

# **Purdue University Writing Lab Report**

**1995-1996**

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**Muriel Harris, Writing Lab Director**

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## Summary

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During the 1995-1996 academic year, the Purdue University Writing Lab had 12,579 requests from 6,262 users for a variety of services, in addition to 4,865 requests at Purdue of our OWL (Online Writing Lab) and 297,640 OWL requests from users around the world. Particularly noteworthy in this year's work is the following:

- **Increased usage**

Usage figures indicate a 4% increase on campus with traditional services, plus offering e-mail and World Wide Web services to Purdue and the entire Internet community throughout the world.

- **Improved evaluations**

While usage has increased, evaluations remain very high, with 95% of student reporting the quality of instruction as very helpful, an increase of 1% over last year.

- **Use of OWL to provide campus instruction in Internet use**

In addition to instructors who made use of OWL materials for their classes and students who used OWL when writing papers, Writing Lab staff presented 40 workshops on OWL and the Internet in classrooms in various departments across campus.

- **University support for OWL**

Funds from the Faculty Reinvestment Program, the School of Liberal Arts, and the English Department made possible a .25 TA who served as the OWL Coordinator and provided much-needed upgrades of OWL equipment. Having a coordinator and upgraded equipment resulted in improved instructional capabilities and facilitated more workshops on OWL, both in the Writing Lab and in classrooms in campus computer labs.

- **Off-campus recognition of OWL**

OWL served as an ambassador for Purdue as the site was given a Four Star Award—the highest given—by The McKinley Group (which evaluates hundreds of thousands of World Wide Web sites). OWL was featured in a story in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and was the subject of presentations at national conferences, of journal articles, and of an invited workshop at Purdue-North Central.

- **Coordination of OWL with university recruitment efforts**

Because of extensive use of OWL by high school students and teachers, discussions with Admissions Office personnel have led to new initiatives to coordinate OWL with university recruitment efforts.

- **Professional development for the Writing Lab staff**

Both graduate and undergraduate tutors read papers at national and regional conferences. In addition, the Director had articles and book chapters accepted for publication and read papers on writing center theory and administration at national conferences, was a featured speaker at one national conference and the keynote speaker at another, and was invited to present a faculty workshop at another institution.

The Writing Lab continued to provide Purdue students with one-to-one tutorial assistance with writing skills as well as a variety of other services detailed in Part I. Statistical reports of this use are included as Part Two; and evaluation figures and comments from users of the Writing Lab's services are included in Part Three.

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## Part One: Staff, Services, and Users

### 1. Staffing

The 1995-96 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 coordinator 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 (Developmental Composition)
  - (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
  - (99 workshops held in classrooms by invitation of instructors)
- instructional handouts
  - (2,638 requests for 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 361 questions called in by students, staff, and faculty at Purdue, as well as calls from around the nation)
- 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), Internet writing 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 and literature courses (requests originated from 44 different courses in the fall and 37 different courses in the spring)
- students learning English as a second language
- students writing papers for hundreds of courses on campus (requests originated from 119 different courses in the fall and 104 different courses in the spring)
- students engaged in other writing projects such as resumes, professional school applications, dissertations, co-op reports, etc.
- 79 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, universities, and other institutions building collections via OWL of writing materials
- writers from all over the world sending questions about writing to OWL

## Part Two: Statistical Use of the Writing Lab

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### 1. Types of usage

	<u>no. of requests</u>	<u>no. of users</u>
Tutorial appointments	3712	1323
Drop-in sessions	1404	1109
Handouts to students	839	730
Handouts to instructors	1799	79
Microcomputers	86	73
Self-instruction tapes	3	3
Writing/studying in the lab	530	179
English 100	1678	238
Traveling Tutor workshops	2165	2165
Grammar Hotline	361	361
Unspecified	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
totals:	12,579	6,202
OWL		
on campus uses:	4,865	
off-campus uses:	297,640	

### 2. Most frequent use of the Writing Lab by departments

<u>Dept.</u>	<u>no. of requests</u>
English	4757
AGEC	203
EDCI	109
Com	85

### 3. Use of the Writing Lab by schools

	<u>no. of requests</u>	<u>no. of users</u>
a. Including students in freshman composition courses (N= 6,327)		
Liberal Arts	23.3%	8.4%
Mgmt	11.7%	7.6%
Sci	10.5%	7.1%
Tech	9.5%	3.1%
Ed	9.0%	.2%
Engineering	9.0%	
b. Excluding students in freshman composition courses (N= 2,750)		
Liberal Arts	25.2%	9.3%
Engineering	14.0%	7.0%
Ag	10.8%	6.1%
Sci	10.5%	5.4%
Ed	9.8%	1.9%
Tech		
CFS		
Pharm		
Mgmt		
Unknown		

## **Part Three: Evaluations and Comments**

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### **Evaluations**

Evaluations of individual tutorials (based on 3,003 responses):

a. Quality of instruction:

- very helpful
- somewhat helpful
- not helpful

95%  
5%  
0%

b. Amount learned:

- learned a lot
- learned a little
- learned nothing

90%  
10%  
0%

c. Likelihood that student would return to the Lab if further help is needed:

- very likely
- somewhat likely
- not likely

94%  
6%  
0%

### **Comments**

#### **A. From instructors whose students used the Writing Lab**

- "The lab is an excellent resource and very effective." (A. Erickson, English)
- "Your handouts always provide good help with my students' drafting and planning concerns. The handouts for instructors are a great resource for class lecture and discussion." (T. Henning, English)
- "Several of my students who used OWL told me they found it very helpful." (A. Matsuda, English)
- "I really do think that Purdue's Writing Lab is TOPS! I'm impressed with the Lab's outreach." (S. Turner, English)
- "I've found it extremely helpful to be able to access the handouts over the computer (through OWL)." (J. Barrett, English)
- "My students have only one complaint: The Writing Lab is too crowded! They have to wait literally hours to receive walk-in help." (B. Blackwell, English)
- "Thank you for your "collaboration" in teaching English 101 this semester." (M. Byrne, English)
- "Your resources provide me with a wonderful array of instructional materials that I can target for the particular problems of individual students." (T. Clemens, English)
- "I saw genuine improvement on final drafts after tutorials." (P. Douglas, English)
- "Have more time available for students." (M. Gibney, Political Science)
- "Your instructional handouts for instructors are useful for developing and grading writing assignments." (M. Gray, Biology)
- "The Writing Lab is valuable as an available resource I can always direct my students to." (P. Mathew, EDCI)
- "The Writing Lab helps by providing feedback and assistance to my students as they prepare resumes." (S. Nelson, CDFS)
- "Expand your services/hours—we need more of you!" (M. Oliver, English)

- “Thanks for your hard work and dedication.” (T. Peele, English)
- “You guys are terrific!” (M. Price, English)
- “Many of my students used the Writing Lab this semester. Most of these students showed improvement in their work. Thanks for your help.” (J. Purvis, English)
- “I can’t work individually with each of my students, so the Writing Lab is important. They can get the attention they need, and work on things that we couldn’t cover in class. You need more tutors, a bigger lab!” (L. Benjamin-Ramirez, English)
- “Students value your services.” (K. Rice, EDPS)
- “Many students have expressed difficulty in getting in to talk to a tutor.” (N. Stillman-Webb, English)
- “The lab is a great asset and help for me. Please keep up the good work. Thank you.” (J. Uhl, AGECC)
- “Great services—I’ll continue to remind students to take advantage of this resource.” (W. Fox, EDCl)
- “Your tutorial services are helpful to students. . . . One of my students showed marked improvement after coming to see you. Her ideas were expressed more clearly; she paid more attention to proofreading.” (J. Martin, Elem Ed)
- “You do a very remarkable job. Your limitations are too few resources.” (W. McLaughlan, Pol. Sci.)
- “Several of my students complained that they had a difficult time getting an appointment. I realize that your budgets are limited, but...you guys need more help!” (C. Tryon, English)
- “I especially like the resources available to me to help students.” (G. Emerson, EDCl)
- “Glad you’re there! . . . You were very important in developing my student’s writing skills and confidence in her ability to write English.” (L. Fontes, CDPS)
- “I think you offer an indispensable service; I’ve seen ways in which you can be really effective.” (S. Ganesh, Com)
- “Keep up the good work.” (P. Georgeoff, EDFA)
- “You’ve especially been a great help to one of my students who has a learning disability.” (C. Salinas, English)
- “My students greatly benefit from visiting the writing lab and love the handouts that help them with their research.” (G. Wetach, English)
- “My only wish (and I’m sure this is yours, too) is that the lab had a larger staff. I’ve had students complain about long waits, not being able to get an appointment within our paper cycle, etc.” (W. Womack, English)

## **B. From students who met with tutors in the Writing Lab**

- “She was very good at making me think about my paper and not telling me what to write.”
- “Overall I think it helps a lot just to talk through my paper with someone.”
- “I can already see improvement in my writing.”
- “I feel a lot more confident about my writing now.”
- “It showed me just having someone to talk to helps find ideas you didn’t know were there.”
- “The lab helped me help myself.”
- “He helped me to get past some blocks.”
- “Now I have some confidence in myself with this paper.”
- “My papers are getting better every time I come in here.”
- “Very helpful, a sounding board for my ideas.”
- “This place is a must for grad school papers!”
- “Both times I’ve been here, I’ve walked away less stressful about my papers.”
- “The tutors are very helpful and know what they’re doing!”
- “I had writer’s block. Now I don’t.”
- “He really acted as if he cares. It was nice to have someone take time to help me.”
- “Very helpful, instead of thinking through things for me, the tutor made me do the thinking and just kind of had questions to guide my ideas.”

- "I learned some good methods to brainstorm."
- "This lab helps you help yourself."
- "He helped me to step back and look at my ideas and figure out where I was stuck in my writing."
- "He gave me help not only with that paper but papers in general."
- "This is my second time, and I did much better on the paper that brought me here the first time. This writing lab is a great, helpful idea. Keep it up. Too bad it's always booked!"
- "It was really helpful to talk to someone who knew what they were doing but wasn't the one grading my paper."
- "I not only fixed problems. I learned from them."
- "My paper is 100% better!"
- "All my experience with this lab has been helpful."
- "She wanted me to read my paper out loud which was a good idea. I could see more problems already, even before we started."
- "Writing Lab is always helping me."
- "It has given me more courage and confidence on my paper."
- "It helps greatly with my writing skills."
- "My talking with her really helped me organize my thoughts."
- "With this lab English courses are somewhat less scary."
- "He answered all my questions, no matter how small."
- "I liked having a conversation with a tutor instead of being talked at."
- "I really felt comfortable talking about what was wrong with my papers."
- "He helped me realize that I had drifted in my paper. He didn't point it out, but he helped me see how I can work towards a strong line of relevant events."
- "He didn't talk over my head and he listened."
- "Everything I had a question on was answered in full."
- "I always learn here and my papers seem to be improving."
- "This makes me want to continue learning to write."
- "She explained so well, even things I tried to figure out in the book but couldn't."
- "He made me think to get the ideas for the paper, instead of just saying his own ideas. He was a big help."
- "He was a lot of help. He was good because it seemed as though he was really interested and wanted to help."
- "Made me truly understand what I was doing wrong and how to change it."
- "He cleared up a lot of my questions I had on my paper."
- "I see drastic improvements in my writing."
- "His explaining was on my level."
- "Good listener, keep on doing the good work."
- "Thanks for the handout. That will help a lot."
- "I always receive so much help at the lab."
- "I wish I didn't have so much trouble in trying to get in here. You're always booked up."
- "He didn't just give ideas, but helped to clarify the ones I already had."
- "There were tips that were useful for future assignments as well as the current one."
- "He made me do my work. Didn't depend on him for the answers."
- "Very committed to helping"
- "You need more open hours or more tutors, or something. I have to wait to get in."
- "It really helps to have objective feedback."
- "This is the best. Hands on help (person to person)."
- "He dramatically changed my perceptions on resume writing."
- "This is an excellent place to get help on English papers and all other papers."
- "He helped me pull my thoughts together."
- "I always learn something every time I come to the Writing Lab."
- "It's like she opened a window for my eyes."



- “She helped me solve problems that I have about the thesis statement. She explains things so clearly.”
- “The tutor gave me very helpful insight on my paper, giving me the right amount of help without doing it for me but assisting me well.”
- “This is the best help source I know around Purdue.”
- “She produced relevant materials as resource examples.”
- “She helped me to think and see things in a different way to more effectively show it in my writing.”
- “Everyone has been very helpful and my grades have been consistently high.”
- “She really helped me develop my ideas and the point I was trying to get across in my paper.”
- “I’m really starting to write better.”
- “He was friendly and made me think instead of telling me what to put in my paper.”
- “She helped me organize my thoughts.”
- “They ask for your input. They don’t just tell you what to do.”
- “She showed me what questions to ask myself.”
- “She taught me a new method to help me fix grammar on my own.”
- “I’m able to do things that I hadn’t previously.”
- “They help you discover for yourself what needs to be done.”
- “I had been struggling in my English class, and thanks to the lab I have received decent grades on my last couple of papers. I have learned to organize and be persuasive.”
- “She allowed me to come up with my own ideas and feel confident in my writing skills.”
- “He didn’t tell me how I should think and write. He helped me develop thoughts and maintain my style while I polish my work.”
- “With the help of the Writing Lab, I can really improve my writing.”
- “Amazing improvement on the thoughts and options of my paper. More than helpful!”
- “Relaxed, helpful atmosphere.”
- “The help was fantastic. (The popcorn is pretty good too.)”
- “She didn’t tell me how to write my paper, but she encouraged me to think of ideas on my own.”
- “I learned how to focus on a certain topic instead of a broad picture.”
- “The lab helps me think for myself and learn how to critique my own writing.”
- “The Writing Lab is the most helpful facility on campus.”
- “Mainly what I learned was how to better state the things I already wanted to say.”
- “I have been to the lab twice and both times I have gained many valuable lessons in writing.”
- “She explained to me my mistakes but did not put words in my mouth. She made me sort of think out and see my problems.”
- “I learned another way to brainstorm and end writer’s block.”
- “Excellent help. Never had the chance for personal, 1-to-1 help before.”
- “Through coming here my grades have improved dramatically.”
- “He was great. He made me do the work and didn’t just tell me what was wrong.”
- “Having someone who won’t grade your paper helps. You can speak your mind and not get a grade.”
- “I learned to question my own statements. That’s something I’ll consciously do now.”
- “I learned ways to write I never had before.”
- “I felt he helped me get on the right track to writing a better thesis without doing it for me. He had me tell him about my paper and then helped me organize my own ideas. This helped me A LOT!”
- “My tutor taught me things that I think will help me in English for the rest of my college years.”
- “I learned what questions to ask myself while analyzing my topic.”
- “This is the best person-to-person assistance that is offered by Purdue University.”
- “Your service deserves more funding. It is very helpful.”