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Featured Center: Stanford Writing Center

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***Praxis* visits the Stanford Writing Center.**



Name of center: Stanford Writing Center

Institutional affiliation: Stanford University

City, State: Stanford, California

Web address: swc.stanford.edu

Director: Clyde Moneyhun (Associate Director of the Program in Writing and Rhetoric)

Assistant Directors: John Tinker and Wendy Goldberg (Lecturers in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric)

Associate Director: Hilton Obenzinger (Lecturer in English)

Year opened: 2001

History:

We opened five years ago to serve first-year students during their writing-intensive first year at Stanford. All students take a year-long Introduction to the Humanities (IHUM) course sequence that asks them to write two or three papers each quarter. All first-year students also take a one-quarter writing course, PWR 1 (the first course in the required sequence in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric); second-year students take a quarter of PWR 2. Many first-year students also take one or more first-year seminar courses that require

writing. Basically, if the first-year class is writing it, we see it. After our opening year, we began to publicize our services to advanced undergraduates, and the number of sophomores, juniors, and seniors coming in continues to rise every year. Last year we opened the doors to graduate students, and they have quickly become an important part of our work. Small-class writing workshops for IHUM and PWR courses were also a feature of our center from the beginning, and we have now added many other workshops for other groups and classes. A major component of our center is performance of all kinds: readings, presentations of student research, interviews with faculty and professional writers. Our latest initiatives focus on outreach to area schools, bringing students to the center to write and sending our tutors to the schools to help start writing centers there.

Sponsoring program: The Program in Writing and Rhetoric

Number of consultations last year: over 5000

Number of small-class workshops last year: over 130

Number of people attending performance events last year: over 1300

Square footage: about 1500 sq. ft.



Services offered:

One-with-one tutoring; small-class writing workshops; by-request workshops for other small groups; support for readings, presentations, interviews; support for student writing groups and student publications; outreach to area schools

Staff:

Program in Writing and Rhetoric Lecturers (30), 4 hours/week as part of their program work

Graduate students from several departments (6-8), 4-10 hours/week, \$20/hour

Undergraduate peer tutors (35), 4-8 hours/week, \$12-13/hour

Clientele:

In 2005-06: First-year students (65%); advanced undergraduates (24%); graduate students (11%)

Disciplines:

First-year students bring assignments from required writing and writing-intensive classes; advanced undergraduates bring assignments from a huge

variety of disciplines in the humanities, the social sciences, the natural sciences, and the professions (engineering, pre-med, pre-law); graduate students bring theses and dissertations chapters, and we usually work with them on a weekly basis across several quarters.

Students also bring other kinds of writing to the center, including letters of application and personal statements for graduate school, research fellowships, and internships. A tiny but persistent number of students bring in pieces of creative writing: stories, poems, and songs.

Money Matters:

Most of our budget comes (by way of the Program in Writing and Rhetoric) from the office of the Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education. Income from a separate donor endowment provides nearly all the funds for the undergraduate peer tutor program. For special projects, such as our school outreach activities, we have pursued and obtained grants from within the university and also from outside agencies.

Current events/programs:

We're excited about two things we're doing that seem to be working well.



While, like most writing centers, we do most of our tutoring at a main location, at least 30% of our tutoring last year was done at remote locations in residence halls, dining halls (after hours), a study center for athletes, even an on-campus coffee shop. After our undergraduates take a training course and do a first quarter of tutoring at the main location, they can schedule themselves for the remote location, and every quarter we post a new schedule to our website so that students can locate a tutor when the main location is closed (on the weekends, during the evening).

The other project (or set of projects) we're doing is high school outreach. One effort now in its fourth year, Project W.R.I.T.E., is directed by Wendy Goldberg. Wendy and her team bring at-risk students from a school district in East Palo Alto to campus for ten Saturdays during the winter quarter. They write, they share their writing, they produce a number of pieces individually and together, and they publish a collection of their writing. (One of the first participants in the project is now a first-year student at Stanford.) We're now in the second year

of a project called Ravenswood Writes. It is funded by a grant from the Teachers for a New Era (TNE) initiative of the Carnegie Foundation. Our focus is on helping local schools create their own writing centers. Last year, we sent a team of nine trained undergraduate peer tutors into three high schools to tutor and to model tutoring to the students and faculty at the schools. This year, we will continue tutoring but will also help the schools begin to transition toward tutoring by their own teachers and students.

Both these projects, besides achieving their immediate goals, have also opened doors of communication between our writing center (and our writing program) and our local schools. Word is spreading. We're starting to get calls and e-mails from more schools who want to join the projects, especially Ravenswood Writes, and we're beginning to get a vision of a supportive network of writing specialists, spread throughout many schools and facilitated (though not led) by us.

For more on Ravenswood Writes, see swc.stanford.edu/ravenswoodwrites/.

Philosophy:

We like to say in our center that our pedagogy is radically student-centered. Ideally, the work done in our center—writing, talking about writing, thinking about writing, revising writing, editing writing—is done primarily by students, not tutors. Our pedagogy focuses on writing as a process. Every piece of writing presented to tutors is considered a work in progress, not a final product. Appropriate response to a given piece of writing recognizes its stage of development and offers the right comment at the right time. More than anything, our response to student writing is characterized by recognizing and honoring what a student is doing well, and then building on that foundation. Students who come to us are not “weak writers” with “problems” to be solved, and student writing is not a display of “weaknesses” and “problems,” but a piece of communication that can be made stronger and more communicative. Our response to error in student writing is guided by an understanding of the many sources, causes, and definitions of error. The most appropriate response to error is not identification of the error and instruction in a grammatical principle, but a series of questions that help the tutor understand the source and cause of the error. Explanations of a student’s error should flow from that exploration of the writer’s choices. Finally, we feel that a writing center can and should promulgate this philosophy of writing pedagogy across a university campus. A writing center can have wider reach and influence on writing pedagogy than any other department, program, or unit on campus. Students from every discipline come for help with a variety of writing tasks. If we are doing our job well, faculty from every discipline look to us for advice about teaching writing to students in a huge variety of classes. In this way a writing center can help shape the campus culture of writing.

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James Bond Consultants in a Writing Lab

Fall 2006 / Training

by **Bonnie Devet**, *College of Charleston*

A writing center director reveals a training technique in which consultants go "undercover" to gain valuable insight into consulting work.



Bonnie Devet

It's spring, and nature's sweet ritual is underway. Daffodils are blooming, azaleas are flowering, dogwoods promise to appear shortly.

During spring, writing lab directors are undergoing their own ritual. They are gathering names of students from faculty who have been nominated for the job of tutor, interviewing these prospective consultants, and, finally, making job offers to the best and the brightest in order to secure the new crop of tutors for the fast-approaching fall. Directors can now catch their breaths, assuming that training can wait until the fall.

But can it?

As a director of a writing center, I've learned not to wait until the fall but rather to use the last precious weeks of the spring term to expose newly selected consultants to the world of consulting, so they can begin, even now their process of becoming well-trained consultants.

Here's why. During the initial interview process with new tutors, I always conduct a mock tutorial, role-playing a client while the interviewees act as the consultants. If the interviewees do well, I hire them. These newly-hired consultants, however, have not gained a full sense of a consultation through

this process; they need to experience a real tutorial from the clients' point of view . So, in late spring, I ask my newly hired consultants to take one of their papers to the Writing Lab and participate in a full-fledged consultation. Here's the novelty of this training approach. During the session, the newly-hired consultants do not tell their consultants that they are going to be working there in the fall. Undercover, the newly selected tutors can then experience genuine consultations.

I recently carried out this training technique with five undercover hirees, who visited the Lab with a variety of paper topics: Beowulf; Charlotte P. Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"; George Elliot's Middlemarch; the architecture of a Charleston, SC, neighborhood; Emily Dickinson's "465"; and a comparison of NAFTA with the European Union. Because I read all the consultants' progress reports, I was able to recognize when the newly-hired ones had had a chance to savor the one-on-one help that is the hallmark of any writing lab. Immediately after their visits, I e-mailed the new consultants to ask: "How did the session go? What do you feel you gained from the experience?"

Benefits for Newly Hired Tutors

Going undercover provided several benefits to the newly-selected tutors. When interviewing the prospective consultants, I stressed that the lab's key job is to be there next to clients on the sometimes long journey of writing, all without intimidating or judging clients. Consultants should also encourage and reassure, making clients feel completely capable of producing quality work. It is only when newly hired consultants attend a legitimate session that they understand this role. I was gratified when a new consultant reported that he had experienced this emotional satisfaction: "I didn't have much done on my paper (It's not due for a few weeks.), but it was good to know that I was probably on the right track." By receiving this reassurance with their own work, the new tutor has a better understanding of a tutorial's affective power.

My mock sessions during the interview process fall short in another way. By default, it is only a pretend session, with Dr. Devet just play-acting a student; interviewees sometimes even get the giggles.

So, I have always suspected that nominees were having a difficult time seeing beyond this simulated activity in order to sense the true nature of consulting work. When participating in the real thing, though, new tutors see the consultation differently. After seeking the lab's help, one of the newly-selected tutors noted, "The role of a consultant seems to be to make people realize habits that negatively affect their writing and encourage them to change." This new consultant seems to have realized that tutors help not just the writing but the writer, as the overly famous writing lab mantra so succinctly and accurately states .

Another concern I have always had was that the newly hired tutors might not be fully informed about the writing process. As top-notch students, they have performed exceptionally well, absorbing through osmosis how to write. Because writing has been easy for them, they need to understand that the process is complicated, and that all writers—no matter how successful they have been—can learn ways to improve their own processes. After the undercover sessions, the newly-hired consultants do discover a basic concept about the writing process: all papers are works in progress. A new consultant explained:

It was interesting to review one of my short papers with a consultant and see that no paper is perfect, no matter how much it may seem to you at the moment you were writing it. It is easy to get locked into a certain way of writing without examining how your choice of words or syntax affects how well you express yourself.

Through only one visit, this hire—a top-notch English major—had learned to improve his own writing process. Another new tutor reported that although she went to her session with just a few specific questions, “I definitely got some questions answered. And, in addition, I realized I needed to fix my introductory paragraph.” She understood that all writers—no matter how experienced they may be—can receive help at a lab.

The newly hired workers also acquired tutoring techniques from the experienced consultants. A Political Science major was impressed by her consultant’s style: “My trip to the Lab was wonderful. My consultant really helped me a lot, and it was amazing how much he picked up from my paper after listening to it only once.” Another new tutor came to understand how a tutorial procedure helps the writing process: “Reading my paper aloud to the consultant really enabled me to find errors in the paper that I had previously missed in proofreading it. It was a worthwhile trip to the Lab.” Now, when she helps her own clients, she will be better able to explain the importance of this procedure.

The undercover sessions also revealed the importance of projecting a friendly, helpful attitude towards clients. After all, clients muster great courage to enter a lab, seeking help from other writers. A newly hired consultant learned how she, too, had to overcome her own fears about seeking assistance at the lab: “I thought it might be a little intimidating to go get help, but it was not at all, and that made me feel good.” This new tutor has gained empathy for her clients’ vulnerability when showing others their writings.

Disadvantages to Using Undercover Tutors

It must be admitted that this undercover training technique poses some disadvantages. It takes a great deal of effort to keep track of when the newly hired consultants had come into the lab for their sessions and then, in turn, to find an opportunity to follow up with them. Because it was near the end of the term when many papers and projects are due, the newly-selected consultants did not always respond in a timely fashion. I had to e-mail them several times, constantly reminding them to send me their insights. Sending these reminders proved time consuming.

In spite of these drawbacks, the benefits have outweighed the difficulties. The newly-hired workers are already on their way to becoming consultants. When they receive full writing lab training in the fall, they will be miles along towards being effective consultants. For they have felt the emotional boost a lab visit provides, they have learned about the writing process just as clients do, and they have acquired a few tutorial techniques to employ as tutors. In all honesty, I would once again train new tutors with this undercover (or as I like to think of it) “James Bond” technique.

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A Writing Center without Walls: Community Gardens as a Site for Teaching English Language Learning

Fall 2006 / Focus

by **Elizabeth K. Rodacker**, Union College, and **Kay Siebler**, Buena Vista University

Two ELL scholars bring ecofeminist principles to bear on community garden work.

About the Community Gardens in Lincoln

Pedagogically astute English teachers will understand the necessity of writing centers without walls--mobile writing centers. Writing centers need to travel when necessary. They must teach when and where there is a need; communities, both tutors and learners, benefit most when writing centers look to non-traditional venues. Non-traditional writing centers may even grow vegetables. This is the story of one such writing center.

In Lincoln, Nebraska, the community gardens became a non-traditional site for writing instruction.

As of June 2005 there were four community gardens in Lincoln. Lincoln, with a population of approximately 225,000, is a politically progressive town for the Midwest. A social-activist sensibility permeates the community; many churches sponsor refugees and immigrants.

The population that works in this garden includes people who are locked into low-paying jobs, unable to read fluently and to write English, and not registered to vote (although able to register)--individuals disengaged in their new American home. Because of their limited English skills, they are unable to fully participate in our American democracy and are therefore unable to transform their communities and lives.



Elizabeth K. Rodacker

This population desperately needs improved reading and writing skills so that they can make improvements in their lives and communities. How can these gardeners/students obtain these necessary language skills when many refugees/immigrants have inflexible work schedules and take non-credit evening ESL classes? Because these students didn't have a writing center at their disposal, they needed the writing center to come to them.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, for its size Lincoln is "one of the largest refugee resettlement areas in the country, with refugees bringing new culture and languages to the city" (Lange-Kubick 2). The U.S. Language Foundation reports that Lincoln residents use 48 different languages when they speak at home. Indeed, Lincoln, Nebraska, is a culturally and linguistically diverse community.

The community gardens grew out the desires of various nonprofit organizations in Lincoln to provide a public space where refugees, immigrants, and people of low socio-economic backgrounds could grow fruits and vegetables during the summer months.



Kay Siebler

The philosophy of the community gardens resists corporate farming (capitalist endeavors that rely on toxins to produce genetically modified crops) by sharing land and resources to produce healthy food, free of chemicals. In an "ownership" society, community gardens resist the dominant culture by bringing people together to work the land and produce food, as opposed to distancing people from the land and food production. With a community garden, people share land and resources to produce food that they then share with their families, friends, and the community. "Can communities survive and sustain their own cultures and ecosystems in the face of an ever expanding global economy?" (Berry et. al. 1) With community gardens, the answer is "yes."

The project reflected in this publication relates specifically to the immigrant and refugee populations who use the gardens and how and why the gardens became a site for teaching English Language Learners (ELL).

Herstory

Teaching ELL in the community gardens began with the idea of serving those who needed English language skills. As an associate professor of ESL, I (Elizabeth) often have summers off and enjoy gardening during that time.

When community gardens first started up in Lincoln, I began gardening and teaching the refugees English, specifically reading and writing skills. The gardens have since evolved to include other gardens and other teachers/volunteers trained in ELL pedagogy. Through our work and connections with other ELL teachers, the project has grown from informal conversations to include a network of teachers who communicate with each other about their goals and pedagogical strategies for ELL.

In 2004, we began connecting ELL with the community gardens. While working on our own garden plot, we talked to the immigrants/refugees about their planting, weeding and harvesting. We offered advice to the farmers who were often working with plants, soil conditions, and weather conditions which were often very different from those in their home country.

Because we strove to establish a mutually respectful connection with the immigrant/refugee farmers, we identified ourselves as teachers when introducing ourselves. In most African, Middle Eastern, and South American countries, teachers are highly regarded, and in identifying ourselves as teachers, we not only solidified our ethos with some of the men from cultures where females are considered inferior, but also created the opportunity to help the immigrants with their English skills.

Once the immigrants/refugee farmers saw that we not only knew about gardening and crops but also about language learning, they would seek us out whenever we came to the gardens.

The questions they asked ranged from how much water the tomato plants needed to how to fill out a green card application.

We started to hold classes at the gardens every Sunday evening at 5:30 for anyone who wanted to improve their English. It was at this point that the informal conversations became more pointed lessons in ELL.

I should note, however, that an ELL instructor cannot just walk into a garden and expect to "teach." As with any aid/development work, the instructor must first work alongside the other gardeners in order to show expertise, establish credibility, and earn their respect. Only through this "work alongside" approach will the instructors be able to eventually establish themselves as members of the community and work with the ELL populations at the garden. The ELL instructors typically had formal education in ELL teaching strategies, although there were also student instructors who were learning ELL informally by watching and co-teaching with instructors who held ELL degrees and other necessary certification.

Population/Students

Because the farmer/student populations varied both ethnically and in level of language proficiency, ELL teachers needed to approach each lesson with an open mind, allowing the farmers/students present to direct the lesson objectives.

With each of the community gardens in Lincoln, the population of immigrants/refugees is a bit different. Each population often has different needs and issues relating to ELL; each population has different cultural barriers or concerns that the instructor needs to be sensitive to or aware of; some populations of refugees/immigrants have deep seated biases toward, bigotries about, or tangible fears of other groups that they may be working alongside in

the garden. In order to be most effective, it is critical that the instructor be aware of these issues as he/she teaches.

Ecofeminism: How It Relates to ELL in the Community Gardens

Ecofeminism is the connection between ecology (concern for the world's natural resources) and feminism (the belief that systems of oppression, regardless of what form they take, need to be abolished). Ecofeminists believe that there is a strong connection between the status of women (and other traditionally marginalized groups) and the care of and concern for preserving natural resources.

The ecofeminist philosophy works well with ELL at the community gardens because issues of social equity for women and respect for the earth are an integral part of the approach taken in both the gardens and in the ELL lessons at the garden. Environmental ethics as well as concern for issues of gender equity are primary concerns to the ELL teachers at the community gardens. "Ecofeminism is a feminist approach to environmental ethics. Feminist theorists ask the question, 'What is the source of the oppression of women, and how do we get rid of it?' Ecofeminists believe there are interconnections between the oppression of women (sexism), the oppression of other human Others (racism, classism, ageism, colonialism, etc.) and the domination of nature (naturism)" (Ecofeminism). This philosophy helped the ELL teachers create a healthy connection between the work of the garden and the web of life, i.e. how to prevent systems of nature from being corrupted by individuals or patriarchal systems of power.

Both the ideals of ecofeminism and the strong influence of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian theorist of progressive education, helped to shape the curriculum design. The inextricable links between education, civic engagement, and social justice must permeate all English classrooms and writing centers. For what reason do writing centers exist?

Writing and language instruction must include a pedagogy that challenges inequality, oppression, and fundamentalism.

Read the curriculum below to see these embedded values.

Our approach to designing the curriculum employed student-driven strategies coupled with feminist pedagogy. A feminist pedagogical approach asks that the instructor be aware of and sensitive to the material realities of each student and take into consideration his/her individual needs. Feminist pedagogy also asks that teachers keep a keen eye to dynamics of race, class, gender, sexuality and other identity issues as they play out both among students and between the instructor and the students. Working with the refugee/immigrants, a feminist pedagogical approach would include paying sharp attention to how different cultural practices and belief systems can act as barriers to learning or how different cultural practices and belief systems can be used to enhance learning and lessons.

Another key tenet of feminist pedagogy is the instructor's rigorous self-critique of what is working and isn't working both for the group and for individual students. Part of this effort involves the instructors talking with each other about what they observe or struggles they have with their student groups, and part of it involves the instructors' commitment to being self-critical about how biases or assumptions they might have about given populations of students

played out in the lessons or student/teacher interactions.

Coupling feminist pedagogical principles with student-driven teaching meant that the curriculum and goals for each lesson were defined by the students present. Teachers would often begin each gathering by asking, "What do you want to talk about today?" Or teachers would bring a local newspaper and ask students if there was an article they wanted to read and discuss. Feminist teachers pay close attention to students' silences and work to engage all students in the lesson, even if that means creating various sub-groups based on interest or language skill.

The problem of having various language learners at radically different levels in the same group can be both a blessing and a curse.

. The students with higher language levels can easily monopolize the lessons and, with this student-driven approach, define the lesson content. It is up to the teacher to be vigilant and draw all students into the lesson at the level at which they can and are willing to participate. It is also imperative that the instructor use teaching strategies that open the space for those who are less assertive.

Given our feminist pedagogical, student-driven approach, it was largely the students who defined the curriculum, which primarily consisted of strategies of conversation, immersion, and reading comprehension of real world texts (newspapers, magazine articles, green card or job applications). The following is a list of topics that were used in the curriculum, followed by a description of the person who added that topic to the curriculum:

- Q&A regarding social services available in the community (initiated by a woman who asked about domestic violence shelters and help available to women in violent relationships)
- Reading, writing and discussion of an article in the local paper about job training opportunities at meat packing plants (brought by an instructor because several of the farmers/students were employed at a local meat packing plant)
- Discussions of organic farming and pest control that did not include chemicals (created by an instructor by way of explaining the products that were available in the community garden shed for collective use and the chicken coop on the garden plot)
- Education on different planting and irrigation methods (initiated by both farmers and instructors based on the various approaches being used in the garden and why those approaches were being used)

With each of these items in the curriculum, there was an open exchange where any and all (farmers/instructors) could offer expertise, advice, and knowledge. The curriculum emphasizes that the instructors are not "all knowing" teachers, but are instead a resource within the group to facilitate learning.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

ESP is a pedagogical approach used with ELL that focuses on incorporating themes into the planned lessons. The ESP approach used by the instructors at the gardens included subsistent and organic gardening. In order to emphasize these two discourse communities or knowledge areas, the instructors worked to include lessons on these topics as a way to expand the farmers'/students' knowledge of agriculture, gardening, organic farming, and use of non-

genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the garden.

The philosophy of ESP is that students need specific language skills to succeed in a professional arena. Typically, ESP pedagogy is related to job training; e.g., veterinary students would need ESP in order to be able to read and comprehend journals and other professional publications within their field, or a cook would need ESP lessons related to food measurements, prices, and culinary vocabulary in order to work in a restaurant. In the context of the community gardens, the ESP philosophy allowed the gardeners/farmers to have a common language base for the work they were doing in the gardens. It also allowed them to converse about their approach to gardening both with the merchants who sold them seeds or plants at the local farmers' market and with each other as they shared successes and strategies.

Language Learning

With shifting U.S. demographics, astute and engaged writing practitioners will observe that more "generation 1.5" students are entering colleges and universities. This generation of students has probably been born in the U.S., and is therefore made up of U.S. citizens, but they nevertheless communicate in languages other than English at home and may be classified as ESL/ELL students when they arrive in college.

Note also that the number of international students studying in American colleges and universities has been on the rise. In fact, international students studying in the U.S. have an enormous effect on the U.S. economy; the **Institute of International Education** ranks these students' presence as having the fifth greatest impact on our economy.

Look around your writing centers. Who visits them? What types of students seek help from the writing center on your campus? Chances are that a significant percentage of the students who frequent writing centers are linguistically and culturally diverse.

Across ethnic populations, the primary objective many of the students/gardeners had for attending the English lessons was to build vocabulary skills and improve reading and writing skills. Because students were at various levels in their fluency, more proficient students were able to help those with less fluency. This was especially true when there was more than one person from an ethnic/cultural group present. If a struggling or emerging language learner was searching for a word or the way to say something, they could turn to the more proficient speaker within their cultural group and ask in their shared language, "How do you say . . .?" Although this practice of "translation" would be frowned upon in a more formal ELL classroom, within the context of the student-driven garden lessons, it allowed the less proficient student to learn more and it increased the self-esteem of the student who was "translating."

Although there is a lot more to learning a language than simply having vocabulary skills, the farmers/students had personal and specific needs for building their vocabulary in certain areas. Some needed to learn the words that would let them ask for directions, ask questions at social service agencies or public places, or communicate with co-workers or bosses. Others needed more advanced conversation skills in order to talk about their produce to potential customers, make conversation at social events with fellow Americans, or communicate more complex health- or living-related problems, such as

securing a new apartment or home.

The primary motivation for most, if not all, of the refugees/immigrants for coming to the community garden ELL lessons is to improve their overall communication skills. They want to be able to better communicate with Americans in the hope of improving workplace and community relationships.

Certainly learning vocabulary and internalizing English grammar patterns is part of learning a language, but oral communication skills move beyond these basics to include things like body language, tone of voice, and context awareness (when to use vernacular — and what vernacular is considered appropriate for which contexts; how body language, tone, and volume are used differently within different contexts or discourse communities; and what constitutes formal and informal language practices). Because various language norms exist in any culture, people who are learning to adapt to a new culture (in this case the culture of midwestern North America) have to learn that the body language, tonality, volume, and personal space that were considered appropriate in their culture of origin may be perceived differently in a new cultural context.

The context of interacting with people (both ELL and the teachers) at the garden allowed the students/gardeners to learn about informal language practices.

Things such as appropriate personal space, appropriate touch, interpersonal greetings, eye contact, and other non-verbals were easily modeled by the instructors. All of these non-verbals are part of effective oral communication skills. Gender differences (how men and women interact in North American culture) were also modeled. Some of the Middle Eastern and Bosnian men had a difficult time seeing females as people who held bodies of knowledge. Even beyond that, it was difficult for them to interact with females as equals (making eye contact, shaking hands, and working alongside them in the fields). What is seen as appropriate or considerate in their own culture can sometimes be seen as inappropriate in North American culture, e.g., males not making eye contact with females or not shaking hands with females. Through their interactions at the garden, these men came to a better understanding of how to interact appropriately with North American females.

In addition to working on these non-verbal skills, the group also focused on communication skills such as speaking without halting and being comfortable speaking to native English speakers. All these skills increase general fluency. Many ELL students feel intimidated or shy when speaking English to native speakers, but the garden provided a non-threatening and encouraging atmosphere where ELL students felt more comfortable taking risks in practicing their English, asking questions, and learning from other ELL students as well as from the instructors. Because the gardeners/students were sharing expertise (about the crops, pest control, irrigation and planting strategies) a dynamic developed where everyone had something of value to share; even if a student/gardener was weak in English, he/she could contribute in other ways, offering skills and knowledge that others could learn from while at the same time increasing his/her oral communication skills.

The objective of language immersion when teaching ELL is to speak to the students only in English, using very simple sentences, props, gestures, mime, and facial expression when needed with early ELL. Because the instructors in the garden did not speak all of the various languages represented, the

immersion strategy was not really one of choice. Because there were typically two or more people of the same culture working in the garden, they would often speak their common language to each other, but then have to switch to English to communicate with other gardeners or the instructors.

Although in a strict model of language immersion ELL pedagogy these moments of switching and translation are not encouraged, in the garden they seemed a natural extension of the learning environment since every student was at a different level. The language switching allowed the less fluent English learners to build a more sophisticated vocabulary by turning to a friend and saying, "How do you say X in English?"

Philosophy of How Community Gardens Relate to ELL

The community gardens and ELL are related in the context of an immigrant's/refugee's reality because the gardens allow the individual to provide for themselves and their family, thereby achieving a great sense of empowerment and pride. Additionally, growing one's own food and speaking English more fluently allow the refugee/immigrant to offer valuable resources to the community, thereby becoming an involved, trusted community member.

Recall Henry Giroux's quote when describing an active citizen as someone "who has the capacity not only to understand and engage the world but to transform it when necessary, and to believe that he or she can do that." A mobile writing center can be the turning point for many of these citizens.

Purpose

The purpose of connecting ELL lessons with the community garden is to allow the gardeners to build community across cultures. Engaging in the ELL classes lifts language and cultural barriers so that gardeners not only feel more comfortable talking with each other, but they also know each others' names, create trusting relationships, and share knowledge. The shared knowledge and trusting relationships create a dynamic where the gardeners are able to grow more and better crops. They share seeds, plants, and vegetables, in addition to insight about issues that are not a part of the garden (job opportunities, community services, and friendships).

Benefits

Creating connections between ELL and the community garden yields tangible benefits such as better crops (by sharing knowledge on pest control, irrigation, and growing conditions, crop yields are higher). There are intangible benefits as well, such as when an immigrant/refugee makes a friend outside of his/her cultural community or feels less isolated because they belong to something that is bigger than their own ethnic community. Benefits also include saving money on food because the gardeners grow part of what they need to feed their family. Some gardeners are also able to sell some of their produce and thereby gain income. For some, the skills they learn at the community garden (both English skills and farming skills) will allow them to engage in larger farming endeavors where they can earn a living by farming.

Cost Analysis

There is no cost to participate in the community garden apart from the cost of buying seeds or plants. The garden cooperative volunteers provide the tools needed for basic gardening at no charge to the gardeners. The cooperative acquires seeds, plants and tools with grant money or from community

donations[1]. The English lessons are also provided free of charge. Therefore, any crops that are consumed or sold by the gardener are 100 percent profit (minus whatever he/she invests in seeds or plants).

ELL at the community garden provided a perfect opportunity to educate gardeners on the organic philosophy behind the community gardens--organic gardening practices and healthy planting, nurturing, and harvesting methods. By using ELL as a spring board to teach organic practices, gardening and farming practices change as the way people talk about their gardening/farming practices change.

The role of women in the immigrant/refugee communities

The role of women in each immigrant/refugee community differs. As such, working with the immigrants requires that the gender dynamics of each culture be taken into account even as the immigrants and refugees learn about the status of women in North American culture. Because the ELL courses were taught by three women, immigrants/refugees coming from cultures where women are not seen as men's equals often had more difficulty seeing the teachers as sources of valuable knowledge. Even if they understood that the teachers were knowledgeable about the English language (because the teachers were native speakers), they often resisted the idea that the female teachers could offer males sound advice or have any knowledge about farming practices.

Regardless of the community/culture, women tend to be the people who plan and prepare meals for the family. Their role as the family nutritionist creates a connection between the way food is grown and prepared and their family's overall health.

Within the community garden, the Sudanese women seemed to be the only group that was wholly responsible not only for preparing the food, but for growing it as well. These women were knowledgeable farmers who modeled the centrality of women's role in cultivation for groups that excluded women from the garden because it was seen as a public sphere. (Traditionally, Muslim women — in this case Iraqi and Bosnian women — are not allowed into the public sphere unless it is absolutely necessary.)

The Hispanic/Latina women worked alongside the men in the garden, while the Iraqi and Bosnian men always came to the garden in male-only groups to do the work and harvest the crops.

Women as family nutritionists, dieticians, and wage earners

Traditionally, women around the world are responsible for their family's nutrition and become the persons responsible for preparing and serving healthy and nutritious food, if this food is available. In some cultures the men traditionally grow and harvest the food; however, there are cultures, especially in Africa, where the women are responsible for growing and harvesting the food as well. The ecofeminist philosophy sees the importance of women planting and harvesting the food their family consumes. The rationale is that women will take better care of the land and the crops, making sure the food is not integrated with harmful chemicals or GMOs, because they see a direct connection between the farming and the health and well-being of their family.

Both ecofeminists and progressive English/writing teachers might argue that the reason many countries, cultures, and continents are facing contaminated ground water, soil that is unable to produce food without chemical fertilizers,

and the over-use of toxic herbicides and pesticides is because males have been responsible for food production. Because males are not responsible for feeding their family (preparing food and keeping nutrition at the forefront of food preparation), they are not as likely to see the connection between how the land is worked and how the produce affects the lives and health of the people who consume it. From the moment a baby is born, a breastfeeding mother has a physical connection to the nutrition and health of her child. A mother concerns herself with the feeding and nutrition of her children in a way that fathers are not often called upon to do.

Therefore, in working in the community garden, lessons regarding organic farming practices were directed towards the females whenever possible. That is not to say that the males were neglected, but that a direct connection exists between women growers and awareness of family nutrition. In addition, when women are taught sound farming practices, they can use their knowledge to become wage earners for the family, selling produce at the local farmers' market or roadside stands. In becoming wage earners, or supplementing the wages they receive from other jobs, the immigrant and refugee women build familial and cultural capital, thus raising their status within the community and their families. Attaining a higher status within their families and within the immigrant/refugee community allowed women from stridently patriarchal cultures to wield a bit of power for the first time in their lives.

Women as sustenance farmers and world ecologists

When women hold knowledge that is valuable to the culture and the family, their status is raised. When women begin to feel empowered through that knowledge, their lives and the lives of their children improve. When women of various cultures learn how to successfully become sustenance farmers through ELL, they begin to see their connection to the earth and their power in the world. Through ELL, they learn of organic farming practices and how to articulate their role in the world's ecology.



Jeanette, a Sudanese refugee, talks with another farmer while planting her crops.

In one community garden, women from a local long-term shelter (typically

women who are in shelter as a result of domestic violence or because they are making the transition from prison to community living) worked a plot in the garden. Although these women did not participate in the ELL classes, learning how to grow food through community gardening was another step towards strength and empowerment. Many of the women from the shelter first came to the garden not knowing gardening basics, e.g. how to plant seeds or seedlings or how to harvest plants. When it came time to harvest some lettuce from their plot, they pulled out the entire lettuce plant instead of just pulling off the leaves. With guidance, however, these women quickly learned the basics and became sources of knowledge for other community gardeners. The skills they learned at the community garden (from how to plant, to harvesting, to healthy food preparation) allowed them to carry this new knowledge into their "new" lives. There is a strong connection between feeling empowered by planting, harvesting, and cooking one's own food and feeling empowered in other areas of one's life.

Once women know how to plant and harvest healthy food, how to treat the soil organically, and how to farm free of toxins, using water conservation practices, they become world ecologists.

Concluding Remarks

The community gardens were a writing center without walls, i.e., a place of learning, tolerance and peace. Teaching and learning in our post post-modern global world are indeed challenging tasks. Students today are globally astute, with knowledge of many issues and facts at the touch of an "Enter" key on any computer keyboard. The job for English and writing teachers is to continue to confer skills that will be forever necessary and demanded--the ability to speak, write, and otherwise communicate fluently--to global students so they can be active, contributing members of the world. Perhaps then the students whose lives we touch will help to create not only writing centers without walls that are places of learning, tolerance and peace, but a planet that is such.

Notes

[1] *This program is made possible by a grant from the Cooper Foundation.*

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Elizabeth K. Rodacker holds a M.A. in English and is an Associate Professor at **Union College** in Lincoln. She is also a committed community activist, working for feminist causes, on behalf of animals, and helping the community become a more welcoming place for all.

Kay Siebler holds a Ph.D. in composition and rhetoric. She is currently an Associate Professor at **Buena Vista University** in Storm Lake, Iowa, from September to May, but considers Lincoln her home. She began teaching ELL as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco during the late 1980s. She is a feminist activist and a gardener and combines those two passions in a local activist group of gardeners, The Guerilla Gardeners. Gardening for social change is the motto of that group and is a manifestation of ecofeminism on the local level.

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Assessing Audience for Community Initiatives

Fall 2006 / Columns

Lisa Loch interviews Dr. Tommy Darwin, Director of the Professional Development and Community Engagement Program at the University of Texas at Austin.

A discussion exploring the best ways for writing centers and other university organizations to match their expertise to community needs.



Dr. Tommy Darwin

Last year the **Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC)** at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) began to offer writing consultations to the Austin community two nights a week at the George Washington Carver Museum and **Library**. At this stage of the project's evolution, the UWC administration seeks to learn about effective strategies to assess the needs of the target audience for this and future community initiatives. In search of a knowledgeable perspective, Lisa Loch, doctoral student and Assistant Director of the UWC, sought out the expertise Dr. Thomas J. (Tommy) Darwin, Director of the **Professional Development and Community Engagement Program** at UT for the following interview, conducted on September 28, 2006, in Austin, Texas.

LISA LOCH: Can you tell me about your role and what your interest is broadly in community engagement and outreach?

TOMMY DARWIN: Universities need to be engaged in their communities both because they have an obligation to the public and for pedagogical reasons. To me engagement implies reciprocity—it involves not only people from a college campus going off campus to work with people and bringing their knowledge to bear and applying it, but also bringing community knowledge and expertise

onto campus. We are all actually part of one big community—universities can work to connect the different parts. We are amazingly privileged, those of us who get to spend our time in universities, so we have an obligation, in a very pragmatic sense. There is also a historical tradition in the American university which says that education should be engaged (as in experiential learning or service learning). As I began working with graduate students on their professional development, it became clear that they needed to put their work in a meaningful context. So if I want to work with graduate students to provide experiences that will enable them to get the tools that they need to pursue what they want to pursue, it has to be put into a context—it has to be made meaningful. And the way you do that is to get engaged in meaningful situations with people who matter and with whom you share an interest and commitment to the outcomes. That is my strongest sense as to why this work is so critical.

LL: So your strongest motivation is as a teacher?

TD: Yes, well the work that we all do has to be made meaningful. It's not meaningful in the abstract. It's not meaningful until we see some really profound relevance. That may be the relevance of "I got published in this given journal and I want to reach these scholars." Okay, so this isn't necessarily about "It's got to have a direct community outlet." But I do think it's all community driven in the sense that we all exist in multiple communities. None of us exists in a vacuum, so we have to actively understand our contexts. In a consulting class it's about making connections that enable you to put your expertise to work...typically off-campus. In a writing class it's about finding the intellectual community you want to impact. So this is not necessarily on-campus/off-campus thing . . . it's ultimately about making a difference and developing the skills and opportunities to do so.

"Communities need to be taken care of, worked on, and maintained, like any long-term relationship."

LL: Before we get into the specific complexities of assessing audience, how do you define community?

TD: There are three aspects of community that I think are important. One is certainly geographic, whether literally geographic, or conceptually geographic as in the geography of discipline—as in how we group ourselves together in terms of conferences and journals. It revolves around a notion of space—where does everybody get together?

Community also involves a sense of identification with a meaning and purpose. An important aspect of communities is that they exist for a reason—there is something that pulls them together. If someone says, "Well, we need community on campus," the first question I have is, "Community for what? Why are people coming together?" Some reason, some sense of shared meaning.



Lisa Loch

Which leads to the third aspect, which is that communities are temporal. They are living things, they come and they go. One can inhabit multiple communities at the same time. They're not as reified as people tend to treat them. They certainly involve groups of people with shared identities, but they exist in a given time and space for a particular reason. If there is anything I've learned in doing the work of getting multiple people together, it's that giving people a common reason to get together is really critical. What you have to accept is that communities will have a tendency to evolve and change over time, and even disperse. The language that we use to define and describe ourselves in community is very important, and there may be multiple versions which pull people together.

So when I think of community I think about the people who are coming together in specific places for specific purposes for a specific time, and that time may be a day, or 150 years, it just depends. But there is a reason, there are things that are shared in common, shared identity, all of which leads to the idea that communities are accomplishments, they are not givens. In some ways it's a shame that we don't have a verbal form of community. Community as something we do, not just something that is. I suppose that we have the word "communicate."

LL: Like communing?

TD: [*laughing*] Yeah, although that has perhaps unfortunate implications! It's an abstract concept, but it is a very fluid concept.

LL: So if writing centers want to bring what they do to larger spheres, what do you recommend as first steps?

TD: A couple things, and they are related. I think that the first thing is to understand where people are, where they are trying to go, where the gap between those two things is, and trying to fill in that gap. People have aspirations. They have a sense of what's possible and we can work towards those aspirations. For me the challenge is to ask what the needs are in general and, on the other hand, to ask, "Given what we can do by virtue of the fact that we are a writing center, what might we be able to do to address those needs?" I

mean this in the sense that a community's needs are more than what they appear to be on the surface and writing can have a broader impact than we might think. What else is writing or what else can it do? The production of knowledge, the clarification and management of tensions and perspectives. So instead of saying, "How do we do writing for the community?" you might ask, "How might we use our capabilities to manage tensions between perspectives in a community?" It opens up a whole lot more possibilities. There is a sense of not limiting oneself to preconceived slots and capacities.

"The most daunting aspect of any endeavor is overcoming the initial inertia."

I'm not saying that we should make stuff up. I mean we're not going to do economic development—that is not our expertise. But, by virtue of what writing enables one to do, clarifying thoughts and bridging gaps—and managing tensions. Not to resolve them necessarily, but to manage them in a productive way. There are certain key people to talk with off campus, and it is valuable to go and talk with them and identify what those needs are. So if you and folks from the UWC went in this town to talk with groups concerned with mental health issues, say, you would first just listen to what their problems are and ask questions and then say, "Well what can we do to address those and how broadly can we construe writing?" That's how I think you get really interesting projects to emerge. I have a Ph.D. in communication studies, so what am I doing involved with community development work in a broad sense? I don't have a degree in that or a policy background. But I am in the role because of what I know and can help with. You are in the business of thinking creatively and understanding problems. That is also very valuable. You have a wide array of capabilities and a wide understanding of what the possibilities are in the community so that you can see where to create the linkages. It starts with what the issues are, and the aspirations—it's not all negatively driven.

I think the last important thing is looking for the expertise that is already in play. That is really important with the whole idea of reciprocity that I was talking about earlier. With a given issue there would be people in the writing center who could help formulate effective arguments but there are also people in the community that have developed effective modes of writing, and rhetorics, that could then inform what's going on in the writing center. You always have to ask yourself what all you do to engage these issues in a mutual way, and then I think it gets really powerful. You are not going to get away from the writing, it's just what else your writing expertise enables you to do.

LL: So in terms of approach to the audience or prospective community, what attitude do you recommend?

TD: I think the attitude has to be one of "Shut up and listen"—I'm here to learn for a while. Early on, I developed my own variation of the Hippocratic oath, "First do no harm." My oath became "First shut up." A huge part of engagement is just regularly showing up and being there, listening, taking things in—wanting to bring expertise to bear, but very much in a collaborative way. One way you know you are in collaboration is that you are not completely defining how things should be done. You're allowing for other parties to bring in their expertise as well.

You also have to be positive. You don't really engage unless you really believe that there are things to be done. You have to avoid the cynicism and pessimism

as much as possible. And then, once you listen and once you learn, your next question is, "Who can help me with this?" or "Who can help me do this?" or "Who can I partner with?" You have to almost be willing to not get any credit, at least in the short term.

You also have to always be looking for the people who are similarly interested in moving things forward. So, we should listen and then work to collaborate in an informed, inviting way. Notice and point out what is already being done and the expertise that is already there, so it's not "You can't do anything and I'm going to fix you." It's more collaborative: "You're doing these things, I can do these things—together we can do more things."

LL: Do you have some specific recommendations for writing centers considering an expansion of their services to a larger community?

TD: I have three things to suggest. The first is to adopt a pilot project mentality and only take on one project at a time. Prioritize and focus on what is possible in the short term. Ask yourselves "What can we do next week?" Also, remember that it is not as much about the project as it is about finding synergy.

The second is to take a project management approach. Create a plan, set goals, define time frames, identify resources, and just get started and keep going. A doctoral student in aerospace engineering taught me that the hardest part of space flight is the first few inches, because you are moving hundreds of thousands of pounds sitting completely still. But, once you get it moving . . .

The last recommendation is to build in a reflection phase. Anticipate transition points and conduct an honest appraisal at regular intervals. Ask yourselves if you want to keep doing it and if you have the resources to continue. Be honest about your commitments and capabilities, especially at the beginning. It is much better to decline a collaboration than to take something on you cannot complete. Look for ways to get different projects to dovetail with each other. A good reason to do a project, for example, is that it will enable you to learn things that you can use in multiple arenas.

Finally, take a long view of your time frame. Lasting community collaborations just don't happen fast. One of my favorite phrases in this regard is "incremental but exponential." It may start slow (back to our space flight), but if you are patient and persistent, it will build up momentum. Remember to take time (especially early on) listening and building relationships—oh, and also have realistic expectations about what it means to be done and think in terms of perfecting your process as well as solving problems. Ideally, what you figure out how to do in one situation can be adapted to other situations.

Lisa Loch is a doctoral student in Human Development & Family Sciences and Assistant Director of the Undergraduate Writing Center at the University of Texas.

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CFP: Spring 2007 Issue of Praxis - The Writing Center and the Classroom

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Praxis announces CFP for Spring 2007 Issue: The Writing Center and the Classroom

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal welcomes submissions for its Spring 2007 issue. We especially encourage submissions on this issue's theme: The Writing Center and the Classroom. Articles on this topic may deal with any of the numerous ways in which writing-center work influences and is influenced by pedagogical and learning practices in the classroom. We invite contributors to interpret the theme broadly; however, some possible applications include

- programs that assign writing tutors to specific classes
- writing workshops and presentations by writing-center personnel in classrooms
- how professors incorporate writing center services into their assignments
- how writing centers might collaborate with professors on assignments and pedagogy
- tailoring the writing-center consultation to specific courses and disciplines
- proposals for integrating writing center work and classroom praxis

Submission guidelines:

Recommended article length is 1000 to 2000 words. Articles should conform to MLA style. Send submissions as a Word document e-mail attachment to Eileen Abrahams, Jeremy Dean, and James Jesson at praxis@uwc.utexas.edu. Also include the writer's name, e-mail address, phone number, and affiliation. Because *Praxis* is a Web-based journal, please do not send paper; we do not have the resources to transcribe printed manuscripts. Images should be formatted as jpeg files and sent as attachments.

Deadline for Spring issue: January 28, 2007

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (praxis.uwc.utexas.edu/praxisarchive) is a biannual electronic publication sponsored by the **University of Texas Undergraduate Writing Center**, a component of the **Division of Rhetoric and Writing** at the University of Texas at Austin. It is a forum for writing center practitioners everywhere.

We welcome articles from writing center consultants and administrators related to training, consulting, labor issues, administration, and writing center news, initiatives, and scholarship. For further information about submitting an article or suggesting an idea, please see our [Submissions](#) page.

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[CFR: Currents in Electronic Literacy \(ejournal 1/15\)](#)

[Fall 2006 / News and Announcements](#)

Currents in Electronic Literacy is excited to announce that it will be moving in a new direction: reviews!

The spring 2007 issue of *Currents* will focus on reviews. We believe a journal based on reviews can be of much greater relevance to the field than our past models, which consisted of a few long articles supplemented by short book reviews. However, in this new model we will conceive of "reviews"

more broadly. In addition to reviewing books, we are soliciting reviews of software, websites, blogs, conferences, parallel academic programs, and pedagogical practices. We hope that the new version of *Currents* will point out emerging trends in the field of electronic literacy.

Spring 2007 Call for Reviews:

The upcoming issue will consider electronically mediated social networking from two angles. On the one hand, how might such varied tools as podcasts, blogs, and even Facebook effectively communicate information both inside and beyond the classroom? On the other hand, how can these and other social networking tools help create an environment that encourages students to participate more actively in the process of knowledge creation? For example, how might using wikis in the classroom help develop students' sense of ownership over their work?

Possible items for review within the theme of social networking:

Software and Webtools such as:

- * Writely
- * Writeboard
- * del.icio.us
- * flickr
- * technorati
- * ma.gnolia.com
- * citeulike
- * connotea
- * facebook
- * myspace
- * Cyworld
- * Podcasting
- * SimTeach

Literature such as:

- * The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of

Information by Richard Lanham

* Code V.2 by Lawrence Lessig

* JPod by Douglas Coupland

* The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom by Yochai Benkler

* The Wisdom of Crowds by James Surowiecki

Websites such as:

* Kairosnews

* Wikipedia < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page>

* Blogging Pedagogy

* The Blogora

* Academic Commons < <http://www.academiccommons.org/>>

Submissions should be approximately 1500 words for individual reviews and 2500

for omnibus reviews of multiple texts or applications. Submission deadline is January 15, 2007. Web-based multimedia reviews are welcome. For questions or to

submit reviews email ejournal@lists.cwrl.utexas.edu.

Currents in Electronic Literacy is an online publication of the Computer Writing and Research Laboratory at the University of Texas, Austin. *Currents* strives to provide a forum for the scholarly discussion of issues pertaining to electronic literacy, widely construed. In general, *Currents* publishes work addressing the use of electronic texts and technologies for reading, writing, teaching, and learning in fields including but not restricted to the following: literature (in English and in other languages), rhetoric and composition, languages (English, foreign, and ESL), communications, media studies, and education.

Currents in Electronic Literacy (ISSN 1524-6493)

<http://currents.cwrl.utexas.edu>

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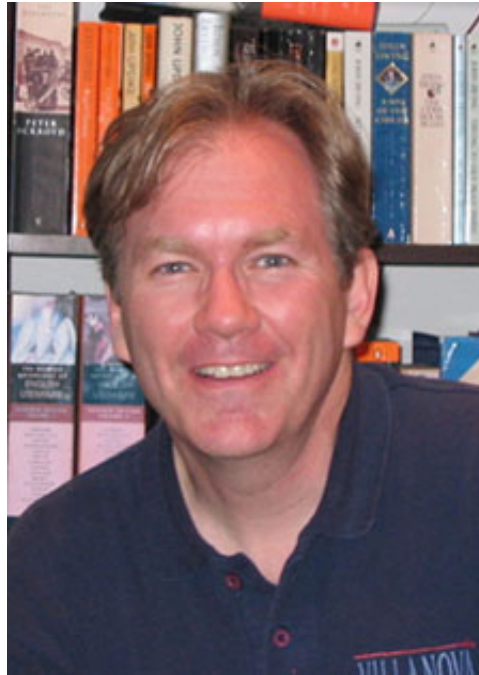
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Consultant Spotlight

Fall 2006 / Consulting

Praxis interviews Tom Rooney, teacher of academic writing, doctoral student in English Renaissance literature, and writing consultant at the Center for Academic Writing of Central European University in Budapest, Hungary.



Tom Rooney

Name: Tom Rooney

Age: 46

Writing center:

Center for Academic Writing, Central European University (Budapest, Hungary)
Center for Academic Writing at Central European University

Size of school:

950 post-graduate students, many from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. 60% are pursuing Master's degrees; 40% doctoral degrees.

Number of years working in writing centers: 10

Job title: Teacher of Academic Writing

Describe the work you do in the writing center:

This semester I am teaching two academic writing courses: one group in Political Science and the other in Sociology & Social Anthropology. Students in both departments must complete their Master's thesis in 10 months time.

During the second semester I will conduct some thesis-writing workshops for both groups, and teach a writing course for 1st year students in Economics. (They will research and write a thesis in 2008.)

Many of the students I consult with during the year come from the groups I teach, but I also consult with MA and Ph.D. students from other disciplines throughout the year on all aspects of their writing. For most consultations I will read a draft e-mailed in advance of our 30-minute meeting.

Describe the training you've participated in:

My approach to writing was greatly influenced early on in my time at CEU by a series of workshops conducted by Joan Retallack (Bard College). These were focussed on the process of writing, rather than consultations, but the well of insights from that week has yet to run dry. Over the years the writing center staff have held several workshops, and taken an occasional day-out, to discuss a variety of topics; 'the consultation' is a topic we never tire of.

I am in the doctoral program in English Renaissance Literature at Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (ELTE) in Budapest, so for the past two years I have also had the opportunity to sit on the other side of the desk in consultations with my supervisor, Prof. Péter Dávidházi. I have adapted some of his techniques in my own teaching and consulting.

How do you normally start a consultation?

I encourage students to write something about the draft in the e-mail they send me, so I have a framework within which to respond. I am always interested in knowing what they are happy with in the draft, as well as any particular concerns they have. If a student does not include any comments in the e-mail, I will ask him/her a question at the start of our meeting. I also try to write a few comments, and/or points to cover, at the top of the paper to use as a guide.

Describe your consulting style: Socratic.

My favorite kind of consultation is one where the student is active.

My greatest strength as a consultant is often being able to give students what they want, as well as what they need.

My greatest weakness is I sometimes try to give too much advice in one consultation.

What I like about working in a writing center is the variety of people I meet, and the breadth of topics I get to read about.

What I don't like is that some administrators in the university see our work as punching a time-clock.

My most challenging consultation days are when I have to read papers on vastly different topics and then discuss them (as intelligently as I can!) with the writers. For one afternoon of consultations earlier this year, for example, I had to read a 25-page research proposal on EU policy issues by a Ph.D. student in International Relations, a term paper on adapting the German banking model in transition countries by a 1st year student in Economics, a thesis chapter on ethnic conflict and the media by a Political Science student, and a literature review from a thesis on migration by a student in the Nationalism Studies Program.

What advice would you give to beginning consultants? There is no 'right' way of conducting a consultation. Try to remain flexible, and be prepared to change your process(es).

What kind of writing do you do? In addition to writing papers for my courses and chapters for my dissertation at ELTE, I am also publishing articles and reviews in journals such as Shakespeare Survey.

How has working in a writing center affected the way you write?

I think it has made me fearless. Most of the writers who consult with me are writing in a second, or sometimes third, language. To watch them do it, and do it well (often without my help) is inspiring.

What else do you want to tell us about yourself?

I always consult several times with my wife Gyöngyi when writing a paper for a class or publication. She is my most perceptive critic.

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Creating Student-Staffed Writing Centers, Grades 6-12

Fall 2006 / Focus

by [Richard Kent](#), *The University of Maine*

Thoughts for College Writing Center Tutors and their Directors

Each spring, a slew of college tutors graduate and head off to teach in grades 6-12. Most of those tutors loved working at their college writing centers; yet, very few will start writing centers at their new schools. True, writing centers have not been a significant part of the k-12 landscape, but after the success of their post-secondary counterparts, perhaps they should be.

As a former high school English teacher and writing center director, I've heard countless arguments against having writing centers in secondary schools. Here are a few:

- Students aren't skilled at working with one another.
- It's the teacher's job to "correct" papers.
- What would I do as a teacher if I didn't take student papers home with me to correct?
- Teachers have enough to do without creating more duties.
- Our school doesn't have space for a writing center.
- We don't have people to staff a center.
- A writing center will cost too much money.

If you're a college writing center tutor or professional staffer, you probably have answers to some of the above. For example, you've witnessed students working with students, and you know first-hand that this approach does work. Indeed, those of us who have started secondary writing centers have found solutions to most, if not all of these arguments.

For a college tutor heading off to teach in grades 6-12, this article will offer a glimpse at starting a writing center at your future school. Much of this article comes from my new book, [A Guide to Creating Student-Staffed Writing Centers, Grades 6-12 \(Peter Lang, 2006\)](#). In an effort to further promote secondary school writing centers, I urge post-secondary writing center directors to continue sharing writing center information with local school district personnel, create secondary school writing center certification programs for university students, and adopt one (or more) secondary schools, not unlike Stanford University's [Ravenswood Writes Program](#). This partnership joins the [Stanford University College of Education](#) and [Stanford's Writing Center](#) in providing writing instruction support for three local high schools: East Palo Alto High School, Summit High School, and Hillsdale High School.

Teaching High School English Before the Writing Center

During the first year of my English teaching life, I carried stacks of papers

home to “correct,” just as my own high school English teachers had. For hour upon hour, I penciled marginal notations and comma corrections. I drew long squiggly lines across the pages in an attempt to guide my young writers in reorganizing sentences, paragraphs, or entire papers. Many English teachers know the drill.

It didn’t take long for me to realize a couple of truths about my technique: First, my single edit of 100—120 student papers, usually without an extended consultation, didn’t parallel how my own editor worked with me as a writer. She didn’t try to “correct” a piece; she conferred with me draft after draft after draft. She respected the process—that recursive dance that writers live—and nurtured mine.

Our handpicked group of writing center staffers represented a cross-section of the student body. However, these young people had one common trait: Other kids liked them.

With my students’ papers, I tried to do it all in one fell swoop. Because of the number of students I worked with, and because I could not conceive of another way, I had an assembly-line approach and bled on their papers. As I look back now, I see that I mangled papers, left students confused, and ignored process. Even worse, I probably discouraged some student writers.

For my talented and self-assured writers—perhaps ten percent of my kids—these corrections were viewed as a fun challenge. However, for most of my students, those who lacked confidence in their writing and in so many other areas of their lives, my editorial carnage confounded and discouraged. As a result of my corrections these students “fixed” lower-order issues such as comma errors and misspellings, but when it came to real revision, it didn’t happen in deep ways. How do I know? All I had to do was compare drafts side by side: the second-draft papers were cleaner and more technically correct, but as for focus and development—those higher-order writing issues—not much changed. In fact, for these kids my editorial scribbles probably made writing more mysterious and more difficult, if not plain misery.

And thus the second truth: I could not be the primary editor for my many student writers if I wanted them to produce a good deal of revised writing during the course of the school year. Clearly, I needed help.

Creating and Operating Our Writing Center

Prior to high school teaching, I taught College Writing 100 at a university and required all of my students to use the university’s writing center. Near the end of my first year of teaching high school, I thought about that university writing center and the benefits it provided to my college students. That spring I visited a secondary school learning lab/writing center. I liked what I saw and knew that both my students and I needed this kind of support.

You’ll read statistics claiming that ninety percent of high school students’ time is devoted to listening to teachers talk...that reality changes when students work with students in a writing center.

During the first year of our writing center’s operation, twelve students worked out of the back of my English classroom. A supportive principal convinced the superintendent and school board to reduce my teaching load by two classes;

the assistant director had hers reduced by one. At the time, our high school operated on a traditional seven-period day. The twelve student-editors and two faculty-directors staffed the writing center during thirty class periods a week. About one third of the faculty sent students to the center, and by the end of the year over 2,000 clients had visited.

Our handpicked group of writing center staffers represented a cross-section of the student body. However, these young people had one common trait: Other kids liked them. In addition, these student-editors, most of whom planned on attending college, enjoyed writing or realized why writing was important to their futures. Recognizing the need to show the maximum potential of a writing center, I selected these specific students in an effort to help the writing center gain status. Clearly, I was a political animal.

The second year of operation eighteen student-editors signed up for a special writing center English class, and by year three the staff numbered thirty-seven. The center opened at 7:30 a.m., thirty minutes before school began, and closed at 3:00 p.m., thirty minutes after school ended. We had our own room with twenty computers and two large desks for tutors and their clients. Amazingly, during our third year no faculty or adult staff members were on duty in the writing center during the day. A faculty colleague in the social studies department "supervised" from just across the hallway. He would pop in periodically, and I visited the center when time permitted. This student-supervised writing center lasted one year. A sixteen-year old knuckle-dragger threw a three-ring binder and a dictionary out the window in late May and that was the end of that. The next year teachers were assigned to the writing center as one of their duties.

During my last three years at the high school, the writing center thrived in the media center/library thanks to our gracious librarian, Mr. Sassi. At this time we were up to about sixty writing center staff members, most of whom took "The Writing Center" English class from me. Any real costs associated with running the center disappeared after the first year of operations because the assistant director and I returned to teaching a full load of classes. Operating eight hours a day, five days a week, 180 days a year, the writing center's annual client load swelled to 5,200 visits from high school students, elementary students, k-12 teachers and administrators, secretaries, custodians and "lunch ladies," school board members, superintendents, and community members. Here's a glimpse at a typical day:

It's 7:30 in the morning and two bleary-eyed 9th grade girls peek around the doorframe. Tabitha, the writing center student on duty, smiles. She figures the girls are from Mr. St. John's class—all of his students are writing multi-genre papers this month and must bring the papers in for a conference. At 7:38, Jeff and Lindy arrive to help with two more of Mr. St. John's students.

Housed in the media center/library, the writing center creates lots of extra traffic, but Mr. Sassi, the media center specialist, loves the comings and goings. Most of all, he enjoys sneaking glimpses of kids working with kids.

During first period, Dustin swaggers in. The first draft of his reading autobiography is due on Friday—it's Wednesday. "I don't have a clue what to write," he moans. To get to know him, Marcy chats a bit with Dustin. Finally,

she suggests, "Let's make a list of things that you've read in your life." She helps him create a list, including snowboard magazines, comics, and a weekly magazine that has ads to sell everything; he's also reminded of the picture books his mom read to him when he was younger. In fifteen minutes Dustin is on his way with a blueprint for the paper.

During 3rd period, three senior writing center staffers go to Mrs. Tyler's class to confer with students during their writing workshop time. Mark staffs the writing center by himself, and except for a steady stream of kids coming in to use the computers, no one needs his help in the first hour. During the last thirty minutes of the period, he talks to three A.P. Biology students who are writing a brochure on Lyme disease for a group project.

At lunchtime fourteen students work at the computers while three student-editors, all seniors, sit around the main desk cramming for a physics test. A wiry boy fingering a paper peers in, sees the seniors, and bolts. "I'll go get him," says Jason, pushing aside his physics notes. Jason returns with the boy and spends ten minutes discussing the tenth-grader's paper with him.

When the dismissal bell sounds at 2:25 pm, fifty-three kids make a beeline for the lecture hall. A fifteen-minute S.A.T. study session called "Slaying the Dragon" is being offered. Today, it's sentence completions. By 3:00 in the afternoon when Ian tallies the writing center's logbook, twenty-eight students have visited the center for conferences and seventy-seven have used the computers. The twenty-three kids in Mrs. Tyler's 3rd period class and the S.A.T. crew are counted on separate tally sheets.

The writing center is closed for the day.

Teaching High School English with the Writing Center

During each eight-to-nine-week academic quarter throughout the school year, my high school English students created a portfolio that included the following:

Formal Papers: Three highly revised papers, approximately 1,000 words each

Informal Papers: Two papers, revised once, approximately 1,000 words each

Journals: Forty-eight one-page journal entries, not revised, spell-checked only (if word processed), approximately 150 words each

Reading: Five self-selected books and up to a dozen shorter in-class readings

Presentations: Three to five book projects created and presented in class—one of these book projects had to be written

Quarterly Reflection: A written reflection of the class and portfolio, approximately 1,000 words

The writing center staffers supported my English students' work far beyond what I could have accomplished as a classroom teacher alone. Imagine the conversations surrounding the many drafts of my 120 students' five papers each quarter. These students typically revised their formal papers three to five times, and though they only had to revise their informal papers once, many students opted to revise the informals more thoroughly for a higher assessment.

Ultimately, however, the writing center staffers provided the kind of ongoing support—eight hours a day, 180 days per year—that my students deserved. An added bonus: The writing center paralleled what was happening at the next level of schooling in colleges and universities.

The portfolio totals for 120 students during one academic quarter looked like this: Six hundred three-to-five-page papers could amount to 3,000 pages of final manuscript. Add in three to five revisions per paper and we're talking a lot of writing, a good deal of revision, and hours upon hours of conversations in the writing center. Could I have maintained this kind of support for my students as a classroom teacher without a writing center? To a degree. I could have devoted more time to in-class peer editing sessions, but because my students often utilized the writing center services during their study halls or at other times, they would have lost out on other opportunities in our classroom (e.g., discussions, reading time). I could have worked with teaching colleagues to have our students tutor one another, or I could have tried to solicit and train volunteers from our community to work with my students. Ultimately, however, the writing center staffers provided the kind of ongoing support—eight hours a day, 180 days per year—that my students deserved. An added bonus: The writing center paralleled what was happening at the next level of schooling in colleges and universities.

Over time, because of the highly individualized nature of a portfolio pedagogy and the support of the writing center, my high school English classes became more and more heterogeneously grouped (**Kent, 1997**). In a single class I might have students from each grade level, 9-12, and from all the different "tracks" (e.g., college bound, AP, special needs, vocational). I loved having a wide variety of students in each class—it gave the feel of a one-room schoolhouse, and the practice coincided with the National Council of Teachers of English guideline, **Tracked for Failure/Tracked for Success**.

Steps Toward Creating a Writing Center

My primary advice for new teachers interested in creating writing centers:

- Mind the home fires: get your own classroom teaching practice in order.
- Come to know your new colleagues, students, school, and community.

In the first few months while you're settling in at school, ask your mentor teacher and other colleagues if they have considered creating a writing center. As proxies for writing center services, your colleagues might conduct class-to-class writers' workshops or organize in-class writers' groups. Your school may also have National Honor Society or AP students providing tutorials. Clearly, it's important to know your school. Once you are convinced that your students and the school would benefit from a writing center, hold discussions with your English/language arts team about the concept. Your colleagues' support is vital.

Plan an introduction to writing centers at a team or department meeting using focus points such as the following:

1. Discuss college/university writing centers and your own experience.
2. Take your colleagues on a tour of selected writing center

websites:

International Writing Centers Association
Praxis: A Writing Center Journal
Benjamin Banneker Academy for Community
Development
Glenbrook North High Writing Center
826 Valencia (Community Writing Center)
Purdue OWL

3. Share “The High School Writing Lab/Center: A Dialogue” by Speiser and Farrell in

The High School Writing Center: Establishing and Maintaining One (Farrell, 1989, pp. 9–22). This conversation examines writing centers at the high school level.

4. Invite a university or 6th-12th grade writing center director to talk to your team.

5. Share the following statement from NCTE: **“The Concept of a Writing Center”** by Muriel Harris, a SLATE (Support for the Learning and Teaching of English) statement from NCTE.

6. Distribute the **“1987 National Council of Teachers of English Position Statement”** on Writing Centers.

7. Make a list of challenges your colleagues identify about developing a writing center. Examples of those challenges are cited at the beginning of this article. Discuss the list thoroughly. If you don’t have all the answers, speak to your college writing center director, find a secondary writing center director to serve as a mentor, seek input through IWCA’s **Discussion Forums**, join the secondary writing center director’s **mailing list**, or **email me**.

Once you’ve introduced the idea to your colleagues, it’s time to head off to the principal’s office. Arrange a fifteen-minute meeting to introduce the idea, and, if possible, bring along a respected veteran colleague. By necessity, administrators have a different, more global view of your school. They will have many questions, including How much will it cost, Who will staff it, and Where will it be housed? You won’t have all the answers; in fact, you won’t even know all of the questions at this point. Offer an introduction to the idea by showcasing representative writing center books, articles, facts, and figures that you shared with your department colleagues.

My English teaching practice blossomed for two reasons associated with the writing center. First, the center’s staff took over some of my work as an English teacher...Second, my students, in their daring and increasing confidence as writing center staffers, pushed me as their teacher.

You might place other informational pieces in a one-inch, three-ring binder with a concise (one-paragraph) opening statement. This professional presentation—similar to a view book or a marketing proposal—will do much to attract your busy principal. If at this point you have the support of your department, it might be a good idea to have a group statement, signed by all, at the front of the document, stating that you agree to explore the possibilities of a writing

center.

Once you've enticed your principal, make a list of other critical constituents. Those folks will include the school's literacy specialist or literacy coach and curriculum coordinator, the superintendent, potential university affiliations, potential business partners, and your school staff. The more partners you attract, the more potential the writing center has. Inform and include everyone.

How the Writing Center Changed My Teaching Practice and Me

After a few years of high school teaching, my six-class teaching load included three English classes designed for teaching writing center tutors. I couldn't have been more fortunate. The instruction my students received paralleled traditional training with university writing center tutors (Boquet, 2001; Gillespie & Lerner, 2003; Harris, 1986; and Kinkead & Harris, 1993). These days, as a university professor eight years removed from my high school position, hardly a week goes by that I don't hear from one of my high school writing center "kids," now carpenters, business people, mill workers, lawyers, woodsmen, Ph.D. candidates, ski coaches, actors, boat builders, learning center directors... and teachers—many teachers.

My English teaching practice blossomed for two reasons associated with the writing center. First, the center's staff took over some of my work as an English teacher. This shift in responsibility allowed me more time in school and at home to plan, write, and innovate. I also found much more time in class for those deeper conversations with kids. These conversations helped me think about students' needs and design activities that could connect more deeply to them.

Second, my students, in their daring and increasing confidence as writing center staffers, pushed me as their teacher. Their daring and confidence thrived, I believe, because of their work as "teachers" in our school's writing center. Unlike most high school students, these students enjoyed greater responsibility and authority through assisting our community's writers. You'll read statistics claiming that ninety percent of high school students' time is devoted to listening to teachers talk (e.g., Goodlad, 2004)—that reality changes when students work with students in a writing center.

My writing center students' confidence and abilities inspired me to create a wide variety of activities and opportunities, including fourth quarter independent study projects (Kent, 2000). My student colleagues craved an opportunity to explore interests in and beyond our English classroom. These interests were connected to language arts—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—and were developed as the students apprenticed in funeral homes and retail stores, explored mountaintops and city streets, etc. Indeed, their inquiry projects had these high school students building boats, writing plays, choreographing dances, studying Sylvia Plath, and escaping the cinderblock walls of school. I believe that such learner-centered opportunities became possible in our school because both my writing center students and I lived not only the writing life but also the teaching life.

Conclusion

During the spring of 2006, two of my UMaine interns and an English teacher (a former intern) founded a writing center at nearby Brewer High School. Folks from the school and community as well as television crews and newspaper reporters attended the grand opening. Housed in a room connected to the

library, the writing center looked a bit like a study room at Oxford. Talk about swanky.

The conditions for setting up the Brewer High School writing center were near perfect: A highly-respected English teacher who understood writing centers because he had used writing center services in college; two brilliant interns who had worked as university writing center tutors under the guidance of the quite wonderful Harvey Kail, coordinator of UMaine's **writing center**; an innovative, learner-centered principal who cleared the deck of any road blocks; a trained writing center staff of a dozen motivated high school students who loved writing; and me just up the turnpike providing information and advice when necessary. This fall, to complement what's already in place, my 4th-year English methods students will provide tutoring alongside the Brewer staff. If that's not enough, the high school has just hired two English teachers with writing center experience. Talk about ideal.

For those of you heading off to teach in secondary schools, let me repeat my advice: Settle in, get to know your new school community, and connect with college or secondary writing centers in your area. Are you eager to put your own writing center experience to use? Teach all of your students how to work with one another on their writing. Finally—vitaly—stay connected to the writing center community by joining the **International Writing Centers Association**. Order writing center publications and continue reading *Praxis*. The professional conversations within these publications and organizations will help your classroom teaching life in essential ways.

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Richard Kent is an assistant professor of literacy and director of the **Maine Writing Project** at the University of Maine, Richard Kent is the author of *A Guide to Creating Student-Staffed Writing Centers, Grades 6-12* (Peter Lang, 2006). A former high school English teacher, writing center director, and athletic coach, Kent was 1993 Maine Teacher of the Year and a recipient of the 1994 National Educator Award.

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From the Editors: Beyond the University

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Praxis focuses on the community writing center.

This issue of *Praxis* focuses on writing center work at locations outside of colleges and universities, for example, at community gardens and city libraries. It thus explores ways in which universities can and do extend their resources to the larger communities they inhabit.

Although **Focus** contains only two articles, each is an extended discussion of the transformative power of writing center work. Elizabeth Rodacker and Kay Siebler break new ground in their article on the ELL work they do at the community gardens of Lincoln, Nebraska. Richard Kent brings his considerable experience to bear on the development of secondary school writing centers, thereby furthering a discussion begun in *Praxis*'s Fall 2004 issue. Our Featured Center, Stanford Writing Center, offers a complimentary perspective on writing centers in high schools through its Ravenswood program. Also in this issue, *Praxis* exploits its own resources at the Undergraduate Writing Center: UWC Assistant Director, Lisa Loch, interviews Tommy Darwin, Director of the Professional Development and Community Engagement Program at UT, and in **Consulting**, UWC consultant James Jesson reflects on UT's development of a community writing center at the City of Austin's Carver Library. In **Training** Bonnie Devet reveals a method in which consultants go "undercover" to complete their training. In an extremely effective column, **The Merciless Grammarian** seeks to affect our usage of the words affect and effect. The effect is startling.

We are especially proud that so much of the work featured in this issue is pedagogically and pragmatically focused. Whether you are thinking about starting a writing center at your local high school or community garden, you will find good, solid advice in this volume.

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Professional Development and the Community Writing Center

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by **James Jesson**, *The University of Texas at Austin*

One writing center's experience with consulting in the community.

Outreach plays an important role in any university writing center. At the **University of Texas at Austin**, the **Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC)** conducts much of its outreach through voluntary "interest groups" comprised of undergraduate and graduate writing consultants. These include, for example, the "handouts" group—which creates one-page guides on topics such as MLA citation, comma use, and "Myths of College Writing"—and the "presentations" group, which visits classes to lead writing workshops and to advertise the writing center's services. Much of this outreach naturally aims to bring students into the writing center. But while presentations, handouts, and other advertisements attract many of the 10,000-plus students that the writing center sees yearly, such outreach efforts also benefit the consultant volunteers whom it sends out beyond the writing center. Particularly for undergraduate consultants, who may not have as much experience speaking in front of classrooms or writing for a wide audience, leaving the writing center's walls can provide challenges beyond those offered in their classes.

Since February 2006 the UWC has offered an outreach opportunity for its consultants that sends them into the Austin community. Consultants involved in this project provide free writing assistance to community members at the **George Washington Carver branch** of the Austin Public Library. Once a week during this Fall semester, and twice a week during the past Spring and Summer, pairs of consultants from the UWC have seen consultees whose age and writing projects often differ significantly from what consultants typically see on campus.



James Jesson at UT's Undergraduate Writing Center

The Carver Library project stems from a belief both in what the UWC can offer the community and in what the experience of community outreach can offer participating consultants. Allison Perlman, a graduate student Assistant Director (AD) at the UWC, who developed the Carver Library project along with fellow ADs Lisa Loch and Eliana Schonberg [1], explains that the project furthers two of the writing center's recent goals. The first is to develop a community outreach program that satisfies specific community needs and solidifies relations between the university and Austin residents. The Carver Library is located in Austin's Eastside, a heavily African-American and Latino, working-class neighborhood that is undergoing rapid gentrification. Located just east of the University of Texas campus and downtown Austin, the neighborhood is the most economically depressed area of those adjoining the university.

The contrast between the community's relative lack of resources and the university's wealth makes it important for the university to build trust with this neighborhood and with the community in general.

One of the outreach project's participants, graduate student Lisa Avery, notes that much of her initial interest in the project came from this opportunity to build bridges between university and community. Having worked in outreach projects that brought her into contact with public school teachers, Avery frequently heard those K-12 teachers express "skepticism about university employees, university programs, and the general willingness of the university community to respond to their larger community commitments." Applying university resources to the community, therefore, can be a valuable and necessary project.

The second goal that the writing center's outreach program meets is to further undergraduate consultants' professional development. In this, the Carver project grows out of earlier UWC initiatives aimed at enhancing consultants' skills and resumes. These include **Virgil**, an online, interactive writing guide, which undergraduate consultants developed, and the UWC's online journal, *Praxis*, which features undergraduate editorial-board members. Both **Virgil** and *Praxis* are precedents for the Carver project in extending consultants' influence and experience beyond the writing center and the university.

Those consultants who participate in the community writing center experience unique challenges and benefits. The difference between consulting on campus and off appears immediately in the different consulting environments. As a large university writing center, the UWC provides amenities that ease the consultant's work: a reception staff to perform visitor intake, a break room where consultants can study and eat during downtime, an extensive library of reference works, and consulting areas designed for one-on-one consultations. The community consulting site lacks all of these amenities. The public library generously provides a large conference room for the consultants, equipped with power outlets and wireless Internet. But the room's single table, which seats at least a dozen, is designed for large meetings rather than one-on-one, collaborative work. Consultants sometimes lose the space altogether if the library has a more urgent need for the room. Such displacements are rare, but consultants have occasionally been moved to a cubicle-size space for all or part of their shifts. Beyond these challenges, consultants more generally face the experience of walking into an alien environment. Consultants in the public library interact with staff members who may not know who the consultants are

and whose friendliness varies along with their willingness to help with things like opening the consulting room and storing boxes of materials between consulting shifts.

These challenges can in fact become advantages for the outreach project.

For undergraduate consultants seeking careers in community outreach, involvement in the project provides not only a resume entry but also the experience of working in and adapting to an unfamiliar environment.

Perlman sees this as one of the program's benefits, putting "consultants through that experience of being guests somewhere and having the responsibility to respect that."

Another potential challenge, the layout of the library's consulting space, provides some unexpected benefits for consultants. A flexible drop-in policy and the conference-room space encourage collaborative consultations whenever two consultants are available for only one writer. Collaborative consultations can help with the longer pieces of writing that community members will often bring in; two consultants can more thoroughly critique a 30-page memoir chapter than one, for example. And the interactions between consultants during consultations and downtime alike can be beneficial. Shifts at the Carver usually pair an undergraduate and a graduate consultant. Thus, in addition to exposing students to different consulting styles through collaborative consultations, the Carver setup allows undergraduates to learn from graduate students' mentoring and for graduate students to get to know undergraduates better than they might in the writing center environment.

Consultants have been attracted to working at the Carver Library primarily by the variety of writers and writing projects. Undergraduate consultant Jennifer Udan, for example, says she chose to consult at the Carver this past Summer because the "broader client base at the Carver" meant seeing "people who have more freedom to be creative, which is refreshing." One such creative writer is Tom Fleming, the most frequent repeat visitor to the Carver site, who is working on a memoir of his experiences as a Peace Corps volunteer in Uzbekistan. Fleming's project illustrates many of the differences between the university and community writing center experiences. At well over 100 pages, the memoir clearly differs from undergraduate writing center projects, typically short enough for a consultant to read in one sitting. The long work thus challenges consultants to think about such large issues as the narrative arc, with the consultant reading selections of the entire memoir and therefore relying on the author's description of the work as a whole. This reliance on the author's understanding of his project intensifies the collaborative nature of the consultant-writer interaction, since the consultant must work off of the author's idea of what he or she needs to work on. Such a situation works best when the writer is as engaged in the collaborative consultation as Fleming is. Fleming, who plans to self-publish his memoir, tells consultants to criticize his writing as much and as frankly as possible. "The most valuable critiques were the harshest," Fleming says of his consultations at the Carver. This attitude may not be familiar to consultants used to undergraduates, but encountering it can be liberating for those who are ready for more engaging consultations. Undergraduate consultant Udan, for one, cited the opportunity to be "more evaluative" as one attraction of the community writing center.

Of course, any consultation, whether in the university setting or in the community, requires consultants to gauge consultees' relative levels of comfort, and the community writing center can require particular sensitivity from consultants. One of the Carver's first visitors was a woman who had volunteered to help teach writing skills in her daughter's grade-school classroom and who was feeling insecure about her ability to do so. Consultants helped her with grammatical rules and the fundamentals of various types of writing assignments. But as graduate consultant Avery says, along with needing help with "skills to demonstrate to the students," this visitor to the center "needed a community of writers to help her feel less alone in her struggles and goals." For consultees like this, visiting the writing center for assistance requires great courage. It can be hard enough for undergraduates to enter the university writing center and seek help from their peers. How much more difficult is it, then, for a non-college student, insecure about her knowledge and writing skills, to seek help from university students?

Consultants in the community writing center, therefore, must quickly hone their skills at recognizing and adjusting to visitors' relative levels of comfort and confidence, particularly when visitors range from elementary school students with homework assignments to middle-aged adults working on job applications and creative projects.

The variation in clients at the community writing center also gives consultants experience with writing projects that can be more urgent, with a clearer sense of real-world consequences. Perlman explains that, in planning the Carver project, one of the anticipated differences between consulting in the UWC and at the Carver Library was that "the people coming [to the Carver] would have a different investment" in their writing projects and consultants would be working on documents with "a very practical purpose [and a] different kind of utility, a different kind of urgency and immediacy." Avery finds that her experiences at the Carver support Perlman's prediction: "The people at the Carver," Avery says, "seemed to instinctively understand that their writing had some effect on readers and seemed keen to understand how to create desired, rather than unintentional, effects."

Despite some of the differences, however, consulting in the community can be remarkably similar to consulting on campus. While the community location might attract more extensive projects or demand more complex advice, the UWC consultants have maintained the writing center's basic principles of collaborative consultations in which consultant and consultee treat writing as a process directed toward a specific audience. Even when working on more urgent projects than one typically sees in a writing center, consultants have avoided being overly directive and have left the writer in charge of his or her own writing and learning. As such, the community outreach project has granted the public entry into the writing center while providing a bridge for consultants into the community.

Notes

[1] Also instrumental in launching the project were Sydnye Allen, the Carver Outreach Coordinator, and the original consultants at the site: Delaney Hall, Lisa Avery, Emily Falconer Baker, and James Jesson.

James Jesson is a graduate student and assistant instructor in the English Department at the University of Texas, Austin, and a member of the *Praxis* editorial board. He was among the first consultants from UT's Undergraduate Writing Center to participate in the outreach program at the George Washington Carver Library.

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Southeastern Writing Center Association Awards

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The SWCA is accepting nominations for their 2007 Achievement Award and Tutor Award.

Each award is presented annually on a competitive basis to outstanding members of the SWCA community, and each winner will receive a plaque and \$250 at the SWCA conference in Nashville, TN, February 8-10, 2007.

The Achievement Award recognizes the superior work of a writing center director (or equivalent leadership/supervisory position) within the SWCA. Nominees should possess a record of outstanding service to the organization, a particular center, and/or the writing center community at large. Research contributions will also be considered.

The Tutor Award recognizes the leadership, commitment, and overall excellence of a student (undergraduate or graduate) or staff member who works in any capacity in an SWCA center, including peer tutoring, administration, tutor training, campus workshops, or other significant work.

Nominees must be currently working in a writing center at an educational institution (including high schools, two-year colleges, and four-year college/universities) in the SWCA region (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands). Nominees should also be current members (student, individual, or institutional) of the SWCA.

Writing center director, administrators, staff members, and tutors may nominate someone for either award. Self-nominations are also accepted. Please forward the name, award, institution, address, phone, and email of the nominee to Deaver Traywick, Awards Committee Chair, by November 1, 2006 at deavertraywick@bhsu.edu.

Nominees will be notified and asked to submit an application packet to Deaver Traywick, Awards Committee Chair, by midnight December 1, 2006 at deavertraywick@bhsu.edu.

- A cover letter indicating acceptance of nomination and description of one's relevant work
- Three letters of support
- Curriculum vitae (optional for the Tutor Award)
- Optional materials, such as conference papers, publications, writing center materials, instructional resources, online material, etc. (15 pp. limit for Tutor applications; 40 pp. limit for Achievement applications)

Please contact the Awards Committee Chair with questions or concerns at (605)642-6922 or deavertraywick@bhsu.edu.

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The Merciless Grammarian

Fall 2006 / Columns

The Merciless Grammarian spews his wrath on nasty problems of grammar, mechanics, and style.



Drawing by Nathan Baran

Most Merciless,

I find that all this harping on grammar has a terrible affect on me. I end up stressing about all this stuff I don't really know much about, and as a result my writing becomes less affective.

Anxiously yours,
Mahonri Finneas

Two issues here, Mahonri, one fundamental to the fearsome beastie that is grammar, the other more a sign of your own befuddled state. Heavy lies the mantle on the shoulders of those called to enforce the strictures of grammatical usage. I am reminded—as no doubt are you—of Ælfric of Eynsham, the first writer of a grammar book in English.

Around the year 1000, Ælfric penned a dialogue for little monks-in-training to teach what we might call LSL (Latin as a Second Language). In the dialogue, the teacher first asks, "Are you willing to be beaten for the sake of learning?" The monklets dutifully respond, "Yes, we would rather be beaten than not know. But we know you are merciful and will not beat us needlessly." Are our attitudes toward grammar any different today? The consequences may not be as, shall we say, corporal, but the feelings are the same: someone's got a stick.

Not that I in any way advocate sparing the rod to smite the infractor, which brings me to your own transgression. Unless you are versed in psychology or the performance of ancient music, your use of *affect* is misguided. Gather

around while Uncle Merciless tells a story about words.

In common usage, the noun *effect* means “a result” or “something produced”; the verb *affect* means “to influence,” “to have an effect on.” In the adjective realm, if something does a good job, it is *effective*. If we go back to Latin, whence these words come, *effect* is the progeny of *efficere*, “to make [something] out [of something].” *Affect* is the whelp of *afficere*, “to do [something] to [something].” The trip into English and across six hundred years has turned the vowels in these words to mush. As a result, we pronounce them both “uhfect,” and choosing a vowel can be difficult when Vanna isn’t there to spin the letters for you.

Now, that doesn’t mean that *affect* can’t be used as a noun and *effect* is forever banished from verbdom. Return to the Latin for a sense of what these mean. *Affect* is a term now used mostly among those who probe the mind and perform the music of the baroque (not necessarily the same group of people). It means “the outward expression of emotion”—or, to get etymological on it, as the kids say, “signs of being emotionally acted upon.” That which brings out or draws on the emotions is therefore *affective*, as in sermons on the wrath to come. True to its roots, the verb *effect* means “to bring about”: “The elixir seemed to effect signs of life in the cadaver.”

I sincerely hope that has taken a buzz saw to your orthographical log jam. As for your larger concern, don’t worry. It’s nothing that a fundamental culture shift won’t cure.

Reigning in state,
The Merciless One

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