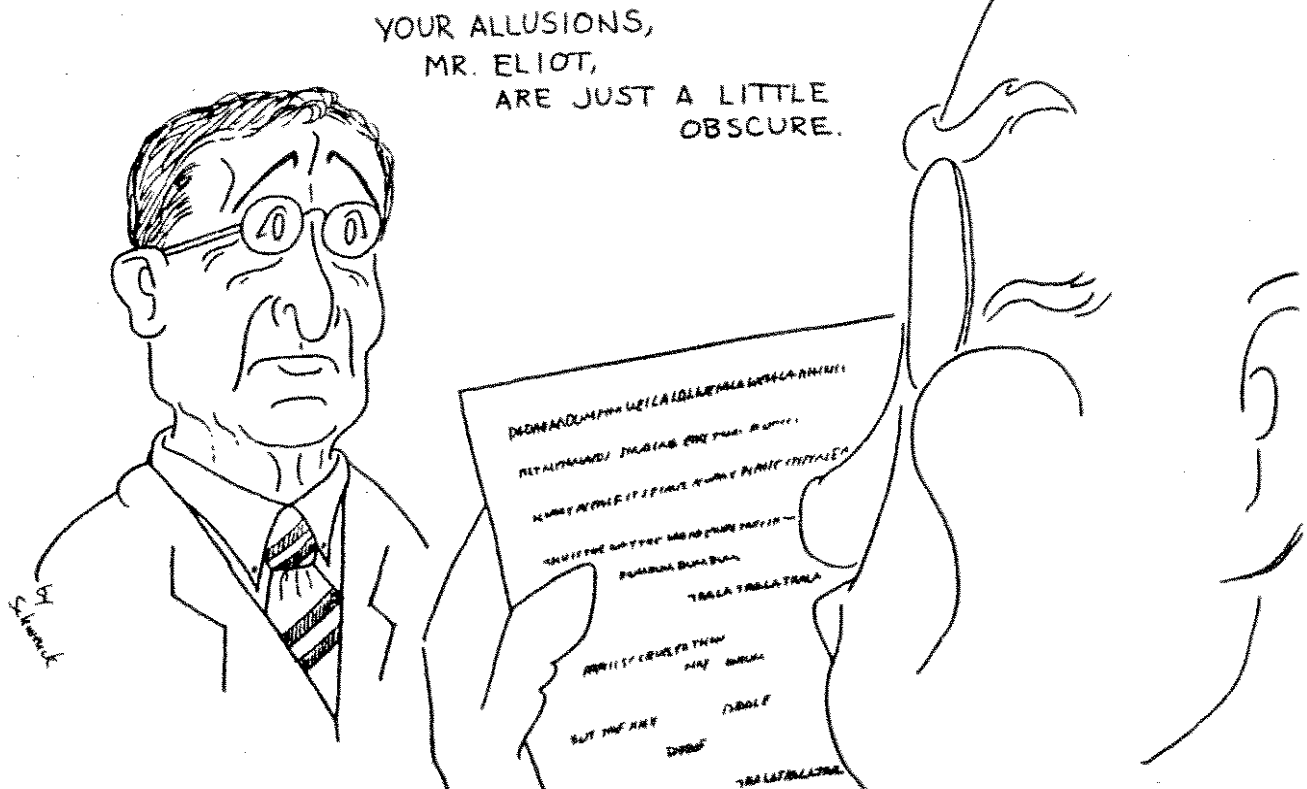
hope that still more students will initiate their own conferences.

Lorraine Perkins
St. Cloud State University

"Since it is axiomatic with me that--given physical and mental abilities--any student will master any language task that he or she really feels the need to master, I see no reason for a stress upon any one kind of writing in any composition class. The problem is, of course, that students may discover their need after they have passed through freshman English, but that is no excuse for using the freshman English class to prepare students to accomplish tasks that they may well never encounter. This means, of course, that the English department should staff writing labs, to help students at all levels with writing problems as those problems arise. When students need to write a research paper for history--if indeed they ever do--they can read Turabian, and if that does not suffice, they can come to the writing lab, where they will get help.

--excerpt from W. Ross
Winterowd's "Introduction"
to Contemporary Rhetoric
(New York: Harcourt Brace
Jovanovich, 1975), p. 16.

GREAT MOMENTS
IN WRITING LAB
HISTORY, # 5



BEGINNING THE WRITING LAB
AT WILLIAM WOODS COLLEGE

The Writing Lab at William Woods College, a four-year liberal arts college enrolling approximately eleven hundred women, began operation in the spring term, 1978. Not unlike other colleges and universities, we have encountered students with writing problems who have required additional instruction outside the classroom. We have implemented a Writing Lab as a service to these students, but also to those who wish to improve and/or reinforce their writing skills.

At a time when we are experiencing a nationwide literacy crisis for which the causes are still uncertain, there is a peculiar factor which we feel contributes to the writing problems among our students, and which to us seems blatantly counterproductive. In the state of Missouri, the Board of Education accepted a recommendation from Dr. Arthur Mallory, state Commissioner of Education, to downgrade high school English requirements to one unit. Dr. Mallory reasoned that it was grossly unfair to require students to take three years of English; instead, he asserted that it was more practical to leave the matter up to the local principal, the guidance counselor, or the parents and student. However, in a recent article appearing in a local paper, Dr. Mallory intimated that he may have erred in making his recommendation and that, depending on the results of the Basic Essential Skills Test (BEST) to be administered on a statewide basis, he may have to reconsider his recommendation.

In fact, Dr. Mallory's recommendation may come much sooner than we expect: the state published a booklet designed to aid teachers in preparing their students for the BEST, and it discovered only after releasing twelve thousand copies that the booklet was flawed with innumerable mechanical and grammatical errors. When asked the reason why these errors appeared in print, the chairman of the committee whose task it was to prepare the booklet commented: "We were short of time and therefore could not proofread." We are hoping that the State Board of Education increases English requirements in the high school because a considerable number of our students at William Woods are natives of the state and are experiencing special difficulties with their writing.

Like many schools across the country, we have had to implement a Writing Lab without really knowing how it ought to be done. The

ideas and suggestions we have gleaned from the Writing Lab Newsletter and from the excellent panels that have formed at the Four C's in the past few years have been most helpful in our endeavors. Here is how our Writing Lab evolved. First, we were faced with the dilemma of choosing a meeting time which would be convenient for all students. Because the Writing Lab could not be offered for credit, we immediately ruled out the possibility of scheduling it along with the semester's course offerings. We also lacked the time, funds, and staff to open a facility with the flexibility to accommodate student referrals and walk-ins on an individual basis. We were limited, therefore, to a few hours in the evening outside of dance rehearsals, club meetings, play rehearsals, sorority meetings, and the like. The only hour at which time all students were virtually free was directly after the dinner hour from six to seven o'clock. Our aim was to make the Lab accessible to all students. If, however, a student who desired to attend the Lab could not because of a conflict resulting from unusual circumstances, we agreed that we would confer with the student during our regular office hours.

To utilize the Writing Lab efficiently, we composed a list of the most common errors appearing in freshmen themes. Then, after calculating the number of sessions in a sixteen-week semester, we began to assign each topic to however many sessions we deemed necessary to cover the topic adequately. Since we had two members of the English Department working in the Lab, we were able to offer two sessions, each covering a different topic, every Tuesday and Thursday evening for a total of four sessions a week. Our objective was to offer each topic at least twice in the semester so that if a student failed to attend a particular session, or if s/he experienced difficulty mastering the error in one session, s/he would have a second opportunity to do so at another time. We held sessions on sentence fragments, spelling, noun-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, punctuation, paragraph development, etc. We began each one-hour session with a formal explanation of the error and spent the remainder of the period working individually with students while they completed practice exercises.

We publicized the emergence of the Writing Lab by making posters and distributing them to every building on campus, two and three in buildings receiving the most traffic. Each week we sent reminders to students via campus mail and published the session topics in the

college's weekly "Where & When." In order to muster up faculty support, we composed a memorandum to all faculty members stating our objectives with the Lab, explaining our procedures, and encouraging them to refer students with writing problems. Appended to the memorandum were six referral forms and a schedule of topics. In the memorandum, we attempted to make two points clear: (1) that although we expect students to write and organize their ideas clearly and coherently after completing the required courses in English Composition (Engl. 1013 and 1023), we often have to remind ourselves that good writing, like any other skill, requires much time and practice; and (2) that to insure clarity and correctness in written expression, we should evaluate not only what students write but the way they write.

We anticipate having two or three peer-tutors next semester, paid with work-study funds, to assist us in the Lab and to help individualize our instruction. Assuming that students learn to write best by writing, we also intend to combine practice exercises with the actual process of writing. We welcome suggestions and comments from readers on ways that we might further develop our Writing Lab and make it a more effective learning environment.

K. B. Lovejoy
William Woods College

A 4C's Report

In the 4C's session I chaired, entitled "Responding to the Needs of Writers-with-Problems: Why Are We Doing What We Are Doing in our Writing Labs?", the participants were Lea Masiello, University of Cincinnati; Nancy Jones, University of Iowa; and Michael Southwell, CUNY. Lea talked about general tutorial problems when working with students who show great need for improvement. Nancy and Mike managed to develop quite a debate on the issue of using a tutor at all times or using programmed instruction. Nancy has been working at the University of Iowa with all the individual work that is stressed there. She showed the progress that one young man had made through a year's work in the Lab. Mike showed, on the other hand, how time and energy can be saved when one does have programs that work and that students can use on their own. Mary Epes, Mike's colleague, was in the audience. She answered several questions about the materials that they have produced at CUNY. If anyone were interested in learning more about their work, I'm sure that either Mike or Mary would be glad to answer an inquiry.

Janice Neuleib
Illinois State University



BOOK REVIEWS REQUESTED

Many of us involved with Writing Labs are looking for new books and materials to use both for staff training and student remediation. With the profusion of new material being published on writing, it becomes increasingly difficult to make sound choices, which are especially necessary since most purchasing budgets seem to be very limited. Often the book or program that promises so much does so little for the actual student. I thought it might be helpful to include in the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER a section of brief book and material reviews, through which members could share some of their experiences with various resources for the teaching of writing.

The following information concerning a book or materials would be useful: author's name, title, publisher, approximate price, format, content, usefulness, and weaknesses. Please send this information to me at the Cooperative Learning Center, Southeastern Massachusetts University, North Dartmouth, Mass. 02747. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Susan Glassman
Writing Lab Director
Southeastern Mass. Univ.

BOOK REVIEW

Blumenthal, Joseph C. English 3200: A Programmed Course In Grammar. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$5.95.

In a programmed format, English 3200 covers a wide range of grammatical and usage problems, including sentence patterns, devices of subordination, sentence variety, smooth-running sentences, as well as the standard explanations of verb, pronoun, modifier, and punctuation usage. Tests for each of the units covered in this book are also available. English 3200 is useful for Writing Labs because its programmed format enables students to work independently on a large variety of topics. I have found it is best used by assigning students specific areas rather than trying to have them cover the whole program. The ready made test booklet is also a convenience. Although it is a well-conceived program, I have found that there are five drawbacks which prevent it from being thoroughly effective for remedial instruction: 1) Many students become bored after completing a few lessons. 2) Much grammar terminology is

used. 3) Because English 3200 is comprehensive, it takes too long to cover some areas. 4) As in many other programmed books, there is no provision for students to practice what they have learned through actual writing. 5) Although the tests are helpful, it takes many students a long time to complete them. English 3200 is a helpful resource if used in conjunction with other materials and methods of instruction.

Susan Glassman
Writing Lab Director
Southeastern Mass. Univ.

WHAT CAN YOU DO EXCEPT TUTOR?

Giving individual help to each and every student with a writing problem is a wonderful idea and an ideal way to work on individual problems, of course. Every writing lab director and instructor knows that. But what about the logistics of it--specifically the time involved and the mere numbers of instructors needed to meet those individual needs on a one-to-one basis. Especially when the instructors find themselves saying the same thing to relatively large numbers of students, it seems that there must be a way to save time yet still reach the maximum number of students, possibly more than are being reached on an individual basis. At that point, the lab might want to consider the use of group sessions dealing with specific yet not unique problems.

They may be called mini-courses or writing workshops or anything else appropriate, but whatever they are called, their purpose is the same. The instructor meets with a group of students who wish to have special instruction on a certain aspect of writing. The instructor may use the same exercises used in individual instruction or may prepare special materials; in any case, each student has an opportunity to have special instruction in writing. The instructor is able to reach a number of students with this basic instruction instead of a single student. Further work may not be needed by most students; those who do need more help will already have had the basic instruction and can work individually with the instructor on extra-help exercises.

The single hour session offers several features which would make it a ninth way of attracting more students to the writing lab and its various services. (See "Eight Suggestions to Attract More Students to Labs," by R. Stanley Dicks, Writing Lab Newsletter, April 1978). One of these features is the very nature of the course: it only takes an hour and is, therefore, designed for the average rather than the remedial, teacher-referred student. One hour courses deal only briefly, in a review fashion, with subjects normally covered in the classroom or introduce

the average student to additional material he or she can use to improve his/her writing or can use in outside-the-English-classroom. This out-of-the-English-department aspect of this type of course is one of its greatest possibilities. In offering courses on specific, course-oriented or special skills areas, the writing lab serves the entire university, certainly one of its primary goals.

These one-hour group sessions at Purdue University are called mini-courses and are taught several times during the course of the semester by the lab instructors. The mini-courses at Purdue cover basic skills (punctuation, spelling, writing topic sentences, prewriting use of detail), broader skills (sentence combining, paragraphing, proofreading and editing, using introductions and conclusions), and special writing techniques (writing a critical paper, writing a research paper, writing a letter of application). The investment of time for the student is small--only one hour--but it is time well spent as he or she learns a skill can be acquired in that hour. For the instructor who prepares and teaches the mini-course, the time invested in preparing the materials is time saved when that instructor helps six or twenty students in an hour, instead of the one or two it is possible to see individually in the same hour. Altogether, the mini-course is a very practical way of solving some of the time and numbers problems which face writing labs trying to give their campuses the best possible service.

Linda Richardson
Purdue University

It is easy as Writing Lab Instructors to sometimes feel isolated from the rest of the faculty and cut off from that kind of interchange which sparks new ideas because other faculty members do not understand completely the kinds and varieties of problems dealt with in the Lab situation. It is refreshing to have a newsletter which reports successes experienced by other Lab instructors. Although our Lab has different needs than many of those reported, there are still ideas that we can adapt to suit our needs and new directions we can work toward in developing our Writing Lab program.

Thank you for an excellent publication.

Donna Reddout
Cameron University

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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