

WRITING LAB REPORT

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SUMMARY

In the Fall, 1977 semester the English Department's Writing Lab continued to offer students individualized supplementary instruction designed to help them improve their writing skills. A total of 948 students were helped in tutorial appointments, on an immediate drop-in basis, in mini-courses, or through self-instruction materials available in the lab. While many needed help with basic writing skills, others recognized the need to continue to develop their writing proficiency and came in on their own initiative to prepare for report or essay exam writing, graduate theses, applications for professional schools, or the English Proficiency Exam.

Of the students who came to the lab, the largest proportion were those registered in the schools of Agriculture (21%), Engineering (18%), Science (17%), and HSSE (16%). The remaining students were registered in Consumer and Family Science (9%), Management (8%), Technology (5%), Pharmacy (3%), Veterinary Medicine (1%), or were unclassified (2%).

Questionnaires aimed at evaluating the progress made by students who attended the lab were sent to the students and to their composition instructors. These questionnaires indicated that the tutorial instruction being offered by the lab increased the writing competence, grades, motivation, and self-confidence of the students who attended the lab. More specifically, the questionnaires returned by the composition staff indicated that 89% of the students who worked in the lab showed definite improvement in their mastery of writing skills, and the grades for 71% of these students rose either one or two letter grades. Instructors also reported that 71% of the students evaluated showed noticeable improvement in their confidence in themselves and their abilities, and 90% indicated an increased motivation to write well. When students evaluated the lab, 84% judged the instruction to be clear and effective. Of the students who responded, 95% felt that

they had made genuine progress in their writing skills, and 87% reported that their lab instructors were very helpful and very competent.

The lab also continued to be heavily used by the composition staff who came in to read materials on the teaching of writing in the lab's Resource File, to borrow the lab's books and instructional materials, and to use its audio-visual materials in their composition classrooms. In addition, the lab continued to respond to requests from faculty members from other universities who wrote or visited the lab to request materials and information for starting their own labs.

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A. WRITING LAB INSTRUCTION AND SERVICES

In the Fall, 1977 semester the English Department's Writing Lab continued to serve both as a supplement to the department's composition program and as a tutorial center for other students in the university by offering individualized instruction in basic writing skills. Using the instructional approaches, materials, and record-keeping system described in the "Writing Lab Report--January, 1976," the lab staff continued to provide personalized instruction needed by students to improve their writing competence. Specifically, the lab's work for the fall semester included the following:

1. Publicity. In its continuing effort to remind students and instructors of the lab's facilities, the lab director participated in the general orientation program for all new graduate instructors of composition; sent out an explanatory pamphlet, Using the Writing Lab, to all instructors of composition; sent full-page informative handouts to all students enrolled in composition courses and to the heads of the counselling staffs in all schools of the university; and visited classes when invited to answer questions about the lab's services. In addition, articles describing the lab were published in the Lafayette Journal and Courier's "Purdue Orientation Issue" and in the Purdue Exponent's orientation issue, and a brief description of the lab's facilities appeared in the orientation booklet sent to all new freshmen. Throughout the semester reminder articles also appeared in the Exponent.
2. Instruction in Writing Skills. In an effort to provide various types of instruction to fit different needs, the lab offered help in the following forms:
 - a. Regularly scheduled tutorial instruction.

Students who need individualized instruction in basic writing

skills attended regularly scheduled appointments with a lab instructor. This offered the instructor and the student the opportunity to establish a comfortable working relationship and to proceed more slowly when extensive remediation was needed. Lab instructors working with students on a regular or long-term basis were also able to follow the students' progress in their classroom writing and to discuss the students' improvement with their composition instructors.

One indication of the increasing need for individualized tutorial instruction in writing skills is the fact that within two weeks after the start of the fall semester, the lab's appointment schedule was filled to capacity. Before mid-semester, when students were being asked to wait several weeks or more for an appointment, the English Department promptly responded to the need for more staff by immediately adding another $\frac{1}{4}$ -time appointment. The additional hours of instruction provided by this extra staff member, plus voluntary contributions of extra time by the rest of the staff (despite their need to prepare for their own course-work, exams, and other teaching obligations) helped somewhat to alleviate the over-crowding of the lab's facilities. However, because of the very evident decline in writing skills among entering freshmen (far more apparent this year than last), the problem of adequate staffing and space is not yet solved. The additional class hour for English 101 and 102, beginning next fall, will provide more classroom instructional time, but as the composition program moves toward more rigorous standards for proficiency in writing, the need for individualized tutorial instruction will continue to increase.

b. Drop-in help.

Because the lab instructors also want to provide help for students who have a quick question, need hand-outs from the lab's files, or want a little extra help, the staff scheduled one-fifth of their regular hours as drop-in time. During these hours a lab instructor was available to answer questions, help a student with some pre-writing discussion for a paper, discuss organizational structures for papers in progress, help students learn to proofread their themes, etc. Of the 176 students who came in without regularly scheduled appointments, many expressed their appreciation for not having to wait several weeks to have their questions answered. Because of the effectiveness of instruction offered at the time that it is needed and because of the increased need in the spring for immediate help with term papers, the lab staff proposes to allot 2/5 of its available time next semester to drop-in hours.

When asked to evaluate the usefulness of the drop-in system, 72% of the composition instructors who responded indicated that it was of great help to their students, and the remaining 28% reported that it was of some help.

c. Mini-courses.

As in previous semesters, the Writing Lab again held mini-courses intended as small group instruction or review of the subject; however, because of the past success of these mini-courses (and the over-crowding of all sessions), the program was expanded greatly this semester. A total of nine different mini-courses were offered to 394 students in twenty-nine separate sessions, and in some cases new materials were developed for use in the courses. Because of the increased number of sessions, attendance at each was

kept to more reasonable levels than in previous semesters, and instruction was, therefore, much more effective.

When asked to evaluate these mini-courses, 79% of those composition instructors who responded reported that they were of great help, and the remaining 21% indicated that the courses were of some help. Several classroom instructors also invited members of the lab staff to repeat some of the mini-courses in their classrooms, and one instructor stated that he had learned several new teaching techniques as a result of having been a part of the mini-course held in his class. In addition, the director of the writing center at the University of California at Berkeley, having heard of the success of the lab's program of mini-courses, wrote to request hand-outs and descriptive materials, as well as suggestions for improving a similar program offered by his tutorial facility.

d. Self-instruction materials.

The Writing Lab's extensive set of tape and booklet self-instruction modules on spelling, grammar, rhetoric, and vocabulary were heavily used this semester. In addition to the students who used these modules to supplement their lab work, 146 additional students came in for 240 hours of independent study as part of coursework assigned by their instructors. Five new self-instructional modules developed by the lab staff (with the assistance of an Instructional Improvement Grant funded by the Associate Provost's office) will also be in use next semester.

The excellent evaluations of the effectiveness of the lab's self-instructional materials (discussed in Section C of this report) indicate that these programs will continue to be heavily used. However, serious lack of space for storage of materials and for

more study carrels and tape recorders prevents any expansion of their use. During normally busy hours all three study carrels and tape recorders remain in constant use, and some students have reported being turned away because of the length of the waiting lines. The need for more space remains an urgent priority for the Writing Lab.

3. Resource Center

a. Resource File for the composition staff.

The Writing Lab's Resource File of materials on the teaching of composition (described in an article by the director in the December, 1977 issue of College Composition and Communication) continued to be in daily use during the fall semester. Several hundred entries on the sign-out sheet indicate that instructors came in frequently to dip into files of theme assignments, browse through folders of sample graded papers, read articles on composition, make copies of the lab's instructional materials, and borrow books on the practice, theory, and pedagogy of composition instruction. Other users of the Resource File included members of the staffs of the Learning Center and Office of Writing Review, as well as students enrolled in English 591. Through funds provided by the English Department, a small but very useful library of books on the teaching of writing was added to the Resource File, and both these books and recent issues of the two major college composition journals that the lab now subscribes to were in constant circulation.

When asked to evaluate the Resource File, 81% of those composition instructors who responded reported that it was of great help, while the remaining 19% reported that it was of some help.

b. Resource for other institutions.

As a result of the Writing Lab Newsletter, which is edited by the lab's director and mailed to over 150 labs and learning centers across the country, the Writing Lab has become a clearing house for information on labs. In addition, all specific requests for information describing Purdue's Writing Lab have been answered with copies of the lab's instructional materials, descriptive booklets, and semester reports. In on-site visits by the directors of the writing labs at Alabama State University, the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, and the University of Nevada at Reno, lab staff members were able to offer the visitors extensive tours of the lab's facilities.

B. STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF THE USE OF THE LAB

The following tables describe the student population using the lab during the Fall, 1977 semester.

Table 1. Total number of students using the lab.

1.	No. of students attending the lab for tutorial appointments:	232
2.	No. of students using the lab as a drop-in center:	176
3.	No. of students attending mini-courses	394
4.	No. of students using the self-instruction modules	<u>146</u>
	TOTAL	948

Table 2. No. of appointments required by students using the lab for regularly scheduled tutorial sessions.

<u>No. of appts. per student</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>Total no. of appts.</u>
1	88	88
2	57	114
3	36	108
4	23	92
5	8	40
6	6	36
7	7	49
8	2	16
9	3	27

10	2	20
11	2	<u>22</u>
TOTAL NO. OF APPTS.		612

Table 2. No. of drop-in sessions attended by students

<u>No. of sessions per student</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>Total no. of sessions</u>
1.	136	136
2.	26	52
3.	7	21
4.	4	16
5.	2	<u>10</u>
TOTAL NO. OF DROP-IN SESSIONS		235

Table 4. No. of self-instruction modules used by students

<u>No. of modules</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>No. of uses of modules</u>
1	99	99
2	26	52
3	9	27
4	7	28
5	1	5
6	2	12
7	1	8
8	1	<u>9</u>
TOTAL NO. OF USES OF MODULES		240

Table 5. Description by courses of students attending the lab for tutorial appointments, drop-in sessions, mini-courses, and self-instruction modules

Course No.	No. attending tutorial appointments	No. requesting drop-in help	No. attending mini-courses	No. using self-instructional modules	Totals
A. COMPOSITION COURSES					
English 002	4	0	4	2	10
English 100	24	10	95	19	148
English 101	113	88	243	62	506
English 101M	32	18	19	39	108
English 102	11	12	15	3	41
English 103	5	5	13	0	23
English 304	0	0	1	0	1
English 420	1	3	0	0	4
English 421	3	1	0	1	5
B. OTHER COURSES					
English 185	1	0	0	0	1
English 286	0	0	0	7	7
English 376	1	0	0	0	1
English 386	1	0	0	0	1
English 601	0	1	0	0	1
Anthropology 335	1	0	0	0	1
Child Development	0	0	0	1	1
Child Development 530	1	0	0	0	1
CDFS 551	1	0	0	0	1
Communications 114	0	1	0	0	1
Economics 690	0	1	0	0	1
Education 284	1	0	0	0	1
Education 285	0	1	0	0	1
IE 690	0	1	0	0	1
LA 304	0	1	0	0	1
Management 325	0	1	0	0	1
Supervision 252	0	1	0	0	1
Supervision 374	0	1	0	0	1
Other undergraduates	18	21	1	10	50
Other graduate students	6	6	0	0	12
C. GRADUATE STUDENTS PREPARING FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY EXAMS					
TOTALS	<u>8</u> 232	<u>3</u> 176	<u>3</u> 394	<u>2</u> 146	<u>16</u> 948

Table 6. Description by school of students attending the lab

<u>School</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Agriculture	21%
CFS	9%
Engineering	18%
HSSE	16%
Management	8%
Pharmacy	3%
Science	17%
Technology	5%
Veterinary Medicine	1%
Other (including unclassified students)	2%

C. EVALUATION OF STUDENTS' PROGRESS

1. Instructors' Evaluation of Students

In order to assess the quality of instruction received by students attending the lab and the degree of increased competence in these students' writing skills, the Writing Lab sent out seven-item evaluation questionnaires to the composition instructors for each of their students who attended the lab. A tally of the responses indicates that while 27% of the students needed only some help, 29% needed much help; and 35% needed a great deal of help. Responses to the question concerning subject mastery indicate that 89% of the students demonstrated definite improvement in the areas of writing skills studied in the lab, and the grades for 71% rose either one or two letter grades. Composition instructors also reported that 44% of the students indicated to their instructors that they appreciated the lab's help, and 71% of the students evaluated in this questionnaire showed noticeable improvement in their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Of the students evaluated for motivation, 90% indicated an increased desire to write well. Responses to the question asking about feedback from the lab indicate that 90% of the instructors evaluated communication from the lab instructor as adequate to

excellent. Finally, from those instructors whose students used self-instructional materials, 26% rated the modules as being of some help, 30% responded that they were of much help, and 41% reported that they were of great help.

2. Students' Evaluations of the Writing Lab

When students evaluated their work in the Writing Lab in a four-item questionnaire, 13% rated the quality of their instruction as adequate, 37% responded that it was clear and effective, and 47% reported that it was very clear and very effective. When asked to evaluate their progress in writing skills as a result of their lab work, 95% of the students reported definite improvement, and 84% stated that what they had learned in the lab enabled them to write better papers and receive higher letter grades. All of the students evaluated the quality of their lab instructors' help as adequate or better, with 87% reporting that their instructors were very helpful and very competent. In the space provided for further comments and suggestions, many students appended notes expressing their appreciation for the lab's services and their lab instructors' help. The only complaint expressed by some students was that they were not able to spend more time with lab instructors because of the over-crowded schedule.

Of the students who used the lab's self-instructional materials, 36% rated the quality of instruction provided by the modules as adequate, 29% reported that it was clear and effective, and 23% responded that it was very clear and very effective. As a result of using these modules, 43% of the students noted some improvement in their writing skills and 31% reported a great deal of improvement. When asked whether they liked or disliked using self-instructional material, 90% of the students reported that they did like it, and the most often cited reasons were that they could learn at their own pace, concentrate on what they particularly wanted to learn, and work at times that were convenient for them.