

Purdue Writing Lab Report

1990-1991

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Contents

Summary	1
1. Staffing and Services	1
2. Statistics	3
3. Evaluations	4
4. Future Directions	4
Attachments	5

Writing Lab Report: 1990-91

Summary

Statistics for use of the English Department's Writing Lab for the fall and spring semesters, 1990-91, indicate that the Writing Lab served 8,018 students and instructors at Purdue University and others who phoned in (locally or from across the nation) to our Grammar Hotline. Judging from our evaluations, summarized in Attachment C to this report, we are pleased to report that over 98% of the students reported improvement in writing skills and over 97% of the instructors agreed that our instruction resulted in students' improvement.

Our major emphasis continued to be that of providing the one-to-one, individualized contact that writers need to develop their skills. We offered reader response, asked and answered questions, offered writing strategies, diagnosed and dealt with writing problems, and engaged in collaborative conversations about writing. While the majority of our tutoring is with students enrolled in writing courses in the English Department, we also provided writing help for students enrolled in English Department literature courses and over 300 courses in other departments at Purdue.

This report will discuss the work of the Writing Lab in terms of 1) our staffing and services, with a listing of staff, a review of our various services, and a summary of noteworthy accomplishments for the year; 2) statistical summary; 3) evaluations; and 4) future trends.

1. Staffing and Services

A. Staffing

This year's Lab staff consisted of fourteen graduate teaching assistants, a temporary assistant director, and myself, plus a receptionist, a secretary, work/study assistance with clerical tasks, a computer consultant, and 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). The Lab was open five days a week, plus three evenings, for a total of 54 hours/week.

B. Services

Together, the instructional staff offered tutorials, drop-in assistance on a first-come/first-served basis, workshops, Traveling Teacher sessions in writing classes and in other classrooms across campus, instructional handouts, self-instruction tapes, tutor training practicums, a grammar hotline, computers for word processing and computer-assisted-instruction, faculty workshops, and a library of books, journals, and reference materials.

The population whom we served represents a wide variety of writers and teachers, including the following:

- Students enrolled in English Department writing courses (English 100, 101, 102, 103, 109, 304, 420, and 421)

- Students enrolled in English-as-a-Second-Language courses (English 001 and 002) or preparing for the graduate writing requirement for international students (English 009)
- Students enrolled in a variety of literature courses in the English Department (English 231, 237, 241, 250, 257, 267, 305, 351, 361, and 376)
- Students enrolled in a variety of Communication Department courses (Communication 114, 212, 252, 253, 312, 324, 325, 330, 352, 353, 356, 415, 435, 453, 456, 458, 461, 490, 491, 512, 534, 558, 563, 584, 590, and 618)
- Graduate students taking the English Proficiency Exam in the Office of Writing Review
- Students preparing resumes and job applications
- Students using computers for writing assignments, simulations, and self-instruction
- Students writing papers for a wide variety of courses in other departments (Courses in which there were five or more requests for lab services include AG ECON 331; BC 300; BIOL 301; CPT 154 and 280; CSR 309; EBFL 101; ECON 650; EDCI 311, 317, and 570; EDFA 500; EDPS 230; GEO 100; GS 190, 199, 290, and 490; HIST 152 and 271, HS 470; IT 172; MGMT 100 and 653; NS 213; NURS 502; PHIL 270; POL SCI 141, 223, 417, 460, 560, and 561; PSY 240; RHI 590; and SPV 252 and 486.)
- Students in three sections of practicum courses in tutoring writing (English 390 and 502W)
- Composition instructors who need professional journals, books, and instructional materials on teaching writing skills
- Purdue faculty who request assistance in adding writing skills to their courses

Other noteworthy accomplishments during the year include the following:

- Being funded by the Dean of Students Office for an additional tutor to work with learning disabled students
- Having three of our graduate student lab instructors present papers about their writing lab work at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (a national conference on composition) and three of our graduate student lab instructors and eight of our peer tutors present papers and workshops at the East Central Writing Centers Association Conference (a regional writing centers conference)
- Having one of our graduate student lab instructors serve on the Board of the East Central Writing Centers Association
- Holding faculty development workshops jointly with the Center for Instructional Services on developing effective writing assignments
- Using desktop publishing facilities, provided by Donald Brown, Dean of Academic Services, to improve the instructional effectiveness of our instructional handouts
- Meeting with advisors across campus, Faculty Fellows, and student organizations to introduce the services of the Writing Lab and to review basic principles of effective writing

- Offering tutoring to journalism students by Charles Leslie (University Relations Office), who donated his time and expertise as a tutor for one evening each week
- Being featured in the *Exponent*, the *Liberal Arts Newsletter*, and Purdue brochures
- Offering self-paced, non-credit courses on writing skills for people in the community
- Holding resume workshops for university-sponsored student organizations
- Hosting visitors from other campuses and high schools across the country who made on-site visits to study our Lab as a model for developing their own facilities, including the Director of the new writing center at Indiana University
- Hosting a group of high school tutors who met with our peer tutors
- Providing our facilities for an extensive research project for a graduate student in Communication and for another research project for a graduate student in English

2. Statistics

	Total no. of uses	Total no. of people
No. of tutorial appointments	2480	1485
No. of drop-in sessions	3052	1265
No. of student requests for instructional handouts	2763	1940
No. of uses of microcomputers	549	328
No. of self-instruction modules	132	66
No. of uses of Lab for writing room	2913	465
No. of requests from English 100 students	4738	268
No. of instructor requests for handouts	235	137
No. of students attending Traveling Teacher sessions	1463	1463
Unspecified	84	66
No. of grammar hotline calls	535	535
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> totals 18,944 8018 </div>		

3. Evaluations

As with past evaluations, teachers and students who filled out and returned questionnaires each semester continued to rate the Lab's services very highly, responding that our instruction was effective and that students' writing and their grades improved because of their Lab work. A summary of the responses is included as Attachment C to this report. In the fall semester, students were asked to evaluate tutorials after every session; in the spring, students were asked for evaluations at the end of the semester.

Teachers noted that the Lab performs a necessary service in providing the individualized instruction that writers need and that classroom instructors are not able to offer. Instructors also commented on the usefulness of the handouts as resources for their teaching, and visitors to our Lab requested copies as resources for other labs that are developing or expanding across the country. Traveling Teacher sessions were also noted as useful, and letters from faculty and student organizations around campus who requested sessions indicated how useful these workshops were. Student comments on the evaluations indicated that they valued the instruction, the tutors' ability to help them think and to find their own answers, the individual attention, the immediate feedback, and the friendly environment.

The only complaint—which recurred with alarming frequency—was that students were forced to wait for tutors or were unable to get sufficient help. Inadequate staffing continues to be a problem, one that results in keeping students waiting days or even weeks for appointments. Drop-in, during busy periods, can also meet waits of an hour or two. Some students requested weekend hours, but we do not have adequate staff for this. If the anticipated reduction in TA teaching loads leads to staff reductions, the problem of inadequate hours and tutors will become even more severe, depriving more students of the individualized component of their writing courses and eliminating any writing help for students writing in other courses in the English Department and across campus.

4. Future Directions

As we prepare for 1991-92, it is clear that the Writing Lab has some on-going needs and new directions to explore. In an attempt to stay within our newly assigned budget, we bought no new equipment or materials, reduced duplicating (despite comments by students and teachers that this is a valuable educational service), and eliminated other normal expenditures. But by mid-year, we still needed additional funds for basic operating costs. It was hoped that some of the yearly budget could be used for some planned growth and replacement of antiquated materials; however, replacement parts for older equipment overstrained our resources. The inadequate budget is definitely a problem that will need to be addressed.

One direction to explore in the coming year is the Writing Lab's contribution to student retention at Purdue. With the help of personnel in the Registrar's Office, we hope to do some statistical studies which we will offer to the School of Liberal Arts Committee on Retention, as well as a report on some of the less quantifiable benefits of personal attention and one-to-one interaction which the Writing Lab offers to students.

As we look forward to the next academic year, we remain committed to our goal of having the Lab serve as a useful, effective, well-functioning tutorial service for Purdue students and as a nationally recognized model for writing labs across the country. We thank the head of the English Department, Dr. Margaret Rowe, for her support and encouragement which permits us to continue our commitment to helping students become more proficient writers.

A. Comments from Teachers

- The Lab has helped me the most by being available for my students.- A. Luchetts (Communication)
- I appreciate your help with all these students. Clearly, I had the best set of papers ever! -Prof. A. Altermatt (CDFS)
- In survey classes I now feel much more comfortable assigning papers or asking students to rewrite exams as papers since I know that I can refer students to the Writing Lab for the help they need. The Writing Lab is an invaluable resource for the entire faculty. -Prof. N. Myers (English)
- Our staff in Agec 331 really appreciate the time and effort put forth by all of the Writing Lab staff (tutors and receptionists). We stress written communication skills and without your input to our students our goals would not be fulfilled. -Prof. D. Downey (Ag Econ)
- Keep up the good work! -S. Scholz (Philosophy)
- Both Marty's grade and attitude improved largely because of the writing lab. -J. Holltsman (English)
- You need more funding for more assistants at peak "seasons." All grad students should do a rotation in the lab. -M. Morris (English)
- I think the lab is very useful and urge students to make use of it. -L. Anderson (English)
- I think the Writing Lab and its instructors are fantastic. -M. Price (English)
- I'm glad the Writing Lab was there. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't been there! -Prof. B. Burleson (Communication)
- I really appreciate the work you do with the students. Keep up the fine efforts. -Prof. L. Neher (IT)
- A great help. Renee required a great deal of help that I just didn't have the time to provide. The Lab was a Godsend for her. Thanks! -S. Keen (English)
- Dustin may well go on to include writing as a factor in career choice. I believe the positive reception and encouragement from the Writing Lab staff may well be a role player in that decision. It is a shame the Writing Lab is so booked up that not more students can take advantage of all it offers. Many of my students have been discouraged by the waiting time and haven't pursued what might have well been a highly profitable encounter. -M. Roadruck (English)
- Thank you for your help. It seems that we call upon the Writing Lab periodically and the response is always the same: enthusiastic! -Prof. D. DeWitt (ME)
- Just a word of thanks...and a wider expression of gratitude to the Writing Lab for the help they have given my students over many years. -Prof. S. Shermis (Education)

- The problems my students have displayed have been helped through individual instruction, and most have improved tremendously. I also appreciate having a variety of handouts available. I've used many of them in my classes. -J. Hansen (English)
- I feel very fortunate that this service is offered. I do not have the time to review 100+ students' papers before they are turned in. Your services have helped improve the general writing skills. Thank you. - C. Snyder (CPT)
- Your lab needs more people, more funding, more equipment, and anything else it takes to give these students the help they so dreadfully need. As an educator, I am both alarmed and frustrated with this situation. -P. Secklin (Communication)
- Whenever a student uses the W. Lab at least three times during the semester, their work improves dramatically. -R. Leffers (English)
- I am very impressed with the help given to Brian and other students in my class. All have shown enormous improvement in their writing skills. -J. Tretter (Pol. Sci.)

B. Comments from Students

- The help I received from the lab gave me insight into the writing process. When I left from the lab, I had a better understanding of how written papers should be developed. -R. Cumberland
- I think the Writing Lab is a very good idea. The only disadvantage is that it is very hard to get an appointment as the tutors are all booked. Maybe more people should work there. -N. D'Sousa
- I think it needs to be bigger so you can help more students because everyone needs to go to the writing lab. -M. Covely
- I think the lab is the greatest. I have learned a lot from it. The tutors helped me understand more about what writing is and how I should approach it. English class is good also but it can't help you as much individually. -C. Cooke
- The handouts were helpful and the tutor was very helpful. -A. Allison
- All I can say is that this writing lab is excellent in helping me sort through the paper writing process. -H. Hedrick
- Handouts really help! -J. Leininger
- I liked the people. They were attentive and very helpful. -A. Garinger
- An incredible resource! Writing Lab helped me quite a bit. -J. Boecher

- I think they should also have a few people during the weekends. At certain times of the year many of the English classes have big projects and it's hard to make an appointment when it is too crowded. -A. Heineman
- She helped me enjoy writing in the right style. -S. Ware
- It is really a great service and it seems as though everyone is really willing to help you and work with you. -A. Girvin
- I also received some handouts on writing a resume: they were extremely helpful! -A. Faruki
- I liked the one on one help the writing lab provided. -B. Camp
- My only suggestion is for the Writing Lab to recruit more tutors because the amount of tutors right now is not enough, especially during papers' due dates. -V. Cabrera-Velez
- Helped me with my style and clarity. Helped me write better papers and improved my grade a lot. -K. Rohr
- I feel more confident in what I'm writing about now! -C. Ketzler
- I like the lab, mainly because questions I had can be answered and I could get some help in areas needed. -J. Overby
- It gave me a couple approaches that I had not thought of. -M. Balla
- As an adult student, I find having an adult reader/critic very valuable. In-class peer review is fine, but there's a limit to how much value this can have when done by them. -C. Dunden
- The Writing Lab has helped me realize how to put material together and explain my points in greater detail. -M. Strain
- I was only able to get in once. There were no times available. -J. Reynolds

C. Summary of Evaluations

A. From instructors (percentages based on 335 responses)

1. Students' writing improvement:
 - great improvement 47%
 - some improvement 50%
 - no improvement 3%
2. Students' grade improvement:
 - one letter grade or more 72%
 - up to one letter grade 20%
 - none or less than one letter grade 8%

3. Students' attitude toward the Lab:

- appreciation 40%
- little or no feeling expressed 58%
- resentment 2%

4. Feedback from Lab instructors:

- excellent 74%
- adequate 25%
- little or none 1%

5. Evaluation of Writing Lab services:

- very helpful 90%
- somewhat helpful 10%
- not helpful 0%

B. From students

Fall semester (percentages based on 1124 responses made after individual sessions)

1. Quality of instruction

- Very helpful 90%
- Somewhat helpful 9%
- Not helpful 1%

Spring Semester (percentages based on 181 responses)

1. Quality of instruction:

- very helpful and clear 86%
- adequate 12%
- not helpful or clear 2%

2. Writing progress:

- great deal of progress 66%
- some progress 32%
- no progress 2%

3. Grade improvement:

- one letter or more 64%
- up to one letter 28%
- dropped or didn't change 8%