

WRITING LAB REPORT

January, 1977

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SUMMARY

In the Fall, 1976 semester the English Department's Writing Lab continued to offer individualized supplementary instruction to students who need help with basic writing skills. During the semester the lab offered tutorial help on an appointment basis, immediate drop-in assistance, mini-courses, and self-instruction materials to 855 students, about 91% of whom were registered in composition courses and needed supplementary help. The remaining students who worked in the lab came in on their own initiative for help with report or essay exam writing, graduate theses, applications for professional schools, the English Proficiency Exam, or general help with writing skills. Since 427 students made use of the Writing Lab in the Spring, 1976 semester, this semester's total of 855 students receiving help indicates that the use of the lab doubled during the fall semester.

Of the students who came in for regularly scheduled tutorial appointments, the largest proportion were students registered in the schools of Engineering (18%), Management (14%), Agriculture (14%), and HSSE (11%). The remaining students were registered in Science (8%), Technology (7%), Pharmacy (4%), Veterinary Medicine (4%), Consumer and Family Science (3%), or were unclassified or not registered in the schools categorized (17%).

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 82% of

the students who worked in the lab showed definite improvement in their mastery of writing skills, and the grades for 77% of these students rose either one or two letter grades. Instructors also reported that 80% of the students evaluated showed noticeable improvement in their confidence in themselves and their abilities, and 82% indicated an increased motivation to write well. When students evaluated the lab, 95% rated the quality of instruction as adequate or better, with 80% judging the instruction to be clear and effective. Of the students who responded, 89% felt they had made genuine progress in their writing, and 89% 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 and from Indiana high schools visited or wrote to the Writing Lab to ask for materials and suggestions for starting their own labs.

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A. Writing Lab Instruction and Services

In the Fall, 1976 semester the English Department's Writing Lab continued to serve as a supplement to the department's composition program by offering tutorial 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 the individualized instruction needed by students to improve their writing competence. The lab also provided several new services designed to increase its usefulness both to the students and to composition instructors. Specifically, the lab's work for the fall semester included the following:

1. Publicity. In its continuing effort to remind students and instructors of the lab's facilities, the lab participated in the general orientation program for all new graduate instructors of composition and in the English 100 workshop; sent out its own booklet, Using the Writing Lab, to all instructors of composition; sent wallet card reminders to all students enrolled in composition courses; held a coffee hour during the first week of classes for all members of the English department in order to acquaint them with the lab; and displayed its audio-visual equipment at the department's A-V demonstration. In addition, articles about the lab were published in the Lafayette Journal and Courier's "Purdue Orientation Issue" and in the Purdue Exponent's orientation issue. Throughout the semester reminder articles appeared in the Exponent, and an article describing the lab will appear in Purdue Reports next spring.

Because some composition instructors still do not inform their students of the lab's services, more publicity in the Exponent is planned, and other methods of acquainting freshmen with the lab are being explored.

2. Instruction in Writing Skills. In the past the lab has stated that its primary objective has been to provide supplementary personalized instruction in basic grammar and mechanics; however, an increasingly large number of students are now coming to the lab for help with pre-writing and with rhetorical skills such as topic development and organization. In addition, requests from composition staff members that the lab offer these kinds of help in addition to instruction in grammar and mechanics indicate that the lab's originally defined role must expand in response to the expressed need for this type of supplementary instruction. Itemized questionnaires will be sent out next semester asking instructors to indicate the types of writing skills which they prefer or will allow their students to work on in the lab.

As the lab has continued to enlarge its program, instruction is now being offered 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.

b. Drop-in 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 lab staff has attempted to offer immediate drop-in assistance at times when regularly scheduled students have not shown up. Because the lab's appointment schedule was filled by the second week of the semester and remained from then on filled up for several weeks in advance, lab staff members also added on extra time to their already filled schedules to assist other students on a drop-in basis. Because 121 students were able to receive this kind of immediate help in the fall semester, there is obviously a need for the lab to provide this service. The large number of English 103 students who dropped in this way indicates that they can also benefit from some immediate, quick help.

However, since the willingness of the lab staff to add on extra hours of instruction cannot be expanded indefinitely, lab instructors will, beginning next semester, regularly schedule a portion of their time in the lab as "drop-in hours." It is hoped that this will also help to alleviate the problem reported by composition instructors on their evaluation sheets that too many students who needed extensive help were unwilling or unable to wait two or three weeks to see a lab instructor. One

possible use of this drop-in time may be for a lab instructor to meet quickly with a student, diagnose his needs, and then suggest the appropriate self-instructional materials that the student can begin working on until the instructor and the student can begin meeting on a regular basis.

c. Mini-courses.

As in previous semesters, the Writing Lab again held five mini-courses on the topics most often requested by instructors; paragraphing, punctuation, sentence structure, topic development, and editing. Each mini-course, intended as a one-hour brush-up or review of the subject, was held twice at different hours (including one evening session) and in succeeding weeks; and lab instructors prepared separate materials to hand out to students attending the courses. When asked to evaluate these mini-courses, 36% of those composition instructors who responded said that they were of great help, another 32% reported that they were of much help, and the remaining 32% indicated that the courses were of some help.

These mini-courses were intended for small groups of five to ten students, and the responses from instructors indicated that this would be the projected attendance. However, attendance at all sessions was so heavy (one session was attended by 54 students) that the planned opportunities for student participation were severely restricted.

In an attempt to alleviate this over-crowding and to meet the many requests from instructors that these courses be held regularly, the Writing Lab intends to hold more sessions of each mini-course next semester as a regular part of its program of instruction.

d. Self-instruction materials.

With funds provided last summer by the English Department and the Dean's Office, the Writing Lab purchased an extensive set of tape and booklet self-instruction modules on spelling, grammar, and rhetoric. The lab requested these materials so that they could be used as supplements to the lab staff's tutorial instruction. In addition, the lab publicized these materials in a notice to instructors and suggested that these modules could be used to supplement classroom instruction. The response was overwhelming. In addition to the students studying in the lab who worked through these programs, an additional 119 students came in to work independently and completed 208 modules as part of work assigned by their composition instructors. When asked to evaluate these self-instructional materials, 41% of the composition staff who responded said that the modules were of great help, and another 41% of the respondents said that the materials were of much help. The remaining 18% reported that the self-instructional materials were of some help.

While the lab was extremely pleased to be able to offer the facilities for so much additional instruction in writing, this large number of students provoked

complaints by the Learning Center tutors who objected to the over-crowded conditions of the room. The extensive use of the self-instruction materials also created a demand for more tape recorders than the lab has. Because the lab's two tape recorders were insufficient, the receptionist often had to borrow Learning Center equipment and, occasionally, English Department tape recorders. Despite these additional sources of equipment some students were forced to wait until a tape recorder was free. In response to this need, the lab made several requests to the Dean for more equipment. One request for a tape recorder and three study carrels has been approved, and a further request for another tape recorder plus a slide projector is now being reviewed in the Dean's Office.

3. Resource Center

a. Resource File for the composition staff.

In its report at the end of the Spring, 1976 semester, the Writing Lab indicated that it sensed a need for a resource file for instructors of composition, and during the summer materials were collected and an index made up and distributed to the staff. The response by the composition staff indicated that the need for readily available materials on composition is extensive. From the day that the index was distributed until the end of the semester, instructors came in daily, dipping into files of theme assignments, browsing through folders of sample graded

papers, reading articles on composition, making copies of the lab's instructional materials, and borrowing books on the practices, theory, and pedagogy of composition instruction.

The sign-up sheet for the Resource File lists 97 entries by instructors, for the use of about 180 separate items. 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; and additional notes of appreciation were appended to some of the forms. Of the respondents, 26% said the file was of great help, 57% reported that it was of much help, and the remaining 17% said that it was of some help.

Throughout this last semester, more materials have been collected, and an expanded index will be distributed next spring. The lab deems the Resource File to be a success and plans to continue to expand it by purchasing more books, by copying more articles from journals of composition, and by collecting further contributions from the composition staff. Use of the file as a repository for other materials needed by the whole composition staff is also planned. Because the lab's Resource File is a new direction of growth for labs, the Writing Lab's director has been invited to talk about the use of the lab as a resource for composition staffs at the next CCCC conference.

b. Resource for other institutions.

Although the Writing Lab in its present form is only

in its second year, it is becoming recognized as a comparatively well-established lab at a time when other labs are first being planned or put into operation. Requests for information that are received by mail have been answered with copies of some of the lab's materials and reports, and on-site visitors from Valparaiso University, Purdue's Calumet Campus, Glendale Community College (California), and Lawrenceburg High School (Indiana) have been given tours of the lab and more extensive collections of the lab's materials. In two cases, visitors stayed for an entire day of discussion about the lab's operation and instructional approaches.

4. Other Programs

In addition to its work with students who need additional instruction in writing skills, the lab has also, this semester, had one of the English Department's Freshman Fellows assigned to the lab for an eight-week period. This student began by observing the tutorial process, and by the end of the semester he proceeded to work more directly with students. If he is again assigned to the lab next semester, as he has requested, he may be ready to engage more directly in the tutorial process. Another program planned for the future is the practicum in the lab for the English teaching majors, and the director of the English 002 program has already met with the lab staff in preparation for an additional use of the lab by 002 students, beginning in the Spring, 1977 semester.

B. STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF THE USE OF THE LAB

The following tables describe the student population using the lab during the Fall, 1976 semester.

Table 1. Total number of students using the lab.

1.	No. of students attending the lab for tutorial appointments:	261
2.	No. of students using the lab as a drop-in center:	121
3.	No. of students attending mini-courses:	354
4.	No. of students using the self-instruction modules as part of classroom assignments:	119
TOTAL		855

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	62	62
2	55	110
3	56	168
4	27	108
5	18	90
6	13	78
7	11	77

Table 2. (continued)

<u>No. of appts. per student</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>Total no. of appts.</u>
8	3	24
9	6	54
10	2	20
11	3	33
12	3	36
14	1	14
19	1	19
TOTAL NUMBER OF APPOINTMENTS		893

Table 3. No. of self-instruction modules used by students as part of classroom assignments

<u>No. of modules</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>No. of uses of modules</u>
1	74	74
2	15	30
3	20	60
4	6	24
5	4	20
TOTAL		208

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

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>
A. COMPOSITION COURSES			
English 002	1	3	4
English 100	60	89	149
English 101	113	158	271
English 101M	27	3	30
English 102	22	2	24
English 103	5	86	91
English 420	2	0	2
English 421	1	0	1
B. OTHER COURSES			
English 185	1	0	1
English 386	2	0	2
English 405	1	0	1
English 491	0	7	7
Communications 114	3	0	3
Communications 250	0	3	3
Communications 385	1	0	1
Other undergraduates	11	0	11
Other graduate students	3	0	3
Purdue staff	0	3	3
C. GRADUATE STUDENTS PREPARING FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY EXAMS			
	8	0	8

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	37	14
Consumer and Family Science	7	3
Engineering	47	18
HSSE	30	11
Management	36	14
Pharmacy	10	4
Science	22	8

Table 5. (continued)

Technology	18	7
Veterinary Medicine	10	4
Other (including unclassified students)	44	17

C. EVALUATION OF STUDENTS' PROGRESS

1. Instructors' Evaluation of Students

In order to assess the quality of instruction received by students attending the Writing 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 1% needed only a little help, the remaining 99% were in need either of some help (26%), much help (16%), or a great deal of help (57%). Responses to the question concerning subject mastery indicate that 82% of the students demonstrated definite improvement in the areas of writing skills studied in the lab, and the grades for 77% rose either one or two letter grades (the grades for 10% of the students working in the lab having risen at least two letter grades). Composition instructors also reported that 60% of the students indicated to their instructors that they appreciated the lab's help, and 80% of the students rated in these questionnaires showed noticeable improvement in their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Of the students evaluated for motivation, 82% indicated an increased desire

to write well. Finally, 85% of the composition instructors who responded to the questionnaire rated the feedback from the lab as adequate to excellent.

When asked to comment generally on the lab or offer suggestions, some composition instructors responded as follows. Several offered general appreciation, e.g.,

"The lab's tutorial program is great."

"Great results for my students who attended the W. L."

"You are doing a splendid job."

Other instructors indicated that the lab's function of offering supplementary instruction was definitely needed, e.g.,

"I rely on the lab for the students with problems that can't be taught effectively in the classroom."

"Your service makes it possible to cover much more ground with the class since class sessions don't have to be spent on technicalities which plague only one or two students."

"I'm very glad that the lab was available this semester to help those students with special problems that I either did not have time to help as fully as necessary, or felt unable to deal with the problem."

The major problem in the lab that instructors commented on was the over-crowding, e.g.,

"The only problem is not enough of a good thing. How about increasing the staff?"

"It should be enlarged."

"I know that you are aware of the problem; but my only and

very serious complaint is that you simply need more help. Several students of mine who went into the lab about a month into the semester simply could not find enough scheduled time to take care of their problems. I realize that it's necessary to get students in during the first few weeks of class; however, that is not always possible, since some serious writing problems do not become apparent in a student's writing until they get more difficult (and abstract) theme assignments."

"It was very difficult for my students to manage appointments this semester; out of about twenty who attempted, only two succeeded in receiving extra Writing Lab help. (This, of course, is not the Lab's fault.)"

"You should expand. By the time one can really diagnose a student's specific writing problems you are booked solid for weeks, but I'm sure you've heard this before. It's great to have such a resource available."

2. Students' Evaluations of the Writing Lab

When students evaluated their work in the Writing Lab on a four-item questionnaire, 95% of the respondents rated the quality of their instruction as adequate or better, with 80% rating the instruction as clear and effective. Of the students who returned the questionnaires, 89% felt that they had made progress in their writing as a result of their lab work, and 61% of these students reported that what they learned in the lab enabled them to write better papers in composition classes and to have their grades raised one to two letters. All of the students evaluated the quality of their instructors' help

as adequate or better, with 89% reporting that their lab instructors were very helpful and very competent. Several students appended comments at the bottom of their questionnaires which praised their lab instructors' helpfulness and the lab's usefulness.

D. SUMMER SESSION USE OF THE LAB

1. Statistical Summary of the Use of the Lab

The following summaries describe the use of the lab during the Summer, 1976 semester.

- a. Total number of students using the lab 44
- b. Total number of appointments required
by students using the lab 136
- c. Course registration for students attending

the lab:

English 002	7
English 100	4
English 102	3
English 101	13
English 185	1

Graduate students preparing for the English Proficiency Exam	5
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Others (including a faculty member, doctoral candi- dates working on theses and students writing law and medical school ap- plications)	11
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2. Materials Development

Since the lab staff had little opportunity during the previous year to revise and expand the lab's instructional materials and to

prepare other necessary materials, much of the lab's summer operation was devoted to materials development. As a result, the lab's instructional materials file was doubled, previously used materials were extensively revised, a resource file for use by the composition staff was developed, and index to the resource file was prepared, a complete index to all of the lab's instructional materials was compiled, and publicity announcements for the fall were prepared.

E. FACILITIES

1. New Facilities and Help

The following additions to the Writing Lab's facilities this year have greatly increased the effectiveness of its operation.

a. Secretarial help

The Writing Lab now has a secretary which it shares with the Office of Writing Review and the Assistant Director of Composition. The assistance provided by this secretary was greatly needed, for she now handles the lab's extensive typing of correspondence, notices, reports, and instructional materials. In addition she also serves for part of the time, as the Writing Lab-Learning Center's receptionist, thus providing more continuity at the desk than had been previously available. The help provided by this secretary has become indispensable to the lab's operation.

b. Budget

The lab this year has used its new budget to purchase numerous small office-supply items; to pay duplicating costs for its wallet card reminders; and to purchase books and journals for its Resource File, reference books for its own instructional uses, and materials

needed for the maintenance of its audio-visual equipment. The budget has enabled the lab to purchase all of these small items as needed and has thus greatly contributed to the smooth functioning of the lab.

c. Acquisition of Materials

As the Writing Lab grows, its need for equipment continues to grow. Acquisitions this year include most of the extensive set of self-instruction modules requested in the lab's report last spring, plus another tape recorder, three study carrels and a slide-sound program requested this fall. A further request for an additional tape recorder and slide projector are presently being considered in the Dean's Office.

2. Space Needs

While the added help and facilities listed above have greatly increased the effectiveness of the Writing Lab, inadequate space continues to plague the lab's operation. Room 226 Heavilon Hall, which houses both the Writing Lab and the Learning Center, is too small to meet the needs of both staffs and the rapidly increasing number of students they serve. During busy hours instructors and students all too frequently find themselves huddled in corners, leaning against file cabinets, or running down the hall in search of an empty classroom in which to meet.

The consensus of opinion among the staffs of both the Writing Lab and the Learning Center is that another room (preferably Room 227 Heavilon Hall) be allotted on a full-time basis for the Learning Center tutors in other academic subjects. Room 226 is needed by the

Writing Lab instructors and Learning Center reading tutors in the course of their instruction because the room houses all of the lab's file cabinets of materials, study carrels, self-instruction modules, and audio-visual equipment as well as the lab instructors' offices, in addition to the offices and file cabinet of the Learning Center's reading tutors. If the Learning Center tutors in other academic subjects are given space across the hall in Room 227, students working on reading and writing skills in Room 226 will have the space and reduced noise level that they need in order to learn more effectively. Since the request for Room 227 has already been made to the Dean's Office, the staffs of both the Writing Lab and the Learning Center hope that the request will soon be granted.