

Purdue University Writing Lab Report

1993-1994

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Abstract

During the 1993-1994 academic year, the Purdue University Writing Lab assisted thousands of student writers and their instructors with a variety of services. Evaluations indicate that the Writing Lab continues to provide extensive help which results in improvement in student writing. By offering a variety of services in addition to tutorials, our small staff is able to provide some form of individualized assistance with writing skills to over 15% of Purdue's student population. Particularly worthy of note this year is the introduction of online distance learning via OWL (Online Writing Lab), the frequent and favorable references to the Writing Lab in the University's 1993 *Freshman Junior Census*, the integration of peer tutoring into the English 100 program, numerous professional opportunities for the staff, and the availability of tutoring in selected residence halls.

Writing Lab Services: 1993-1994

During the 1993-1994 academic year, the Writing Lab continued to provide Purdue students with individualized tutorial assistance with writing skills as well as a variety of other services which are detailed in Appendix A. Statistical reports of this use are included as Appendix B; evaluations and comments from users of a variety of the Writing Lab's services are included in Appendix C. New programs and noteworthy recognition of this year's work of the Writing Lab are detailed here.

• OWL (Online Writing Lab)

With support from the Dean of Liberal Arts, the Writing Lab has been developing online tutorial services. Computer users with accounts connected to the Internet can send online questions to Writing Lab tutors, who generally respond within a day or so. In addition, the Writing Lab has available online over eighty instructional handouts which users can request by sending an e-mail message to OWL's automatic file server. A brief notice on the Internet in March resulted in thousands of requests from all over the world, including faculty in American and Canadian universities (e.g., the University of Washington, University of Minnesota, Colorado School of Mines, Stanford, University of Maryland, Simon Fraser University); engineers in NASA; technical writers in United States Navy offices; National Institutes of Health, British Columbia school districts; Internet users in Japan, Hong Kong, and Australia; faculty in Switzerland, Mexico, and South Africa, and technical writers in medical facilities in Germany and the Volvo factory in Sweden. Responses to a survey of these users indicate a high degree of satisfaction and extensive recognition of Purdue University's innovative use of technology and commitment to distance learning (see comments on pages 6-7, in Appendix C).

In the Fall 1993 semester, a software program, WORDS (Writers' Online Reference Desk Services) was also developed which will provide OWL services to students with accounts on the Sequent machines in PUCC who are not adept at e-mailing. WORDS has other options meant to offer additional writing tools to writers (to check spelling, to look up a word definition, to connect to the Library's THOR catalog, and so on). Because of delays within PUCC in making this software available, WORDS was not used this year, but it is hoped that it will be available beginning next fall.

With additional support from the Dean of Liberal Arts, plans for further innovations include setting up a gopher site in the Writing Lab to assist student writers searching for information on the Internet. Hypertext tutorials, to be made available on the World Wide Web, will be developed to help students learn how to use e-mail, how to search the Internet for information, and how to download that information. The goal is to provide

students with tools to learn how to gather information needed in research paper writing. An additional benefit will be national and international recognition of Purdue's innovative use of technology, outreach to schools and communities, and models for other institutions developing these distance learning projects.

- ***The 1993 Freshman Junior Census***

In the extensive survey compiled by Aldis Knight, *The 1993 Freshman Junior Census*, of the top twenty keywords and phrases in the list of aspects of the university that were most helpful in students' pursuit of an education at Purdue, the third most often mentioned aspect by freshmen was "the computer, writing, and chemistry labs." In the list of obstacles to pursuing an education at Purdue, the Writing Lab was also mentioned as students complained of long waits and inadequate staff and facilities. (See comments on p. 7).

- **The English 100 program with tutors integrated into the classroom**

The program for developmental writers was revised so that tutors are now integrated into the classroom and also meet individually with every student, every week in the Writing Lab. Because of excellent evaluations from students and their teachers in the English 100 program, this program will continue next year. This innovation was the subject of presentations by the peer tutors at a national conference in New Orleans and a regional conference in Toledo.

- **Professional opportunities for the staff in the Writing Lab**

Because of widespread interest in the integrated tutorial program in the Developmental Writing Program, peer tutors were invited to present papers about their work at the National Writing Centers Association Conference in New Orleans and at the East Central Writing Centers Association Conference in Toledo. Two graduate student tutors in the Writing Lab presented papers about their Writing Lab work at the national Conference on College Composition and Communication and are writing a follow-up paper on the topic, and two other graduate student instructors in the Writing Lab published papers about writing center theory in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. Two peer tutors have been invited to join the Writing Lab Director in collaborating on a book chapter for a book of essays on writing center collaboration. The Director presented papers on writing center theory and administration and about online tutoring at two national conferences and one regional conference and was invited to write a journal essay about Purdue's OWL.

- **Availability of Writing Lab tutors in selected residence halls**

With funding contributed by three residence halls, tutors from the Writing Lab were able to provide on-site tutoring several evenings a week in study rooms in the residence halls. Response to this program was very favorable and will continue if funding is again available.

Appendix A: Staff, Services, and Users

1. Staffing

The 1993-94 staff of the Writing Lab consisted of eleven graduate teaching assistants and a director, plus two groups of undergraduate peer tutors (one group funded by the English Department to tutor English 100 students and the other group funded by other university sources to assist students with business writing and resumes.) In addition, a graduate student served as the system designer and programmer for OWL (Online Writing Lab). Clerical help was provided by a receptionist, a secretary, and work/study student assistance.

2. Services

Services offered by the instructional staff include the following:

- tutorials (half-hour tutorial appointments with tutors)
- drop-in assistance (tutorials available on a first-come, first-served basis)
- required lab component for the English 100 program (tutorials with every student, every week, in addition to having tutors integrated into classroom work)
- Credit courses (English 390, English 502W) (training practicum for one group of graduate students and two groups of undergraduates preparing to be peer tutors)
- Traveling Tutor sessions (workshops held in classrooms by invitation of instructors)
- instructional handouts (hundreds of individual handouts on a variety of writing skills)
- ESL Self-Study Center (tape cassette programs for international students to improve listening and reading comprehension, plus pronunciation and speaking skills)
- Grammar Hotline (responses to questions called in by students, staff, and faculty at Purdue, as well as calls from around the nation)
- a peer tutoring program in selected residence halls (peer tutors offering tutorials in three of the residence halls, funded by the halls)
- computers for word processing and computer-assisted instruction (open lab facilities for word processing, plus computer programs for journalism students and for international students working on English skills)
- faculty development (workshops and meetings with staffs to discuss the use of writing in various disciplines)
- faculty assistance with creating writing assignments and grading (assistance with integrating writing into courses and with using the Writing Lab)
- library of books, journals, and reference materials (library of reference books, plus handbooks to check out)
- OWL (Online Writing Lab), online tutorial assistance

(a variety of online tutorial services being developed for computer users requesting help with writing)

- *Writing Lab Newsletter*
(edited by the Writing Lab Director and published by the Department of English, this newsletter is one of two nationally distributed and indexed publications on writing center theory, pedagogy, and administration)

3. Users

The populations served represent a wide variety of writers, teachers, and others, both on-campus, nationally, and internationally

- students enrolled in English Department writing courses
- students learning English as a second language
- students writing papers for hundreds of courses on campus
- students engaged in other writing projects such as resumes, professional school applications, dissertations, co-op reports, etc.
- teachers using Writing Lab handouts in their courses
- teachers assigning writing in various departments across campus
- writing center administrators from other institutions studying the Writing Lab as a model in on-site visits
- writers on the Internet using OWL handouts
- school districts and other institutions building collections via OWL of writing materials
- writers across the nation sending questions about writing to OWL

Appendix B: Statistical Use of the Writing Lab

1. Types of usage	<u>no. of requests</u>	<u>no. of users</u>
Tutorial appointments	2098	1271
Drop-in sessions	1630	1248
Handouts to students	1453	1296
Handouts to instructors	96	75
Microcomputers	190	146
Self-instruction tapes	73	32
Writing/studying in the lab	224	168
English 100	3256	381
Traveling Tutor workshops	95	95
Grammar Hotline	423	423
Unspecified	39	39
OWL tutorials	118	81
OWL handouts	5350	587
totals:	15,045	5,842

2. Most frequent use of the Writing Lab by departments	<u>no. of requests</u>	<u>no. of students</u>
Dept. English	2671	2286
AGEC	208	191
Corn	230	185
A&D	175	108
Pol Sci	100	87

3. Usage of the Writing Lab by schools

a. Including students in freshman composition courses	Liberal Arts	Agriculture	Technology	Management	CFS	Science	Engineering	Pharmacy	Education	Unspecified
	18.4 %	12.5 %	11.8 %	11.8 %	10.5 %	9.9 %	9.7 %	5.1 %	3.4 %	6.6 %

b. Excluding students in freshman composition courses	Liberal Arts	Engineering	Agriculture	Management	Technology	Science	CFS	Unspecified	Education	Pharmacy
	31.1 %	12.8 %	10.5 %	8.2 %	8.1 %	8.0 %	6.9 %	5.8 %	4.8 %	3.3 %

Appendix C: Evaluations and Comments

Evaluations

Evaluations of individual tutorials (based on 2799 responses):

- | | |
|---|-----|
| a. Quality of instruction: | 94% |
| • very helpful | 6% |
| • somewhat helpful | 0% |
| • not helpful | |
| | |
| b. Amount learned: | 83% |
| • learned a lot | 16% |
| • learned a little | 1% |
| • learned nothing | |
| | |
| c. Likelihood that student would return to the Lab if further help is needed: | 93% |
| • very likely | 7% |
| • somewhat likely | 0% |
| • not likely | |

Comments

A. From users of OWL:

- I think OWL is great. I was especially pleased and surprised that you would answer a question from someone who was not only outside the university, but outside the country! -Gwent, UK
- I found the handouts extremely useful.-University of Pennsylvania
- The handouts are very well constructed and will prove most useful in my work with my more advanced students. -Switzerland
- I think owl@sage is one of the most useful services I have encountered on the Internet and is a great example of the exciting potential of the Internet. -University of Washington
- We will use these materials for faculty training. -Mohawk College, Ontario
- This is truly an excellent service. -La Paz, Mexico
- I used the handout on non-sexist language for a talk to the American Association of University Women.
- Your handouts will be a staple on the provincial learning network for secondary schools in British Columbia.
- I think this is a really great service. -Computervision Corp., Boston, MA

- I was delighted to find the handouts available from Purdue. -School of Business and Banking, Adelphi University
 - The service is a great idea and a big help. -NASA
 - I have uploaded the Purdue OWL files to our local BBS system. The response has been extremely favorable. -North Vancouver School District, British Columbia
- B. From freshmen and juniors in *The 1993 Freshman Junior Census***
1. In the list of aspects of the University that were most helpful to students' pursuit of an education at Purdue:
 - "The Writing Lab is the most helpful aspect at the University." (Health Sci student)
 - "I find the academic services available (e.g., The Writing Lab in HEAV and the Assisted Learning Center in Lilly Hall) to be extremely valuable to my education." (Science student)
 - "The Writing Lab is great. It is so much help." (Science student)
 - "Purdue has many great student service programs—especially the writing lab. The tutors in the writing lab are not only helpful, but very supportive and understanding. The writing lab is a great place." (Technology student)
 2. In the list of aspects at the University that were obstacles to students' pursuit of an education:
 - "One major problem with Purdue University is the Writing Lab. There are not enough helpers in the lab. I have had to wait two or three weeks to have help and by that time the paper was already due. Also, I have tried to walk-in and I had to wait two hours." (Management student)
 - "The Writing Lab needs better facilities, more instructors, and more availability of these instructors. Due to this and the lack of availability by my instructors, I had difficulty improving my writing skills." (Liberal Arts student)

C. From instructors whose students used the Writing Lab

- I teach English 100 so I was lucky to have tutors. I just can't do one-on-one with every student, and they need that work on revising/writing in depth with their own papers. My tutors this term were wonderful, and I saw marked improvement in my students' writing. It would be fantastic for 101 if we could ever get the funding. (R. Reno, English)
- The regular appointments my students had with 100 UTA's were invaluable. They helped my students write solid papers that they would not otherwise have been able to do. My students are well-prepared for 101 and 102 in large part because of the steady attention they received from their tutors. Continue the practice for English 100 and look for ways to incorporate this method into 101 and 102. (L. Toner, English)
- Requesting students access the lab as they write their papers worked well. They all utilized the service. (W. Olmstead, Visual and Performing Arts)

- A large number of my students complained that they could not get in for appointments, often because the Lab was booked solid and there were onerous long waits for drop-ins. (L. Miles, English)
- It's the place to refer my students for reliable assistance with all phases of their assignments. You guys and women do damn good work. (J. Waggoner, English)
- The Writing Lab gives personal instruction to students I can't get to (esp. while class size remains high). (M. Oliver, English)
- Since I have so many ESL students I refer them to the lab for specific help with individual problems. This frees up my conference time—I only have a few minutes for each student. (S. McGee, English)
- The lab helps my students in areas that I don't have time to address with them individually. I owe all of you a huge THANKS. (L. Benjamin, English)
- The scheduled tutorials with 100 UTAs have been excellent. By working with the same tutor throughout the term, students build confidence and establish continuity. Hope you continue this set up! I can't say enough about the WLI! Over the years, it has continued to improve its services. The staff is excellent. Only complaint: too hot and too crowded! (M. Altschaeffl, English)
- The Lab is most helpful by providing one-on-one review of report writing problems. (J. Jacob, EET)
- The Lab needs to be expanded in physical (building) space and increased in staff to meet the needs of a major university like Purdue. (R. Herber, English)
- Over all I feel that the Writing Lab is a very useful tool for our students. I hope to continue using it for many semesters. (A. Hartman, AG EC)
- Great job! (F. Debrix, Political Science)
- I want to express my appreciation to the tutors who worked with my students this semester. The Writing Lab is of great value to me as an instructor, as I simply do not have the time to sit down with my international students and help them with their writing problems. (B. Blake, Management)
- My students are very pleased with the individual attention they receive in tutorials. I also really appreciate this personalized attention and the alternate perspectives in helping them revise. (L. Damon, English)
- You help me most with students who seem to have encountered demanding writing assignments for the first time in my classes....the Writing Lab is a great resource. (R. Bartlett, Pol. Sci.)
- The lab staff is wonderful. I never hesitate before suggesting a visit to the lab since all the staff is so skilled and helpful. (A. Erickson, English)
- I hear good comments from my students...the only complaint is the difficulty of getting help on short notice. OWL sounds like a good way to alleviate this problem. (S. Grabowski, Biology)

- The Writing Lab assists my students in the writing process and with grammar....I appreciate your work and your approach with students....sincere thanks for all you do for students in helping them understand the process of writing. (D.Henderson, EDCI)
- Students reported feeling more at ease with their writing after talking to a tutor. (T. Krause, English)
- My students have raved about the tutors and the help they've received. (B. L'Éplatténier, English)
- You are most helpful to my students. . . . This is a valuable service for Purdue University. (J. May, EDCI)
- I like the multitude of handouts...Great organization and efficiency. I've heard good things about the tutors. (T. McHenry, English)
- You are doing a terrific job—considering the number of people you handle. I couldn't ask for more. (H. Mickelson, English)
- I appreciate the help you offer students. (P. Moore, Communications)
- We appreciate the resource. (S. Nelson, CDFS)
- More staff would be fantastic. Many students have commented that they need more time and more appts. (M. Petray, English)
- Your contribution to the quality and performance of our graduates is very important. Thanks. (R.Taylor, Ag Econ)

D. From students who met with tutors in the Writing Lab

- Great source of information. Good people to learn from.
- Helped me structure my thoughts and paragraphs better.
- Very helpful!!
- One of the best sources for help.
- He asks me questions that really make me think.
- Very good help, friendly people, make you feel comfortable.
- Stuart tutors in a way that encourages a person to look at their work objectively.
- I think that having the writing lab here is extremely helpful and beneficial to all students.
- I like the atmosphere.
- This place is a great place to get help or just ideas on a paper.
- She helped me look at my paper from a different point of view. That helped a lot.
- She showed me how to set up a structure for my paper. She helped without talking down to me.
- If you have a block, as I did on how to write a paper, the tutor will help you remember what you have learned in the past
- My work is much improved because I use the lab.
- Helped me so much! I can write now!
- This is the place where they take a real interest in you.
- Richard is a great tutor. He helps you understand more what you're doing by having you do it yourself.
- She looked at my paper with an accepting attitude even though it was very shaky.
- The people here are very helpful and understanding.

- I'm trying to overcome my fear of writing, and this is the place to be.
- She really knows how to communicate with me in a way I understand.
- The tutor gave me a lot of information, he let me decide everything instead of telling me what to change or do.
- Very friendly and easy to talk to.
- It helped me get past a blocking point.
- Really didn't know what to expect. I really like how I had to make the effort to show what was wrong.
- It's nice talking to someone because it helps to bring out ideas.
- He made me really think and realize more than our TA did in class-w/o telling me exactly how to write.
- There is no other place where I can get this kind of help.
- It's very important to know that when I have a question about my writing that I have a place to go.
- These people know their stuff! But she didn't just give me answers. She got me thinking.
- He helped me sort through my lack of confidence.
- Made me think, didn't tell me what to do, just how to do it.
- I learned how to bring out ideas by asking questions and what to do and develop them.
- He helped me understand my prof's meaning.
- Very helpful, understanding—didn't talk down. Seemed very open to my questions.
- It's the place to go when I'm confused and can't get my thoughts down on paper.
- She helped me look at my paper in a different view.
- Colleen's tutorial style challenges you to think and re-think your material.
- I've seen marked improvements in my writing skill because of coming to the lab.
- She showed me how to get my thoughts on paper.
- He made me teach myself. He didn't tell me anything.
- She knows how to help without giving me all the answers. She makes me think.
- She develops my self-oriented capacity to correct my English.
- I liked that he gave me handouts so I can learn more and refresh my information when I need it.
- A painless way to learn about my writing.
- This is a WONDERFUL service.
- I received "5-star" help.
- You need more tutors. Expand.
- It was very helpful and makes a big difference when it comes to the grade.
- I wish you had more open hours.
- I was overwhelmed at how hard it is to get in for an appt. or walk-ins.
- I like the handouts so I can look back at them instead of coming in for every question.
- She made me think; forced me to ask myself necessary questions.
- The help at the Writing Lab allows you to think on your own as they guide you down the correct path.
- Karen helped me get over the fear of expressing my thoughts and working with the organization of my paper.
- I like how she wanted answers from me. She didn't just tell me what to do to make something right.
- He did not critique my paper, but he asked me questions that made me critique and think about my own paper.
- You guys seem very helpful, and people talk highly of the Writing Lab. It's a lot more friendly than some student services.
- There's a real problem in getting into the lab.
- I can't believe how much twenty or thirty minutes could help my writing.
- The most important aspect of the Writing Lab is the personalized attention you receive.
- They treat you as equals. It is not like teachers helping students. This makes the student feel more at ease so you can learn.