

Purdue University Writing Lab

Annual Report: 1992-93

A. Services

• Student services

As a campus-wide support service for writing skills, the Purdue University Writing Lab worked with 6215 students, offering tutorial help, handouts, self-instruction materials, computers for word processing, a resource room for writing, a Grammar Hotline, and workshops. The constituencies served include the following:

Undergraduates:

Students requested tutorials to work on papers for over 400 courses on campus; learn English as a second language; or write resumes, job applications, and applications to graduate schools.

Graduate students:

Graduate students requested tutorial help to write papers for various courses; prepare abstracts, proposals, and dissertations; study for the English proficiency exam, or learn English as a second language.

We are pleased to report a 3% increase in services over last year. The most needed new service added this year was the Self-Study Center for international students learning English as a Second Language. Funding from a Faculty Incentive Grant from the Dean of Liberal Arts provided ESL students with hundreds of hours of self-study. In addition, we initiated a service which provided tutors in selected residence halls.

• Faculty support and outreach

The value of Writing Lab support to classroom teachers is reflected in "Comments from Instructors" in Appendix D. Additional faculty support was offered through CIS workshops, personal consultations, in-class workshops on writing skills, lab instructional materials used by instructors, and seminars with Sociology, CDFS, and Pharmacy Practice graduate teaching assistants on improving writing skills in the courses they teach. Outreach activities included meeting with visitors who came to study our lab as a model, answering frequent phone and letter requests for more information about tutorial instruction in writing, and accepting invitations by Indiana University and the University of Illinois to hold workshops on writing skills for their faculty and graduate students.

• Planned expansion of services

An innovation in lab services will begin next fall as we add electronic tutoring through OWL (On-line Writing Lab). Start-up funding from the Dean of Academic Services permitted the Writing Lab to develop an e-mail service that will permit students using any computer networked to PUCC (in residence halls or computer labs on campus) to send questions about writing and to obtain copies of instructional handouts on writing skills. Instructors in any course can download handouts and modify them for their own instructional use. While other university writing centers are exploring electronic tutoring as a form of distance learning, this will be the first and most comprehensive on-line service in the nation if additional funding becomes available to develop a PUCC proposal.

B. Goals Achieved

• Enhancing the quality of the undergraduate and graduate experience

Evaluations returned by over 3000 students indicated that 99% reported improvement in their writing skills, and additional comments indicated the

importance of the lab's friendly, supportive, one-to-one environment. Tutor training courses introduced 34 undergraduates and four graduate students to the theory and pedagogy of individualized instruction in writing. In the past, this has resulted in 21 graduate students accepting employment as writing center directors at other institutions and a number of undergraduates accepting high school teaching jobs with responsibilities for starting or expanding high school writing centers.

- **Assisting in retention of students at risk**

As a number of studies have shown, tutorial assistance improves retention. Additionally, the Writing Lab provided a lab component for the basic writing program and worked with counselors to offer tutorials for learning disabled and non-traditional students.

- **Expanding research activity**

The Director and lab staff presented conference papers and published articles in major journals in the field about their work.

- **Expanding outreach**

Hundreds of call to the lab's Grammar Hotline came from local and out-of-state businesses, government offices, libraries, and other educational institutions; visitors from high schools and post-secondary institutions made on-site studies of the Writing Lab; and the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, edited by the Director and published through the English Department, has over 700 subscribers across the United States, Canada, and several foreign countries.

C. Evaluations

Evaluations indicate that over 96% of the instructors reported improvement in their students' writing skills as a result of lab tutorials and that 99% of the students reported writing improvement. In evaluations of individual tutorials, 81% of the students reported that they had learned a lot in the tutorial. See Appendix C for evaluation scores and individual comments.

D. Future Needs

- **Personnel**

Assistant Director

Presently, the director's responsibilities include mentoring new graduate tutors; teaching tutor training courses for peer tutors; supervising the work of over fifty people in three staffs of tutors, two staffs of tutors in training, clerical workers, work/study students, and a computer consultant; directing various programs in the lab; serving as liaison to faculty; handling daily administrative tasks; and planning future growth. When the director was originally hired (to direct a much smaller operation which served several hundred students per semester and had few programs), she was promised the equivalent of one-course relief for administration in the fall and spring semesters. Now, despite the need to handle all the tasks and responsibilities described above during the fall, spring, and summer semesters in a program which has grown from a staff of four serving several hundred students to a complex facility working with over six thousand students, the director has only one course relief for one semester and no summer salary. While most other writing centers in the nation have assistant directors (some of whom have faculty status), the Purdue Writing Lab director has no administrative assistance and is in great need of an assistant director.

Graduate Student Lab Instructors

Staff reductions have caused severe cutbacks in services at a time when university enrollments have risen, maximum classroom size has increased, and composition teachers are even more in need of a support service to provide

the necessary individualized instruction in writing. At least two, preferably four one-quarter time slots are needed to meet student demand and to end the current problem of turning away students on a daily basis and keeping others waiting one or more hours to see a tutor.

Hourly Wage Earners

The restructured English 100 program is greatly in need of more tutorial assistance, assistance which our staff of peer tutors cannot provide under the present budget. A budget to meet this need, prepared by the Director of Composition, has been given to the Head of the English Department. In addition, because of decreased funding for work/study student assistance for reception duties, the total number of hours that the lab can remain open have been reduced and late afternoon and evening hours have been curtailed. An increase in funding is necessary to provide the required tutoring for English 100 students and to provide more hours of access to the Writing Lab.

- **Space**

Although the English Department has been given more space in Heavilon Hall, the Writing Lab remains in its cramped quarters. Tutors work with thousands of students in crowded conditions which detract severely from the quality of instruction being provided. Room 224 Heavilon Hall contains students using computers, international students using the self-study center, and English 100 students who attempt to work with tutors a few feet away from a secretary who types, answers phone calls, and uses her printer. Tutorials in Room 226 are conducted in close proximity to each other, in the midst of phones ringing at the reception desk, the Director working at her desk and meeting students and teachers, Grammar Hotline calls being answered, other students waiting to see tutors, the receptionist making appointments and distributing handouts, and teachers coming in to discuss instructional needs. Storage space has long since run out; the director (a faculty member) has room for only one bookcase for her own materials; and space for the new electronic tutoring equipment and service must somehow be found. Additional space is a very major and immediate need.

Appendix A Staff and Services

1. Staffing

The 1992-93 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, clerical help was provided by a receptionist, a secretary, work/study assistance, and a computer consultant for record-keeping data entry.

2. Services

Services offered by the instructional staff include the following:

- tutorials
- drop-in assistance
- a lab component for the English 100 program
- Traveling Teacher sessions in writing classes and in other classrooms around campus
- instructional handouts
- self-instruction tapes
- tutor training practicums
- Grammar Hotline
- a peer tutoring program in selected residence halls
- computers for word processing and computer-assisted instruction
- faculty workshops
- faculty assistance with creating writing assignments, grading, and incorporating Writing Lab tutorials
- library of books, journals, and reference materials.

The populations served represent 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) and other courses (English 141, 201, 238, 240, 241, 250, 257, 264, 266, 267, 306, 325, 373, 376, 391, 406, 442, 516, and 572)
- Students enrolled in English-as-a-Second-Language courses (English 001 and 002) or preparing for the graduate writing requirement for international students
- Students enrolled in tutor training practicums offered through the Writing Lab (English 390 and two sections of English 502W)
- Students writing papers for a wide variety of courses in other departments and schools (AG, AGECE, ANSC, APD, AT, AUS, BC, BIO, CDFS, CE, COM, CPT, CS, CSR, ECON, ED, EDCI, EDFA, EDPS, EE, EET, FLL, GEO, GS, HIST, HLS, HS, HSCI, IE, IR, IT, LA, MGMT, MILT, MPR, MUS, NRES, NUR, OLS, PHIL, POL, PSY, RECR, RHIT, SOC, SPV, SWRK)
- Students using computers for writing assignments, simulations, and self-instruction
- Students preparing resumes, job applications, and graduate school and professional school applications, CODO essays, cover letters, essays for study abroad and fellowships, internship applications, letters of intent, personal statements, prelim proposals, and student teaching materials.

Appendix B Statistical Use of the Writing Lab

Tutorial appts.	1823	1195
Drop-in sessions	1722	1273
Handouts to students	1304	1210
Handouts to instructors	173	95
Microcomputers	167	135
Self-instruction tapes	64	36
Writing/Studying in the lab	340	224
English 100	3730	412
Traveling Tutor workshops	1098	1098
Grammar Hotline	524	524
Unspecified	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>
totals	10,957	6215

Departments which make ten or more requests

<u>Dept.</u>	<u>No. of requests</u>
AG	14
AGEC	91
BC	18
CDFS	25
COM	162
EDCI	23
EDPS	29
EET	11
ENG	8548
HIST	22
MGMT	42
POL SCI	198
PSY	18
RHIT	12
SOC	15
SPV	14
Unspecfd	45

Courses with ten or more requests

<u>Dept.</u>	<u>No. of requests</u>	<u>No. of students</u>
AGEC 331	46	35
AGEC 496	40	30
COM 114	48	37
COM 212	14	13
COM 325	40	28
EDCI 311	15	15
EDPS 230	12	12
ENGL 002	17	14
ENGL 100	3722	403
ENGL 101	664	350
ENGL 102	148	72
ENGL 103	114	82
ENGL 109	31	15
ENGL 267	13	11
ENGL 420	66	36
MGMT 653	34	14
POL SCI 130	167	149
POL SCI 222	12	10
PSY 366	12	4
Unspecfd	10	10

Appendix C Evaluations

1. Summary of Evaluations

A. From instructors

1. Students' writing improvement:	
• great improvement	65%
• some improvement	31%
• little or no improvement	2%
2. Students' grade improvement:	
• one letter grade or more	68%
• up to one letter grade	22%
• less than one letter grade	10%
3. Students' attitude toward the Lab:	
• appreciation	49%
• little or no feeling expressed	50%
• resentment	1%

B. From students

1. End-of-semester evaluations:

a. Quality of instruction	
• very clear and helpful	89%
• adequate	10%
• not helpful or clear	1%
b. Writing improvement:	
• great deal of improvement	71%
• some improvement	28%
• little or no improvement	1%
c. Grade improvement:	
• one letter or more	73%
• up to one letter	15%
• dropped or didn't change	12%

2. Evaluations of individual tutorials (based on 2547 responses):

a. Quality of instruction:	
• very helpful	94%
• somewhat helpful	6%
• not helpful	0%
b. Amount learned:	
• learned a lot	81%
• learned a little	18%
• learned nothing	1%
c. Likelihood that student would return to the Lab if further help is needed:	
• very likely	94%
• somewhat likely	6%
• not likely	0%