

WRITING LAB REPORT

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SUMMARY

In the Spring, 1976 semester the English Department's Writing Lab continued to offer individualized supplementary instruction to students in the composition program who needed help with basic writing skills. During this semester the lab offered both tutorial help and immediate drop-in assistance, and it also conducted five mini-course reviews on the subjects students needed most. In addition, composition instructors began to use the lab as a resource center, borrowing handouts, books, and other instructional materials. In all, 427 students made use of the lab during the semester; 201 came in for half-hour tutorial appointments (for a total of 810 appointments), 30 students dropped in for quick help, and 196 attended mini-courses.

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 86% 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 61% of the students evaluated showed noticeable improvement in their confidence in themselves and their abilities, and 69% indicated an increased motivation to write well. In response to questions on the effectiveness of the mini-courses, 94% of the instructors reported that after their

students attended these courses, the students demonstrated definite improvement in their writing. When students evaluated the lab, 100% rated the quality of the instruction as adequate or better, with 96% judging the instruction to be clear and effective. All the students who responded stated that they felt they had made genuine progress in their writing, and 96% reported that the lab instructors were very helpful and competent.

The lab staff, because it must plan for the increased use of the lab, is requesting the purchase of the self-instructional materials listed in the appendix to this report. The lab is also asking for the purchase of books on the teaching of composition in order to serve the composition staff more effectively as a resource center.

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A. WRITING LAB INSTRUCTION AND SERVICES

In the Spring, 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 students and to composition instructors. Specifically, the lab's work for the spring semester included the following:

1. Tutorial Instruction. The primary objective of the Writing Lab is to provide supplementary instruction in basic grammar and mechanics, and in the major portion of lab tutorials this type of assistance was offered. However, because of the normally heavy spring enrollment of students in English 102, a course which includes the writing of a term paper, lab staff members also spent time helping students to formulate, develop, and organize lengthy term paper topics. Some students also came to the lab seeking help with assignments which focused on writing about literature. In addition, one lab instructor and a Learning Center reading specialist formulated a very effective program of combined instruction in reading and writing

skills for several students in need of extensive remediation in both areas.

2. Revision of Materials. The lab staff needed to spend some time revising instructional materials used during the previous semester and developing new materials, particularly self-instruction units. New record keeping forms were also added. Because of the need to spend the majority of the time in tutorial instruction, lab staff members found that insufficient time remained for the extensive revision and addition of materials that is needed. This summer the staff plans to allot some of its time for this and for the compiling of a complete index of lab materials.

3. Publicity. In its continuing effort to remind students and instructors of the lab's facilities, the lab sent out notices describing its services to all composition instructors at the beginning of the semester, visited 72 classrooms to invite students to use the lab, was interviewed for an article in the Exponent ("Writing Lab Offers Assistance," in the issue of April 6), sent out two notices for its mini-courses, and mailed questionnaires to all composition instructors who did not make use of the lab asking why they did not send students to the lab and how the lab could improve its facilities to serve them more effectively.

4. Mini-courses. In response to the results of a questionnaire sent to all composition instructors, the Writing Lab

held five mini-courses on the topics most often requested by instructors: paragraphing, sentence structure, sentence variety, punctuation, and topic development. Each mini-course, intended as a one-hour brush-up or review of the subject, was held several times and at different hours (including some evening sessions), and lab instructors prepared separate materials (some in booklet form) to hand out to students attending the courses. Like the mini-courses held the previous spring, these courses were intended for small groups of five to ten students. However, attendance was so heavy (one session was attended by 38 students) that the planned opportunities for student participation were diminished. 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 every semester as a regular part of its program of instruction.

5. Drop-in Center. Following the lead of writing labs at other universities which offer immediate or "drop-in" assistance and sensing a need here for similar help, the lab began more actively to meet the needs of those students who came in with short questions, requests for materials, etc. Between or after regular appointments, all lab instructors attempted to provide such immediate assistance.

However, when lab staff members recognized a student's need for more extensive instruction, they had the student sign up for a regular series of appointments. During the spring semester 30 students sought this kind of help which was usually provided within 15 to 20 minutes.

6. Resource Center. Because the lab has extensive files of handouts and exercises, plus several bookcases of composition texts, the lab has begun to serve the composition staff as a resource center. Eighteen instructors of composition who came in this semester borrowed multiple copies of exercise books for classroom use, took copies of grammar handouts and exercises from the files, read articles on the teaching of composition in a separate resource box, and asked for assistance in explaining points of grammar. In addition, a General Studies instructor asked both for evaluations of paragraphs written by students in her class and for advice in structuring classroom writing tasks, and an instructor from the Department of Horticulture requested lab handouts for those of his students whose writing revealed errors in spelling, sentence structure, and usage. Finally, 14 students who had been working in the lab borrowed books, on short term loan, for further reading. The lab hopes to increase its usefulness as a resource center for composition instructors and has included in its purchase request (which is added as an appendix to this report) several NCTE books on the teaching of composition.

B. STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF THE USE OF THE LAB

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

Table 1. Total number of students using the lab.

1. No. of students attending the lab for tutorial appointments:	201
2. No. of students attending mini-courses:	196
3. No. of students using the lab as a drop-in center:	30
TOTAL	427

Table 2. No. of appointments required by students using the lab.

<u>No. of appts. per student</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>Total no. of appts.</u>
1	57	57
2	18	36
3	32	96
4	18	72
5	11	55
6	18	108
7	13	91
8	6	48
9	11	99

Table 2. (continued)

<u>No. of appts. per student</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>Total no. of appts.</u>
10	2	20
11	1	11
12	2	24
13	0	0
14	3	42
15	2	30
21	1	21
TOTAL NUMBER OF APPOINTMENTS		810

Table 3. 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	3	0	3
English 003	1	0	1
English 100	23	23	46
English 101	37	29	66
English 102	82	137	219
English 103	2	5	7
English 105	13	0	13
English 421	1	0	1
B. OTHER COURSES			
English 237	1		
English 238	1		
English 387	2		
English 493	2		
Communications courses	2		
Other undergraduates	9		
Other graduate students	7		
C. GRADUATE STUDENTS PREPARING FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY EXAMS			
	15		

While use of the lab would normally be expected to be lighter in spring than in the fall, the number of students who received lab help with writing skills increased this spring. This growth was due in part to the addition of group instruction in mini-courses and also to an increase in the size of the lab staff, from a total of six quarter-time appointments in the fall to a total of eight quarter-time appointments in the spring. In the fall 238 students attended the lab for tutorial instruction while the totals for spring indicate that of the 427 students helped by the lab, 231 students received individualized assistance and 196 attended mini-courses.

C. EVALUATION OF STUDENTS' PROGRESS

1. Instructors' Evaluations 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 4% needed only a little help, the remaining 96% were in need either of some help (23%), much help (15%), or a great deal of help (58%). Responses to the question concerning subject mastery indicate that 86% of the students demonstrated definite improvement in the areas of grammar studied in the lab, and the grades for 77% rose either one or two letter grades. While 53% of the students

indicated to their instructors that they appreciated the lab help, the remaining 47% expressed no feelings to their instructors. Instructors of composition also reported that 61% of the students rated in these questionnaires showed noticeable improvement in their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Of the students evaluated for motivation, 69% indicated an increased desire to write well. Finally, 9% of the composition instructors rated feedback from the lab as less than adequate, while the remaining 91% evaluated communication from the lab as adequate to excellent.

2. Instructors' Evaluations of the Mini-Courses

Instructors were also asked to give general evaluations of the extent of the mini-courses' usefulness for their students. A tally of the responses indicates that 10% of the instructors who responded felt that the subject matter was of some help; 20% indicated that the subject covered was of much help, and the remaining 70% judged the subject as one in which a great deal of help was needed. When asked about students' attitudes towards these mini-courses, 83% of the instructors reported that students who attended indicated that the help they received ranged from some to a great deal of help. In response to a question on subject mastery, 94% of the instructors reported that after attending these mini-courses, their students demonstrated either some or a great deal of improvement in their writing. Finally, when asked about the usefulness of the materials developed for the mini-courses, 89% of the instructors who responded judged the materials as offering some or a great deal of help. One

instructor appended the comment that he "was amazed" at one student's improvement after attending a mini-course, and another instructor praised the mini-courses as "well-balanced, with good range." Another instructor added that one of his students "was very enthusiastic about the results."

3. Students' Evaluations of the Writing Lab

When students evaluated their work in the Writing Lab on a four-item questionnaire, all rated the quality of their instruction as adequate or better, with 96% rating the instruction as clear and effective. Of the students who returned the questionnaires, 100% felt that they had made progress in their writing as a result of their lab work, and 79% 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 the students evaluated the quality of their instructors' help as adequate or better, with 96% reporting that their lab instructors were very helpful and competent. Several students appended comments at the bottom of their questionnaires which praised their lab instructors' helpfulness and the lab's usefulness.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE IMPROVEMENT OF THE LAB'S SERVICES

1. Request for the Purchase of Self-Instructional Materials.

The Appendix to this report is a request for the purchase of self-instructional materials for the Writing Lab. The lab staff very much

hopes that this request will be approved because the need for such materials is great. The lab anticipates that there will not only be some normal growth of the lab as more instructors and students become aware of its facilities but that the proposed increase in enrollment for next year will certainly cause some further increase in the need for its services. By having students spend some of their time in self-instructional work, the lab can increase its services, prevent overcrowding, and offer an additional method of study to accompany tutorial instruction. In addition, although 49% of the students who attended the lab during the spring semester were able to complete their study plans, an additional 18% (or 37 students) did not finish their work because of lack of time. Because the lab calendar was filled for most of the spring, these students were able to come in only once each week. Additional self-instructional materials would have allowed them to increase the weekly number of hours they spent in the lab.

In the academic year 1975-76, the lab staff worked with a total of 665 students; of these students 439 received tutorial help (in a total of 1593 appointments), 196 attended mini-courses, and 30 came in for short-term help without appointments. If the lab is to increase its services to the composition program, the purchase of self-instruction materials would be more economical than increasing the lab staff. Salaries for additional staff would represent a continuing cost while a single purchase of materials would serve students indefinitely.

2. Request for the Purchase of Resource Materials

The Writing Lab staff asks that the lab be regarded also as a resource center for instructors of composition. Instructors have already begun to use the lab in this manner, as described in Section A, part 6 of this report. In order to expand its usefulness in this direction, the lab is also requesting the purchase of books that would be of use to instructors. In their responses on questionnaires instructors have stated that they would welcome a readily accessible shelf of books and articles on teaching methods and files of grammar handouts, samples of graded papers, suggestions of theme topics, and additional materials to bring to the classroom. In response to these requests the lab has proposed that the books it has listed in the appended proposal as resource materials be purchased. These materials are not intended to substitute for the instructors' own preparation but to offer to instructors who are no longer in mentor groups the variety of suggestions and alternatives which are provided in these groups.

3. Recommendation That Use of the Lab Be Encouraged.

Most of the students working in the lab have attended their scheduled appointments, and their instructors have conscientiously followed their progress and encouraged their efforts. However, not all students who required additional instruction have been reminded by their instructors to seek the help they need. During the spring semester 18 students never appeared for the first appointments they had made, and 45 students who began lab work did not return for the

additional appointments needed to finish their plans of study. In most cases instructors were notified that their students either did not attend the lab at all or ceased to show up for scheduled appointments. In addition, when one-third of the composition staff was asked why none of their students used the lab, the responses of too many indicated that they had allowed students to ignore their recommendation that lab study was needed. One solution to this problem is more publicity by the lab which reaches all students. An emphatic departmental statement to instructors that would encourage them to see that their students use the lab when needed would also help.

APPENDIX

REQUEST FOR PURCHASE OF MATERIALS

1. Rationale.

The English Department's Writing Lab, having shown rapid growth in both semesters of operation in its new facilities, must anticipate and plan for its future growth, and all plans should be designed to improve the quality of its services to the composition program. The materials listed below would, if purchased, greatly assist the lab to achieve these aims. In addition, the purchase of these materials would be the most economical way to proceed. A single purchase of self-instruction materials would permit the lab to increase the number of students working in the lab, beyond the present figure of 665 for the academic year 1975-76, without an increase in the size of the staff. The requested NCTE publications, listed below as instructors' resource materials, would be kept in a file for use by instructors of composition. These additional readings would be readily available for composition instructors who are interested in improving their teaching. To encourage the use of these resource materials, the lab would send out an annotated list to all members of the composition staff.

2. List of Materials Requested for Purchase.

A. Self-Instructional Materials

<u>Quantity Requested</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Cost</u>
1	<u>Mini-Courses in Rhetoric and Critical Thinking</u>	Educulture Inc. 3184 J. Airway Ave. Costa Mesa, CA 92626	\$660.00
1	<u>English Modular Mini-Courses</u>	Educulture Inc.	382.50

<u>Quantity Requested</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Cost</u>
1	<u>Mini-Courses in Spelling</u>	Educulture Inc.	\$192.50
1	<u>Communications Skills-- Write It Right!</u>	Center for Humanities, Inc. 2 Holland Ave. White Plains, NY 10603	159.50
(An examination copy of this is already in the lab with an accompanying invoice.)			
5	<u>Keys to American English</u> (Gefvert, et al., 1975)	Harcourt Brace Jovanovich	4.95
B. <u>Accompanying Hardware</u>			
1	Sony TC-110B Cassette Recorder		130.00
1	Avedex #4098 Headset with Plug Adapter (for use with above listed Cassette recorder)		7.95
C. <u>Instructors' Resource Materials</u>			
2	<u>Writing Exercises from Exercise Exchange</u> , ed. Littleton Long	NCTE #59079	3.50
2	<u>Ideas for English 101</u> eds. Richard Ohmann and W. B. Coley	NCTE #22450	3.95
2	<u>Observing and Writing</u> George Hillocks	NCTE #33967	1.10
2	<u>Popular Culture and the Teaching of English</u> ed. Kenneth Donelson	NCTE #36443	3.95
2	<u>A Thousand Topics for Composition</u> Revised. Chairman, Kenneth Ettner	NCTE #54522R	.85
2	<u>The Sentence and the Paragraph</u> Francis Christensen, et al.	NCTE #43296R	1.90

3. Description of Materials

The Educulture Inc. self-instruction mini-courses are all series of cassette tape and booklet modules. Each module within a series is

a self-critiquing lesson on one topic. The materials are all constructed so that the student can control his own pace, and he may choose to review and repeat whenever necessary. The Educulture company allows purchasers to duplicate its audio programs for use on their own campus only. Thus, one purchase will satisfy the lab's future needs for additional copies because more tapes can be made at Purdue's Audio-Visual Center.

Educulture's Mini-Courses in Rhetoric and Critical Thinking is a series of twenty-four modules which cover five areas: 1) basic rhetorical principles (unity, coherence, topic development, etc.); 2) methods for expository development (definition, comparison and contrast, etc.); 3) methods of logic (inductive and deductive reasoning, argument and persuasion, etc.); 4) style and diction (word economy, use of figurative language, etc.); and 5) specific applications for exposition (writing about literature, the research paper, etc.).

Educulture's English Modular Mini-Courses is a series of nineteen modules on grammar and mechanics which cover such topics as basic sentence structure, subordinate clauses, subject-verb agreement, pronoun case, and punctuation.

Educulture's Mini-Courses in Spelling consists of seven modules which review basic spelling patterns, consonant patterns, vowel blends, etc. These mini-courses would serve only as an introduction for the student in the Writing Lab before he begins work on his own list of misspellings.

The Center for Humanities' Communication Skills--Write it Right! is an audio-visual presentation on paragraphing and subject development. It can be played on the Caramate projector already available to the

lab. An examination copy of this set has been in the lab for several months, and student evaluation of its usefulness has been excellent. The slides and tape (or accompanying record) can also be used with a slide projector and tape recorder (or record player) in the composition classroom. Several instructors of composition have already asked to use these materials in their classes if the set is purchased.

Keys to American English is a text and workbook designed specifically for speakers of black dialects who wish to acquire the patterns of standard edited English. The Writing Lab already has three copies of this book, and students have used them with excellent results. Additional copies are being requested because of the heavy use of this book.

The additional tape recorder is being requested to supplement the two Sony TC-110B Cassette Recorders already in the lab. A third tape recorder will allow for more simultaneous use of the tape and booklet materials being requested. A third tape recorder will also insure the constant availability of at least two tape recorders if one were to break.

All the NCTE books listed for use as instructors' resource materials are valuable supplementary readings for composition instructors who wish to broaden their knowledge of the teaching of composition. The books on theme topics have been selected in response to requests from instructors for such lists. Popular Culture and the Teaching of English will be a particularly useful book for instructors in the mass media sections and for other instructors who use films to supplement readings in anthologies.