

WRITING LAB REPORT

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## SUMMARY

In the Spring, 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 893 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 in for regularly scheduled tutorial appointments, the largest proportion were students registered in the schools of Engineering (23%), HSSE (18%), Agriculture (17%), and Management (12%). The remaining students were registered in Science (7%), Consumer and Family Science (6%), Pharmacy (4%), Technology (4%), Veterinary Medicine (4%), or were unclassified (5%).

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 91% of the students who worked in the lab showed definite improvement in their mastery of writing skills, and the grades for 76% of these students rose either one or two letter grades. Instructors also reported that 60% of the students evaluated showed noticeable improvement in their confidence in themselves and their abilities, and 78% indicated an increased motivation to write well.

When students evaluated the lab, all rated the quality of instruction as adequate or better, with 88% judging the instruction to be clear and effective. Of the students who responded, 95% felt they had made genuine progress in their writing, and 84% reported that their lab instructors were very helpful and very competent.

Another major use of the lab in the fall semester was by the composition staff who frequently 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, faculty members from other universities wrote to the Writing Lab to ask for materials and suggestions for starting their own labs.

CONTENTS

A. WRITING LAB INSTRUCTION AND SERVICES . . . . . p. 1

1. Publicity . . . . . p. 1

2. Instruction in Writing Skills . . . . . p. 2

    a. Regularly scheduled tutorial instruction . . . . . p. 2

    b. Drop-in help . . . . . p. 2

    c. Mini-courses . . . . . p. 3

    d. Self-instruction materials . . . . . p. 4

3. Resource Center . . . . . p. 5

    a. Resource File for the composition staff. . . . . p. 5

    b. Resource for other institutions. . . . . p. 6

4. Other Programs. . . . . p. 6

B. STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF THE USE OF THE LAB. . . . . p. 7

C. EVALUATION OF STUDENTS' PROGRESS . . . . . p. 10

1. Instructors' Evaluations of Students. . . . . p. 10

2. Students' Evaluations of the Writing Lab. . . . . p. 11

## A. WRITING LAB INSTRUCTION AND SERVICES

In the Spring, 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 spring semester included the following:

1. Publicity. In its continuing effort to remind students and instructors of the lab's facilities, the lab sent out memos to all instructors of composition; held a coffee hour during the second week of classes for all members of the English department in order to acquaint them with the lab; held a workshop for new instructors; sent wallet card reminders to all students enrolled in composition courses; and visited classes when invited to answer questions about the lab's services. In addition, an article appeared in the February issue of Purdue Reports, and reminder articles and notices appeared in the Purdue Exponent. Beginning with the Fall, 1977 semester a brief description of the lab's facilities will appear in the orientation booklet sent to all new freshmen, and a more informative handout, for distribution in the composition classes, is planned.

The Writing Lab has also been described by the director in articles appearing in College Composition and Communication, Arizona English Bulletin, and Resources In Education, and in a paper presented at the 1977 Conference on College Composition and Communication. The Writing Lab

Newsletter, recently initiated by the lab's director, is sent to other lab personnel around the country and has contained informative items about the Writing Lab.

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 attend regularly scheduled appointments with a lab instructor. This offers the instructor and the student the opportunity to establish a comfortable working relationship and to proceed more slowly when extensive remediation is needed. A lab instructor working with a student on a long-term basis is also able to follow the student's progress in his classroom writing and to discuss the student's improvement with his composition instructor. ESL students who are coming to the lab in greater numbers than was previously the case also appreciate the opportunity to work through an extensive program of study with one instructor.

b. Drop-in help.

Because the lab instructors also want to provide help for students who have a quick question, need a hand-out or two from the lab's files, or want only a little extra help, the staff instituted a new format in which one-fourth of their regular hours were scheduled 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

to proofread their themes before being handed in, etc. Because some instructors encourage their students to get this kind of help while others prefer that their students work alone, questionnaires were sent to the entire composition staff at the beginning of the semester, so that students would only be provided with this type help if it was deemed appropriate by their instructors.

The new format of drop-in hours appears to be very successful. Of the 220 students who came in without regularly scheduled appointments, many expressed their appreciation for not having to wait several weeks for an appointment (the usual waiting period during the busy mid-semester rush). By semester's end, the staff felt that drop-in time offered the opportunity for effective instruction at the time that it was needed. However, some students mistakenly viewed drop-in time as an opportunity to have someone proofread or edit assignments about to be turned in, but the lab staff attempted in all cases to answer only specific questions that the student had. That the lab does not merely edit papers will be stated emphatically in the handout that is planned for distribution next fall.

When asked to evaluate the usefulness of the new drop-in system, 63% of the composition instructors who responded indicated that it was of great help to their students, and the remaining 37% reported that it was of some help.

c. Mini-courses.

As in previous semesters, the Writing Lab again held five mini-courses intended as one-hour brush-ups or review of the subject. Each mini-course was held twice, and in some cases

new materials were developed to use in these sessions. As in previous semesters, attendance at these mini-courses was so heavy (averaging over 30 students per session) that lab instructors several times had to refuse to admit some students after all available space in the room was occupied. However, the lab staff was pleased to have several faculty members attend as well as more students from a wide range of English courses.

When asked to evaluate these mini-courses, 55% of those composition instructors who responded said that they were of great help; and of the remaining 45% who indicated that the courses were of some help, many reported that their students complained of the over-crowded sessions. Since previous requests by the lab to have students pre-register were unsuccessful, it is not clear how this problem can be avoided, though more repetitions of each mini-course (spaced throughout the semester) are planned for next fall.

d. Self-instruction materials

With funds provided by the English Department and the Dean's Office during the previous summer, the Writing Lab purchased an extensive set of tape and booklet self-instruction modules on spelling, grammar, and rhetoric; and a slide and tape program on term papers was added during the winter. In addition to the supplementary use of these materials by students working in the lab, an additional 123 students came in to work independently and completed 155 modules as part of work assigned by their composition instructors. When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of these self-instruction materials, 27% of the composition staff who responded said that the modules were of



great help, and another 53% of the respondents reported that the materials were of much help. The remaining 20% reported that the self-instructional materials were of some help; none stated that they were of little or no help.

When the number of students using these modules last fall are added in, a total of 242 students were provided with 363 hours of instruction for a total cost of slightly under \$900. A grant from the Dean's Office which will fund the purchase of an additional tape cassette player and a slide and tape projector will undoubtedly increase the use of these materials next year, and the collection will be expanded by the addition of three slide and tape programs funded through an Instructional Improvement Grant recently awarded to the lab's director. More self-instructional tape and booklet modules will also be added, funded through the lab's budget and also through the English Department's audio-visual materials budget.

3. Resource Center

a. Resource File for the composition staff.

The Writing Lab's Resource File of materials on composition teaching, which was ready for use last fall, continued to be heavily used in the spring semester. Instructors, particularly the new members of the staff added in January, came in often 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. The sign-up sheet entries indicate that 42 instructors used the

file, some only once and others as many as ten times. Other users of the Resource File included the staff of the Learning Center and the Office of Writing Review.

When asked to evaluate the lab's Resource File, all of the instructors who answered the questionnaire responded that it was helpful to some degree. Of the respondents, 36% said the file was of great help, 57% reported that it was of much help, and the remaining 7% said it was of some help. The lab deems the Resource File to be a success and plans to continue to expand it by purchasing more books, copying more articles from journals of composition, and collecting further contributions from the composition staff.

b. Resource for other institutions.

Other universities, such as Temple, University of Wyoming, Douglass College of Rutgers, etc., continue to write to the Writing Lab for information, and all requests are answered with copies of some of the lab's materials and reports.

4. Other Programs

In addition to its regular programs, the Writing Lab has also been available as a facility for students in English 002 to listen to tapes for their course, and the lab was also used by students in English 101 sections following an experimental syllabus which required that they prepare for workshop sessions of their classroom by listening to tapes left for them in the Writing Lab. This summer the lab staff, funded by an Instructional Improvement Grant, will be developing multi-media instructional materials. Finally, a program planned for next year is the practicum in the lab for English teaching majors.

B. STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF THE USE OF THE LAB

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

Table 1. Total number of students using the lab.

1.	No. of students attending the lab for tutorial appointments:	164
2.	No. of students using the lab as a drop-in center:	220
3.	No. of students attending mini-courses	386
4.	No. of students using the self-instruction modules	<u>123</u>
	TOTAL	893

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	37	37
2	33	66
3	28	84
4	28	112
5	10	50
6	7	42
7	8	56
8	3	24
9	2	18

Table 2. (continued)

<u>No. of appts. per student</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>Total no. of appts.</u>
10	3	30
11	1	11
13	2	26
14	1	14
24	1	<u>24</u>
TOTAL NO. OF APPTS.		594

Table 3. 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	96	96
2	22	44
3	5	15

Table 4. Description by courses of students attending the lab for tutorial appointments and mini-courses

<u>Course no.</u>	<u>No. of students attending tutorial appointments</u>	<u>No. of students attending mini-courses</u>	<u>Totals</u>
A. COMPOSITION COURSES			
English 002	2	1	3
English 100	24	1	25
English 101	35	34	69
English 102	55	305	360
English 102M			
English 103	3	0	3
English 105	15	8	23
English 420	2	0	2

Table 4. (continued)

<u>Course no.</u>	<u>No. of students attending tutorial appointments</u>	<u>No. of students attending mini-courses</u>	<u>Totals</u>
<b>B. OTHER COURSES</b>			
English 250	1	0	1
English 304	1	0	1
English 405	1	3	4
English 442	1	0	1
English 463	1	1	2
English 491	0	10	10
English 589	0	1	1
English 596	1	0	1
Ag Econ 651	1	0	1
Communications 114	1	0	1
Communications 212	1	0	1
Communications 490	0	3	3
Ed psych	1	0	1
Education 485	1	0	1
History 500	1	0	1
Nursing	1	0	1
Sociology 350	1	0	1
Sociology 382	0	1	1
Other undergraduates	4	10	14
Other graduate students	5	2	7
Purdue faculty & staff	1	6	7
<b>C. GRADUATE STUDENTS PREPARING FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY EXAMS</b>			
	4	0	4

Table 5. Description by school of students attending the lab for tutorial appointments

<u>School</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Agriculture	27	17
CFS	9	6
Engineering	38	23
HSSE	30	18
Management	20	12

Table 5. (continued)

<u>School</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Pharmacy	7	4
Science	12	7
Technology	6	4
Veterinary Medicine	6	4
Other (including Unclassified students)	9	5

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 16% of the students needed only some help, 21% needed much help; and 63% needed a great deal of help. Responses to the question concerning subject mastery indicate that 91% of the students demonstrated definite improvement in the areas of writing skills studied in the lab, and the grades for 76% rose either one or two letter grades. Composition instructors also reported that 54% of the students indicated to their instructors that they appreciated the lab's help, and 60% of the students rated in these questionnaires showed noticeable improvement in their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Of the students evaluated for motivation, 78% indicated an increased desire to write well. Finally, 95% of the composition instructors who responded to the questionnaire rated the feedback from the lab as adequate to excellent.

2. Students' Evaluations of the Writing Lab

When students evaluated their work in the Writing Lab in a four-item questionnaire, all of the respondents rated the quality of their instruction as adequate or better, with 88% rating the instruction as clear and effective. Of the students who returned the questionnaires, 95% felt that they had made definite progress in their writing as a result of their lab work, and 66% of these students reported that what they learned in the lab enabled them to write better papers and to have their grades in composition courses raised one to two letters. All of the students evaluated the quality of their instructors' help as adequate or better, with 84% reporting that their lab instructors were very helpful and very competent.