

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E E T T E R

Volume 33, Number 7

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

March, 2009

— FROM THE EDITOR —

This month's *Writing Lab Newsletter* contains articles by two authors, Jennifer Jefferson and Shan-Estelle Brown, who offer us thoughtful examinations of the role of the tutor who is knowledgeable about the subject matter and perhaps also the instructors who assign the writing students bring in. Both authors consider the question of how the tutor weighs offering personal knowledge vs. feeding undue information to the writer.

And we depart from the usual type of article in *WLN* to include Neal Lerner's lengthy bibliography of dissertations and theses on writing center and tutorial issues, from 1924 to 2008. Generally, we all look to books, articles, our publications, conference presentations, and WCenter discussions to immerse ourselves in—and learn from—the scholarship in our field. Perhaps because there isn't easy access to doctoral dissertations and master's theses, we too often overlook all the scholarship available there. Lerner's bibliography allows us to trace the history of writing center studies and also indicates to others the wealth of knowledge available about our field. (These pages of titles are also an excellent argument to present to nay-sayers who don't readily acknowledge that writing center scholarship is flourishing.)

Also, Tracey Baker discusses a strategy that has helped her tutors and their student writers learn that tutoring is not a matter of correcting errors and offering answers about what to write.

Refill your coffee cup, find a comfortable spot, and enjoy some good reading.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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KNOWING THE FACULTY (TOO?) WELL: AN ADVANTAGE OR DISADVANTAGE FOR SMALL COLLEGE WRITING CENTERS?

◆ Jennifer Jefferson
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At many small colleges, a limited number of writing-intensive courses exist, and a relatively consistent core group of faculty teach these courses each semester. Although they, and other faculty members, may support the writing center, it is often an even smaller group that consistently encourage students to visit. Directors and tutors frequently come to know many of these instructors closely. Byron L. Stay, in "Writing Centers in the Small College," explains, "The relationships built at small institutions resemble those in a family . . . It's much more likely that everyone knows everyone else" (151). These close, almost familial, relationships can lead writing center staff sometimes to focus too much on what we perceive to be faculty expectations of student writing, rather than on student needs. Do our close relationships with faculty, then, enable us to do the most productive work with students, to help them become better writers beyond the scope of immediate assignments and classes? Or might such relationships constrain writing centers' ability to work with students most productively?

RELATIONSHIPS AND ALLIANCES

While "[r]elatively little research has been done on the characteristics and unique challenges facing di-

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format. If possible, please send as attached files in an e-mail to submission@writinglabnewsletter.org.

rectors of writing centers in small colleges" (Stay 147), the existing literature often emphasizes the need for such centers to create "alliances" (Stay 151; Neff 127). In "The Writing Center at the University of Puget Sound: The Center of Academic Life," Julie Neff cites, as a main reason for her center's success, its "strategic alliances within the university community" (127). Not only is building close relationships and alliances with faculty key to many centers' success, but it is also critical that such centers do not destroy existing or potential relationships or alliances. Shireen Carroll, Bruce Pegg, and Stephen Newmann stress the importance of public relations in a small college. In "Size Matters: Administering a Writing Center in a Small College Setting," they share their findings from a survey of writing center directors at small colleges (which they define as those with 3,500 or fewer students). They write, "public relations concerned our respondents most" (4) and also note that, at the conference where they presented their findings, "discussion centered on the fact that at small sites, it is easy to acquire and hard to shake a bad reputation" (4). A few negative relationships among such a limited pool of faculty can do much to poison center-faculty interactions. Conversely, it can sometimes take only a few positive relationships with faculty to help a writing center significantly. Such pervasive concerns about relationships, alliances, and reputations must necessarily factor into how writing center staff interact with faculty and students at all institutions, but particularly at small colleges.

Endicott College's Writing Center, which serves a population of approximately 1,800 undergraduates and a small number of graduate students, also depends heavily on faculty alliances. Our Writing Center has grown significantly over the past several years; in 2006-07, we conducted more than 1,863 conferences, up from 1,528 conferences in 2005-06. Much of this growth has come, I believe, from increased advertising. In addition to the standard practices of posting flyers and sending campus-wide emails, we have also visited a large number of classes (82 in 2006-07, more than doubled from 36 in 2005-06) to give brief introductions to the Writing Center or to hold extended workshops. We are aware that we could not have conducted these class visits without the support of certain faculty, who kindly either accepted our offers to visit or extended invitations. We also see daily how heavily student use of the Writing Center depends on faculty support. This awareness cannot help but affect our tutoring.

TUTORING SCENARIOS

Tutoring a student whose faculty member we know well can be similar to tutoring a student who is writing a paper on a topic about which we're well versed. While discussions of such papers can be particularly interesting and fun, these discussions can also be more difficult than other conferences. Tutors have to be careful, when they know the subject, not to ask leading questions or to supply information that the student wouldn't otherwise have included in her paper ("But what about that scene in the novel where . . . ? Didn't another writer recently object to your source's theory on . . . ?"). In *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli discuss the challenges that arise when the tutor is familiar with the paper's topic:

If you [the tutor] do share your ideas with students, you need to be wary of two potential problems . . . writers may try to rely on you to produce most or all of the ideas for papers, which should be their own. . . . Conversely, the overzealous tutor may usurp papers, interjecting too many ideas and leaving writers no longer in control of the paper, confused, and perhaps less confident about their writing abilities. (29)

In contrast, when students come to see tutors with subjects about which the tutors know little, tutors are able to ask more genuine questions. In a successful conference, by the time the student has fully explained her ideas to the tutor, she's often well on her way to writing a paper that clearly articulates those ideas.

When working with a familiar paper topic, an experienced tutor recognizes how not to supply facts or interpretations outside of the writer's scope of knowledge, and, instead, to focus with the student on how she can develop her own ideas. Similarly, a line often needs to be drawn when tutors are working with students whose faculty—and their expectations and assignments—they know well. Peer tutors may have

even had these particular instructors for class. Tutors can therefore tend to jump in and share what they know about instructor expectations.

The issue of whether tutors should share such knowledge, which is frequently of a specific rather than a general academic nature, is a large one. For example, a tutor might know that a certain professor prefers having an international perspective included in her students' product marketing plans. The tutor may let a student writer know that the professor often likes to see this perspective discussed. Then, if the student would like to, the tutor might help brainstorm questions to facilitate thinking about his product on a more global level. Tutors may be motivated to share such information to keep faculty—with whom they have critical relationships—happy about the advice their students receive at the writing center. They may also want to keep their students happy, or even show off a little about their knowledge of faculty expectations. When they do focus on faculty expectations, they must ask themselves whether they are doing so because it is what's most helpful to the students and their writing processes or because they want to "keep faculty happy." Asking this question should help tutors stay focused on our larger mission of helping students.

Sometimes it can be appropriate to share information about faculty expectations with tutees. This appropriateness largely depends not just on the purpose in doing so but on the type of information that tutors are able to share: information about written assignments or paper comments, or information about instructors' individual preferences as *not* embodied in written assignments or comments. The more clear-cut situation occurs in the first case, when all of the information is right there before the student on the assignment sheet or in comments on a paper, but the student needs help critically reading and understanding the academic lingo. Here, the tutor is explaining or reinforcing the precise meaning of certain common writing terms and then helping the tutee learn how to use those concepts.

Muriel Harris, in "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors," identifies "interpreting the meaning of academic language" (36) as one of the important things that tutors do. This interpreter role can be particularly key in relation to instructors' assignments. Harris writes, "students may be unable to plunge in, stymied by an inability to figure out what the assignment is asking for. 'We worked on improving his understanding of the assignment' is perhaps one of the most common summaries of tutorial sessions in writing centers" (39). Similarly, in "The Third Voice in the Session: Helping Students Interpret Teachers' Comments on Their Papers," Janet Auten and Melissa Pasterkiewicz explore how useful writing tutors can be in helping students understand what their instructors mean. They point out, "we can help translate the teacher's comments into an active dialogue aimed at realizing the original intention of the comments—as suggestions for improving the paper and encouraging further thinking" (2). This tutor-tutee dialogue should go beyond the basics of what the comments mean; it should also involve how to best approach and work with those comments.

“ [I]f we are getting students into our writing centers, teaching them how to understand their writing processes, and helping them understand how their faculty represent specific audiences, then we are doing good, productive work. ”

Only at times, however, do we have access to the instructor's written language. Often, we have information about instructors' individual expectations as *not* embodied in written assignments or comments. Here, we need to be more careful. A tutor may be doing work that ideally should be done by the instructor. For example, a tutor might say, "When your professor asks for a short personal narrative, she's looking for one that's 2-3 double-spaced pages. She prefers that you focus on relatively recent life experiences." Here, the tutor is not sharing his understanding of the personal narrative genre, but rather is providing information that is unavailable to the student, or to a writing tutor who does not know that instructor. What should the tutor do?

TAKE NOTE

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PEER TUTORING IN WRITING

Call for Proposals

November 6-8, 2009

South Hadley, MA

*"Leadership and Peer Tutoring: Hope,
Vision, Collaboration, Action"*

Proposal guidelines:

- Provide name, position, institution, and contact information (including e-mail) of all presenters.
- Proposals should not exceed 500 words and should indicate the strategy for engaging the audience.
- Proposals should include the presentation type, the title of the presentation, and a 50-70-word abstract for inclusion in the program.

Our conference this year seeks to consider the various ways in which peer tutoring and leadership inform one another. We invite proposals for interactive sessions that explore any topic, though we are particularly interested in questions listed on the conference website: <<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/wcl/21984.shtml>>.

Deadline: April 1, 2009.

Submit online or mail to:

Laura Greenfield,

RE: NCPTW 2009

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POSSIBLE DECISIONS AND ACTIONS

When we know our faculty (too) well, the question becomes, to what degree does this knowledge help us, as writing tutors, perform our jobs better? In contrast, at what point does this knowledge infringe upon our ability to help students? To me, the line often gets crossed when we are no longer helping students understand instructors' written assignments or comments or helping them develop a better understanding of their writing processes, but we are instead doing the intention-conveying work of and for instructors. If knowing the faculty only allows us to act as their mind-readers or spokespersons, then the situation is problematic in regards to 1) our relationship with instructors, who may come to expect us to do their explaining; 2) our relationship with tutees, who may come to expect us to do instructors' explaining (and may blame us if we haven't accurately conveyed faculty intentions); and 3) students' relationships with instructors, which become less direct than they should be. As with many issues in writing center work, directors and tutoring staff have to negotiate these situations according to their own circumstances and based on their close knowledge of faculty and faculty relationships with their writing center.

When we feel that we are beginning to cross some uncomfortable lines, several possibilities for action exist. First, tutors may stick to explaining general writing concepts. Second, the director may speak to those instructors who consistently send confused students. This conversation may result in writing center staff facilitating in-class writing workshops or in the director conducting faculty workshops or sitting down with instructors one-to-one to help them clarify expectations. It may, in fact, be our close relationship with an individual faculty member that best allows us to gauge which approach would be most productive, both with regard to her students' ultimate understanding and with regard to the writing center's long-term relationship with her and her students.

Finally, we can always talk with tutees about how to ask questions of faculty. Auten and Pasterkiewicz explain: "[T]he consultant can help students create a strategy for meeting with an instructor, formulating questions and pinpointing where and why comments [or assignments, or general expectations] are confusing" (3). These conversations can be especially productive with those students most intimidated by the prospect of communicating directly with faculty. As Auten and Pasterkiewicz note, "students are sometimes reluctant to raise questions of a teacher's own written directions" (3).

FINAL THOUGHTS

There's always the potential for misunderstanding when both tutors and faculty work closely with the same group of students, as they do especially often in a small college setting. In "A Defense of Dualism: The Writing Center and the Classroom," Dave Healy notes, "If tutors sometimes wonder what is going on in the classroom, teachers sometimes wonder what really goes on in a tutorial" (188). This tutor-faculty relationship can on occasion be difficult. As Healy states, "Tutors, who see assignments and instructors' comments on papers and who hear students' complaints about particular teachers, are in a position to challenge the instructor's judgment and competence. Of course, we are supposed to refrain from enacting that challenge" (187). It may be the case, then, that when we try to explain faculty expectations, instructors perceive us as judging them. It's also possible for the opposite problem to arise—far from being afraid of challenges, some faculty may want writing center staff to explain their assignments, comments, or unwritten expectations. We must carefully weigh which cases are worth speaking with faculty about, always keeping both the best interests of the students and the nature of our writing center-faculty relationships in mind.

At small schools, it is almost impossible to escape the question of "Would we have such strong relationships with students if we didn't know the faculty so well?" Also, at many institutions, getting students through the door and building up a culture of non-remediation remain key. At Endicott, we have come

a long way toward becoming a more central part of the campus culture. Our transition has only been possible with the support of faculty across the curriculum who have helped us change the way students and other faculty view the Writing Center, from a place only for remedial writers to a place for all writers. The Writing Center and the student body have benefited from faculty involvement, as more students have discovered and now use our services. So for us, we carefully weigh how and when to push back on faculty by asking them to clarify expectations, and weigh how and when to push back on students by insisting that they speak directly with faculty about something we may be in a position to help them with.

In the end, if we are getting students into our writing centers, teaching them how to understand their writing processes, and helping them understand how their faculty represent specific audiences, then we are doing good, productive work. However, Healy reminds us of how “tutors and writing centers provide an alternative to the authority of teachers and classrooms, and that that alternative is important as a catalyst to students’ developing sense of independence and their own authority” (184). We must carefully maintain writing center space as this “alternative to the authority of teachers and classrooms” by being aware of when we are doing faculty’s work for them and by teaching students how to figure out—and question—audience expectations without us. When lines are clearly being crossed, and when the benefits to students do not outweigh the costs, we need to step back, reassess, and rearticulate our roles more clearly to ourselves, our tutees, and the faculty. ♦

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NEWS

ANNUAL IWCA SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR WRITING CENTER DIRECTORS AND PROFESSIONALS

**Sunday, July 12 - Friday, July
17, 2009**

**Temple University
Philadelphia, PA**

Join co-chairs Lori Salem (Temple University) and Brad Hughes (University of Wisconsin-Madison), plus seven outstanding leaders (to be announced soon), plus a great group of Temple writing-center professionals and students, plus 55 wonderful participants from around the US and the world for in-depth and critical discussions.

Anticipated registration fee: \$800 (includes an opening dinner and four lunches.) Two sites are available for lodging: On-campus private dorm rooms at \$38/night; or downtown hotel at approximately \$145/night. (On-campus lodging for families is also available at a slightly higher rate.) Six scholarships will be available to defray the registration fee. Stayed tuned for more details about how to apply.

Registration opened Friday, February 27, 2009. Participation will be limited to the first 55 registrants. Please Note: The institute often fills to capacity two to four months in advance, so if participating in the 2009 institute is a priority for you, be sure to register early.

Questions about the summer ‘09 institute? Please contact us: Lori Salem (lori.salem@temple.edu) or Brad Hughes (bthughes@wisc.edu).

INTRODUCTION TO A LIST OF DISSERTATIONS AND THESES ON WRITING CENTERS, 1924-2008

◆ Neal Lerner
MIT
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I can remember clearly the moment I decided to focus my dissertation on the study of a writing center: I was in the reading room of my university's writing center, having been newly hired as a graduate student tutor. It was a slow day at the start of the semester, plenty of time on my hands to peruse back issues of *The Writing Center Journal* and *The Writing Lab Newsletter*. Amidst the words in those publications, I found that examining the teaching and learning that was going on in that writing center would bring together my interests in collaboration, tutorial support, writing instruction, and learning theory. I would study the writing center!

Once I had made my decision, I then sought allies in *Dissertation Abstracts*, discovering Barbara Roswell and Joyce Neff's dissertations on writing centers, both of which offered me guidance on research questions and methods. Little did I know at the time that I was joining an effort that stretched much further back than the work by those two scholars in the early 1990s. I have since come to learn that doctoral dissertations and master's theses on writing centers go back to Essie Chamberlain's 1924 University of Chicago MA thesis, one of three studies of writing center teaching methods produced during that decade.

From that point on, the trajectory of theses and dissertations written about writing centers certainly indicates remarkable growth for our field. For example, the number of works (75) produced from 2000 to 2008 far surpasses the number of works (33) produced during the 1990s and, in fact, is more than the total from all other decades combined. And the list of authors of works from all eras is a veritable "who's who" of key writing center scholars and International Writing Centers Association leaders, including Jeanne Simpson, Leigh Ryan, Albert DeCiccio, Elizabeth Boquet, Nancy Grimm, and Stephen North. The future for scholarship and leadership of the field would seem bright given the great rise in those pursuing theses and dissertations focused on writing centers.

Given this growth, one would hope that the empty decades of the 1950s and 1960s would not be an era we will revisit. During that time, most educational researchers had moved on to different topics, and the interest in writing centers as instructional sites rose and fell. While writing centers were seemingly commonplace in the early 1950s, when six of the first seven meetings of the Conference on College Composition were held, they declined by 1962, when Albert Kitzhaber reported that "writing clinics and laboratories are being abandoned since students are seldom so poorly prepared as to require special remedial services of this sort" (477). The abundance of research conducted during our present decade is a hopeful indication that our centers are not being "abandoned" but instead are being recognized as key sites for sustained inquiry into a host of teaching and learning issues. As compiler of the list accompanying this introduction, I hope it offers current and potential researchers key contacts, valuable references, and an indication that we do not go about this work alone, but collaborate with writing center scholars both long past and still to come. ◆

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◆ Compiled by Neal Lerner, MIT

(source: Dissertation Abstracts Online, FirstSearch, OCLC) updated 10/10/08

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2006—2008

OUT OF THE “FIX-IT” SHOP: HOW STUDENT FEEDBACK ENCOURAGES TUTORS TO TEACH

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At my university, I teach a tutor-training class connected to our developmental writing program. My 400-500-level class is open to all interested students of any discipline, some of whom may wish to apply to tutor in our writing center, others who may not. Coursework requirements include reading, tutoring, and developing materials for writers. Perhaps because the course draws from all disciplines, some students enroll in the class out of obvious interest in the topic but with no real interest in actual tutoring, in working one-to-one to teach developmental students how to solve their own writing problems. For example, in a recent class, I realized many student tutors wanted to focus on the writing difficulties they found on the pages of text from their developmental writing students rather than on teaching the students holding the pages to understand and fix the difficulties themselves. Despite what they were reading, practicing, and writing in the tutoring course, when they tutored, they tended to fix problems for the students, explaining to me that such fixing was what their students seemed to want. I quickly realized a disconnect existed between the content of our course and how the student tutors were working with the developmental writers, and I needed to find a way to get the student tutors to teach the developmental writing students, not simply to fix their writing problems. I realized that despite the course and despite the training, it is the tutors and their students who work out the tutoring relationship, by themselves, session by session, and I wanted those sessions to be productive and effective, for both sides of that relationship.

DEFINING THE WORD “TUTOR”

I decided to ask both the student tutors and the students in the developmental writing class to define the word “tutor” and also to describe what they understood to be an effective tutoring relationship. On purpose, I did not create a survey with a lot of directed questions. I wanted to leave the two questions open so both student groups could define and reflect in any way they wanted. Also, I did not want to lead them in any way: I sought their thoughts in their own language. Both groups answered the questions twice, at the beginning and end of the term.

RESPONSES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TERM

As Appendix A demonstrates, initial responses from both groups show that most students on both sides of the tutoring relationship translated “tutoring” as “fix-it sessions.” The 48 developmental writers who responded to my questions all used the word “help” when they described their expectations of a tutor. The majority of them, more than 40 students, expressed the importance of patience and kindness. In these initial responses, most students related that tutors are all-knowing people who can and should identify all of their problems and give them solutions. Such responses are not a surprise to anyone associated with developmental writers or with tutoring centers. Students often expect much more than any tutor is able (or permitted) to give.

The nine student tutors echoed the expectations of the developmental writers, offering comments about both what they were learning in class and what was happening in tutorials. Like the developmental writers, student tutors also stressed the concept of helping. Five of them identified help as something that involves spotting and correcting error, stated in such terms as “proofreading, suggestions, and application/practice,” mirroring the expectations of the basic writers. Four others expressed thoughts even more aligned with those of the developmental writers. In addition, the student tutors talked about the give-and-take inherent in the tutoring relationship, while the developmental writers talked only about themselves and their own needs. The student tutors talked about both themselves and the students they worked with, using words such as “trust,” “friend,” “mentor,” “mutual respect,” “facilitator,” “guide,” and “good communication.” One student pointed out the need to create interest for students, noting that tutors who simply cover material without trying to engage student interest are not as effective as those who do.

RESPONSES AT THE END OF THE TERM

As Appendix B indicates, by the end of the term both groups of students no longer seem to define “tutoring” in terms of quick fixes—at least not always. Student tutor responses indicated more of a focus on working *with* students, on helping students to

help themselves, than on correcting writing problems on the page. Not all, but most student tutors seemed to have really grasped the importance of not overstepping boundaries when they worked with the developmental writers. They seemed to understand that fixing their students' writing problems was not teaching. Up until this point in the term, the student tutors both understood and seemed to agree with the importance of not providing quick fixes for the developmental writers, but they were somehow caught in a kind of limbo where they still were not able to accomplish this, and they seemed to wonder if tutoring without fixing was really even possible. Such responses seem to account, at least in part, for the reasons tutors sometimes do too much work for their students, even if they seem to understand why this is not good practice.

In their end-of-the-term comments, only six of 48 developmental writers still defined the concepts of tutor and tutoring relationship in ways that rely on quick fixes, on having the tutor find and correct errors. Overwhelmingly, developmental writers still relied on the word "help," but they used it differently at the end of the term. At the beginning of the term, the concept of help usually indicated expectations that the tutor would solve all their problems. At the end of the term, they described situations where they were helped in terms of having learned to help themselves. These comments suggest that students seemed to understand their own responsibility in tutoring sessions. They expressed their ideas in a way that they no longer seemed to expect a quick fix and that they, themselves, needed to be the ones who were aware enough of what they were doing to ask questions and seek help. "Tutoring" to them now seemed to mean learning, not just passive watching as tutors did their work with them.

WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR THE CHANGE?

By the end of the term, the student tutors seemed much more effective because of the course, course materials, and experience working with the developmental writers. But I also believe asking them to read the responses of the developmental writers at the beginning of the term had an impact. Possibly because these responses were anonymous, on paper and, therefore, divorced from the physical presence of the students who wrote them, the developmental writing students' words acted as a kind of reality check. Contrasting the words and thoughts of the developmental writers (tutorials as "fix-it" sessions) to what the student tutors were reading and learning in the tutoring course may have played a part in leading the student tutors to become more invested in learning how to teach the developmental writing students to help themselves. They could see, through the developmental writers' eyes, that these writers had not learned anything about solving their writing problems; they had learned only how to wait passively until tutors came up with solutions for them.

Ironically, the distance created for the student tutors through reading the developmental writing students' words on the page instead of sitting next to them allowed the student tutors to care about focusing less on the problems they noted in student writing and more on the students themselves. Depersonalizing the developmental writing students' comments by having the student tutors read them as part of the course material lead the student tutors right back to the person/people and convinced them that they needed to begin building the kind of trust and respect necessary for an effective tutoring relationship that goes beyond simply fixing problems.

IS IT JUST SEMANTICS?

It is possible to argue that both groups of students had simply "learned the language" by the end of the term. However, the developmental students seemed to indicate that some changes in their perception of tutors and tutoring relationships occurred in the tutorials—in language that does not seem just to mimic the language of tutoring ideals that they might have heard/learned from the students tutoring them. When I asked them at the end of the term to reflect on their tutors, their tutorials, and whether they had noticed any changes in their writing and/or their feelings about writing from when they began the course, most identified positives. One student used a bridge metaphor to describe a shift in attitude: "Although writing seemed a difficult bridge to cross at the beginning of class, it now seems like a small overpass, which proved to be a lot of fun while crossing." Notably, tutoring had helped this student conquer the challenges of writing in the best possible way from a student's perspective: the tutor had managed to make the difficult work seem like "a lot of fun."

TAKE NOTE

MIDWESTERN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals October 22-24, 2009 Rapid City, SD

The 2009 MWCA Annual Regional Conference is designed to both honor and challenge some of our best conferencing traditions. To that end, we invite proposals for conference participation in nearly any format. We welcome proposals for everything from works-in-progress to fully polished presentations; from round-table discussions to interactive, multimedia sessions; from informal discussions of research in our discipline to engagement with other disciplines that inform our work. To find details on presentation formats, to see annotated samples of successful past proposals, or to submit a proposal, please visit the conference website at <http://pages.usiouxfalls.edu/mwca/mwca09/>.

Deadline for proposals: March 20, 2009.

Questions about the call for papers may be directed to Christopher Ervin (cervin@usd.edu) or Greg Dyer (greg.dyer@usiouxfalls.edu).

Many other students talked about the confidence they had gained during the term. One student discussed how important feeling confident can be, adding “and I will use what I have learned in other classes.” Another student connected the confidence gained during tutoring sessions to allowing students “to ask more questions” and added that it “enhances a student[']s learning ability.” All of this language seems to show less dependence on waiting for tutors to fix problems and also suggests an assumption that students learn during sessions, that part of learning involves asking questions, and that the work done in sessions has value beyond the session, beyond the specific assignment, and into the future. Another student tied the notion of confidence to trust: “[Tutors] are here for everyone and won’t judge a student if a student makes a mistake but help out instead. . . . This has showed me not to be afraid of showing my true self.” This comment suggests that many positive strides have been made: the tutor will “help” (not fix); the tutor will not be judgmental (the student—and “everyone”—will not be made to feel incapable of doing the work); the student’s “true self” can focus on working and seeking help. How the developmental writers described their relationships—this time to their writing and not necessarily only to their tutors—suggests that they came to see themselves as important participants in the tutoring relationship. They saw themselves as writers. These changes in attitude and feeling seem to come as a direct result of the effective tutoring they were a part of and indicate a true change in the tutoring situation, one which would have had to have come from the tutors.

Focusing student tutors on the words of students they tutor does not suggest a solution to all the problems that occur between tutors and their students because of their expectations of what tutoring is and can/will accomplish. Some of the responses gathered at the end of the term show a number of gaps between what tutors strive for and the reality of their work. The developmental writers who indicated either anger or frustration over not getting enough from their tutors, as well as those who, even after having a tutoring relationship over the term, still defined tutors as people who fix problems, indicate that no simple solutions exist. Indeed, the students in the tutoring class—who suggested that tutorials should go a certain way but often become simply grammar fix-it sessions—also pointed to a gap between what they heard, learned, and even wrote about effective tutoring. All of this points to the ever-present need for those who train tutors to remember that the need to define “tutor” and, more specifically, “tutoring relationship,” never disappears and, in fact, remains vital.



Appendix A: SAMPLES OF INITIAL RESPONSES Prompt: Define the word “tutor” or “tutoring relationship.”	
Developmental Writing Students	Student Tutors
<p>“I expect my tutor to help me with any and everything I need help with and make sure I understand before leaving the session or moving on to another subject.”</p> <p>“I would like my tutor to critique me and help me understand any of my problems</p> <p>“...show me everything I need to know how to do in writing a paper.”</p> <p>“A [tutor] leaves no questions or . . . at least promises an answer by the next session. . . .”</p> <p>“Cover[s] everything I want and need to know.”</p> <p>“Always make sure that they have helped you in every possible way.”</p> <p>“Whatever I am having trouble with, they can assist me with helpful solutions.”</p>	<p>“The tutor and student have a mutual understanding of each other’s needs, and they [must] both [be] willing to put forth an effort.”</p> <p>“They must work together to set tangible goals.”</p> <p>“The tutor should proofread and point out difficulties in the student’s work.”</p> <p>“Some tutors simply feed/supply the student with answers, while others actually help them grow as students.”</p> <p>“Sometimes a tutor will try and do the work themselves which does not help the student at all.”</p> <p>“Doing the work does not confirm that the student learns anything. It does not suggest that the student will necessarily reach a higher level of understanding.”</p>

<p>"Understanding all of the things that I need to know to do my best in class."</p> <p>"Be able to understand why the student is having difficulty in a subject."</p> <p>"A very smart well educated person who is very patient."</p>	<p>"The writer must understand that the tutor is not going to do the work him/herself."</p> <p>"... a good tutoring session is one that leaves the student and the tutor feeling good."</p>
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Appendix B: SAMPLES OF END-OF-TERM RESPONSES
Prompt: Define the word "tutor" or "tutoring relationship."

Developmental Writing Students	Student Tutors
<p>Tutors:</p> <p>"help you to understand the problem and make it a little clearer for you."</p> <p>"find solutions to my problems."</p> <p>"thoroughly check my work, looking for errors & giving me suggestions as to how I can improve."</p> <p>"help the student get a better grade."</p> <p>"give advice, instruct, demonstrate."</p> <p>"direct you in the right path and help you get better at something."</p> <p>"help you understand so that you can make corrections."</p> <p>"answer the questions I have about something."</p> <p>"[My tutor] helped by making suggestions but she did not do my work for me."</p> <p>"[A good tutorial means] leaving the session, knowing that I've learned something."</p> <p>"[Good tutorials happen] when we get somewhere... meaning I understand more of what I am doing."</p> <p>"I feel robbed... I had a tutor who knew the material but could not teach or would not help."</p>	<p>A tutor:</p> <p>"asks questions instead of giving answers or dictating."</p> <p>"guides students to where they need to be going, and enables a student to find his own way eventually and gives him the skills and tools to become his own guide."</p> <p>"should come prepared to listen."</p> <p>"Sometimes... ends up doing all of the work."</p> <p>"usually ends up tackling proofreading and editing mistakes, and ends up making that the highest priority."</p> <p>"[In a tutorial] the idea is not to fix the problems for the students but to teach the student how to see the problems and correct them him/herself."</p> <p>"The student would learn the strategies taught and how to use them for similar issues in the future."</p> <p>"Usually it is an easy 'quick fix' for the tutor to tackle grammar + editing issues first."</p> <p>"[In tutorials] 'productive' is not measured with the quantity of the problem areas covered but rather the quality of the students' ability to correct the problems themselves."</p>

TUTOR'S COLUMN

AUTHORITY AND WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINE: AN ANTHROPOLOGIST'S VIEWPOINT

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As a graduate student tutor and Writing Center liaison to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut, I assist students with their anthropology papers. The Department of Anthropology is small, but its classes serve as general education requirements for many undergraduates. While anthropology provides an understanding of human behavior, how humans interact with their environment and the influences of culture on the individual, tutoring student with anthropology papers provides me with an understanding of how various students approach their writing center sessions. While some students actively express authority over their papers during a session, other students misinterpret tutoring sessions as opportunities to be directed toward better papers instead of opportunities to work collaboratively with tutors. For example, during a session I asked a student writer to summarize Marni Finkelstein's ethnography about street kids in New York before we delved into his book review. He had some trouble articulating the author's main arguments. From my teaching experiences, I know most students eagerly describe the events and the colorful, foul-mouthed personalities within the book's covers because of the informants' young ages, the well-known location, and the vivid accounts of violence. Because I knew the book usually prompted class discussions, I started to wonder if he had read it carefully. As we looked at his paper, he asked me basic questions that the author had answered in the ethnography's introduction. The majority of his questions concerned the ethnography itself instead of his interpretation of it. He had also missed important details from other book chapters. It became clear that he was relying on me to supply missing information. I suggested that he reread and told him that if he could not convince me that he understood what he read, he would not be able to convince his professor. He replied with a sheepish smile, "Yeah, I should go back and read that last chapter."

A great reason to seek a writing tutor who works in a specific discipline like anthropology is that the tutor has a familiarity with its theory, jargon, and relevant sources that other tutors might not. However, once some students know that I am familiar with the material to be analyzed, they might ask me more questions about the material than about their own paper, as did the student in my anecdote. I do not mind answering a few questions about the text, but problems with the student's analysis could be the result of not reading source material well or at all. The harm in students giving their authority to professors or tutors is that they "fail to develop the ability to write in the authoritative academic style that will give them recognition within the university system" (Palmeri 9). But can you blame students for not knowing the particulars of your discipline? No. For students who did not have anthropology classes in high school, the field is entirely new to them. Many students enroll in introductory anthropology classes not out of curiosity but to fulfill a requirement for graduation. Anthropologist Rebekah Nathan describes how some students find themselves in anthropology classes in her ethnography of American undergraduate culture, *My Freshman Year*: "[A] number of students enrolled in my basic cultural anthropology course who had no idea what anthropology was. My course was likely the last piece in their scheduling puzzle, and frankly, they didn't care what anthropology was" (116).

So how do students see me, a writing tutor and anthropologist? They might not realize it, but they treat me as their informant, someone who knows anthropology from an emic, or insider's, perspective. They view me as someone to help them "get it right" in the same way that ESL students view their tutors as "cultural informants" versed in what American academic writing should be (Powers). However, just as ethics prohibit me from exploiting informants when conducting field-work, students should not misuse tutors, and tutors should restore authority to student writers. Yet for many students, my knowledge of the subject is actually secondary to my relational position to their professors. Undergraduates frequently ask at the beginning of a session if I know their

professor, and it seems to help when I tell them that I do; it builds my credibility not only as someone versed in anthropological discourse but also as someone affiliated with their professor. We then discuss the assignment in terms of what the *professor* wants instead of what the *assignment* calls for. Tutor Jason Palmeri's statement about a tutor's authority makes sense: "[P]aradoxically, my ability to validate and encourage students' attempts to take ownership of their own texts directly depends on the evaluative authority invested in my position" (10).

Students working with a discipline-specific tutor often want to receive feedback that their instructors would provide without being graded. Writing in anthropology encourages students to critically recognize the cultural seams that connect their world. However, many students believe that writing "critical" essays means identifying only the negative aspects of the text. They hesitate to critique articles they enjoyed. I explain that being critical means evaluating the evidence the author employs and weighing the strengths and weaknesses of his or her arguments. I also discuss with students the value of a concise summary because it shows comprehension of the text. During a tutoring session, we make outlines of the students' papers because outlines can accommodate people with different learning styles and provide direction. Students often ask if it is okay to use "I," and I usually encourage it for reading responses that require opinions or personal experiences. Yet I discourage them from "we" and "our" because these pronouns risk promoting ethnocentrism and assume that the student writer and the reader come from similar cultural backgrounds.

Other students are concerned more with deadlines than with a discipline. Desperate students are difficult to assist since they are consumed with trying to save themselves from a failing grade, not with using the appropriate discourse. Some students want to insert verbatim into their papers what I have mentioned during a tutoring session. To remedy this problem, I say, "Okay, so that's how *I* would say it. How would *you* say it?" It is important to be careful with desperate writers because they often are willing to be passive and let someone take over. For instance, a student at the end of last semester simply wanted me to tell her what to do. "I just want to know how not to fail," she said repeatedly, shrugging her shoulders and shaking her head. She was sure her professor hated her. Cutting her losses, she was no longer concerned with doing a good job on this paper. It became difficult at first to engage her in her own paper because she was upset, but we were able to shape her ideas. I asked her why she had chosen her topic, Americans' perceptions of Latino immigration to the United States, and she replied that she worked alongside Latin American immigrants and did not like the negative comments she heard about them. She became more animated, and we worked to convey that passion in her writing.

Tutors with knowledge of a particular field should practice restraint because they know more than students need to know to write a paper. Loading students with extraneous information might convince them to include everything the tutor mentioned during the session. A tutor's ability to help students understand the demands of the discipline, the assignment, and even the professor who gave it is always limited by the gravity of the paper's due date.

Just as students use me an informant who understands anthropology, I treat students as informants who can teach me about undergraduate campus culture and student attitudes toward writing. I always first introduce myself and ask them about their understanding of a tutoring session, the assignment, and the text they are using. I also read the demeanor of the student and look and listen for cues that could indicate how he feels about writing. If a student's body language suggests that he is writing-apprehensive, I try to put him at ease by smiling, asking how he is and what he likes about the anthropology class. I have noticed that students who dislike writing readily volunteer this information; it is important to be empathetic yet firm since writing is sometimes difficult. While students of anthropology learn about other cultures, they are actively participating in and shaping their own. The information gleaned from each student during a session creates for me a sharper picture of what writing in a discipline means. ♦

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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

March 27-28, 2009: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in York, PA

Contact: Cynthia Crimmins (crimmin@ycp.edu) or Dominic Delli Carpini (dcarpini@ycp.edu). Conference website: <www.ycp.edu/lrc/mawca2009>.

April 2-4, 2009: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Georgetown, TX

Contact: Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton (piedmone@southwestern.edu) and Cole Bennett (bc00b@acu.edu).

April 3-4, 2009: East Central Writing Centers Association, in West Lafayette, IN

Contact: Linda Bergmann (lbergmann@purdue.edu) or Tammy Conard-Salvo (tcsalvo@purdue.edu). Conference website: <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/ecwca>>.

April 4-5, 2009: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Hartford, CT

Contact: Katherine Tirabassi; 603-358-2924; e-mail: ktirabassi@keene.edu.

April 17-18, 2009: Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association, in Ellensburg, WA

Contact: Teresa Joy Kramer; kramert@cwu.edu. Conference website:<<http://www.pnwca.org/>>.

April 17-18, 2009: Florida Regional Writing Center Conference, in Tampa, FL

Contact: Kate Pantelides: 813-974-9720; kpanteli@mail.usf.edu. Conference website: <www.usf.edu/writing>.

October 22-24, 2009: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Rapid City, SD

Contact: Christopher Ervin (cervin@usd.edu) or Greg Dyer (greg.dyer@usioxfalls.edu). Conference website: <<http://pages.usioxfalls.edu/mwca/mwca09/>>.



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