WRITING LAB REPORT

December 30, 1978

Muriel Harris, Director
Kathleen Blake Yancey,
Assistant to the Director
Melissa Barth
William Demaree
Gwendalyn Gong
Malka Miller
Linda Richardson
Paula Wilson

SUMMARY

In the Fall, 1978 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 1654 students were helped in tutorial appointments, on an immediate drop-in basis, in mini-courses, in classrooms visited by the lab's Traveling Teacher service, and through a greatly increased use of self-instruction materials available in the lab. In addition, the lab's Resource File of instructional materials and its library of books and journals on the teaching of writing were read by the composition staff, its lending library of grammar handbooks was used by students, its audio-visual programs were borrowed for use in composition classrooms, and its facilities and materials were made available to faculty members at other universities where writing labs are being planned.

Questionnaires aimed at evaluating the progress made by students who attended the lab were sent to the students and to their composition instructors. The responses to 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.

CONTENTS

A. WRITING LAB INSTRUCTION AND SERVICES

In the Fall, 1978 semester the English Department's Writing Lab continued to serve as a supplement to the department's composition program, as a tutorial center for other students in the university by offering individualized instruction in basic writing skills, and as a resource facility for the composition staff. 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 fall semester included the following:

1. Publicity. In its continuing effort to remind students and instructors of the lab's facilities, the lab director participated in the general orientation program for all new graduate instructors of composition; sent out an explanatory pamphlet, Using the Writing Lab, to all instructors of composition; sent full-page informative handouts to all students enrolled in composition courses and to the heads of the counselling staffs in all schools of the university; and visited classes when invited to answer questions about the lab's services. In addition, articles describing the lab were published in the Lafayette Journal and Courier's "Purdue Orientation Issue" and in the Purdue Exponent's orientation issue, and a brief description of the lab's facilities appeared in the orientation booklet sent to all new freshmen. Throughout the semester reminder articles also appeared in the Exponent.

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 attended regularly scheduled appointments with a lab instructor.

This offered the instructor and the student the opportunity to establish a comfortable working relationship and to proceed more slowly when extensive remediation was needed. Lab instructors working with students on a regular or long-term basis were also able to follow the students' progress in their classroom writing and to discuss the students' improvement with their composition instructors.

Although an additional class hour for English 101 and 102 was added this fall, the need for individualized tutorial instruction in writing skills continues to increase. Within two weeks after the start of the fall semester, the lab's appointment schedule was filled to capacity, and by mid-semester students were being asked to wait three to four weeks for an appointment. While the lab staff tried to alleviate the long waiting period by donating extra hours of instruction or by drawing up programs of self-instruction, students and their instructors repeatedly commented on evaluation forms distributed at the end of the semester that more staff and/or hours of tutorial instruction are needed.

b. Drop-in help.

Because the lab instructors also want to provide help for students who have a quick question, need hand-outs from the lab's files, or want a little extra help, the staff scheduled one-fifth of their regular hours 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 learn to proofread their themes, etc. Of the 202 students who came in without regularly scheduled appointments, many expressed their appreciation for not having to wait several weeks to have their questions answered. Drop-in hours were also used

extensively by other undergraduates engaged in writing projects such as reports on term papers for other courses throughout the university, letters of application for professional schools or scholarships, thesis proposals, etc.

When asked to evaluate the usefulness of the drop-in system, 65% of the composition instructors who responded indicated that it was of great help to their students, and the remaining 35% reported that it was of some help.

c. Mini-courses and the Traveling Teacher Program.

As in previous semesters, the Writing Lab again held mini-courses intended as small group instruction or review of the subject. Because of the past success of these mini-courses, the program was greatly extended this semester to include a total of sixteen different mini-courses offered to 599 students in thirty-four separate sessions. When asked to evaluate these mini-courses, 73% of those composition instructors who responded reported that they were of great help, and the remaining 27% indicated that the courses were of some help.

Recognizing the need to serve another group of students to whom the lab could also offer assistance, one lab staff member also structured a mini-course designed to help students review for the grammar section of the Law School Aptitude Test (LSAT). This highly successful and greatly appreciated mini-course will again be offered in the spring as will another mini-course on writing letters of application, a small group review session which is particularly useful in the spring when students are seeking summer jobs or permanent employment.

In addition, the lab also instituted a new program this semester in which lab instructors offered to teach their mini-courses in com-

position classrooms as "traveling teachers." This program was particularly appreciated by new teachers who were thus able to observe teaching techniques of more experienced instructors, by other instructors who found the change of pace provided by a visiting teacher to be a valuable addition to their instruction, and also by a few senior faculty members who had not taught composition recently and welcomed the opportunity to observe new approaches to the teaching of writing. A total of sixteen class hours of instruction were offered to 310 students in this Traveling Teacher Program.

d. Self-instruction materials.

The Writing Lab's extensive set of tape and booklet self-instruction modules on spelling, grammar, rhetoric, and vocabulary were very heavily used this semester. In addition to students who used these modules to supplement their lab work, an additional 297 students came in for 545 hours of independent study as part of course work assigned by their instructors. This represents a great increase over last fall in the use of self-instruction modules (when 146 students spent 240 hours studying these materials), an increase which was also apparent by the length of the waiting lines as students waited for the three study carrels and tape recorders which the lab has available.

Since the lab will have more floor space available beginning next semester, a major priority will be to acquire more study carrels and tape recorders to keep pace with the increased demand for self-instruction materials.

3. Resource Center

a. Resource File for the composition staff and students.

The Writing Lab's Resource File of materials on the teaching of

composition continued to be in daily use during the fall semester. Instructors came in frequently 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 both books on the practice, theory, and pedagogy of composition instruction and also recent issues of the major college composition journals to which the lab subscribes. When asked to evaluate the Resource File, 66% of those composition instructors who responded reported that it was of great help, while the remaining 34% reported that it was of some help. The major complaint voiced about the Resource File bookshelves was that because the lab has only one copy of most books and journals, the more popular or useful ones were too frequently checked out and unavailable.

Another resource, initiated this fall, is an accompanying bookcase filled with publishers' samples of grammar handbooks, rhetorics, workbooks, and readers. These books were made available as a lending library for students who wished to supplement their reading in their assigned textbooks or who found their textbooks inadequate. This lending service proved to be a popular one for students in composition courses (including an English 103 course in which the research paper assignment was to compare the presentation of various rules of grammar or rhetorical principles in different texts available in this collection), for graduate students in need of books to help review for the English Proficiency Exam, and also for other students at various levels of proficiency who wanted handbooks to study on their own.

The heavy use of the entire resource collection by both students and teachers resulted in some confusion because of the lack of a fully

systematized check-out procedure or catalog. However, the Assistant to the Director of the Writing Lab has volunteered to take on the responsibility of organizing the library in a more efficient manner for future use.

b. Resource for other institutions.

As a result both of published articles describing the Writing Lab Newsletter, which is edited by the lab's director and mailed to over 400 labs and learning centers across the country, the Writing Lab continued to serve as a clearinghouse for information on labs. In addition, all specific phone and letter requests for information describing Purdue's Writing Lab have been answered with copies of the lab's instructional materials, record keeping forms, descriptive booklets and semester reports; and on-site visitors, both faculty members planning new labs and graduate students researching labs for doctoral dissertations, were given tours of the lab's facilities.

4. Future Growth

At the end of the semester, the Learning Center (which had shared 226 Heavilon Hall with the lab) was moved to another room. The additional space now available for the lab will both improve and expand the lab's service to students because it will provide more room for tutorial sessions, for students and staff using the resource collection, and for self-instruction facilities. Moreover, the addition of a full-time receptionist will provide greater continuity, better service to students, and more efficient use of the lab staff's time. When a door and window connecting the lab with the Office of Writing Review are installed, the receptionist will also be able to monitor exams in the OWR, thus also allowing that staff to use their time more efficiently to grade exam papers.

B. STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF THE USE OF THE LAB

The following tables describe the student population using the lab during the Fall, 1978 semester.

Table 1. Total number of students using the lab.

1.	No. of students attending the lab for tutorial appointments:	246
2.	No. of students using the lab as a drop-in center:	202
3.	No. of students using the self-instruction modules:	297
4.	No. of students attending mini-courses:	599
5.	No. of students taught by the lab's Traveling Teacher program:	310
	TOTAL	1654

Table 2. No. of appointments required by students using the lab for regularly scheduled tutorial sessions

No. of appts. per student	No. of students	Total no. of appts.
1	86	86
2	48	96
3	50	150
4	20	80
5	17	85
6	5	30
7	3	21
8	5	40

9	2	18
10	4	40
11	3	33
16	1	16
18	1	18
22	1	22
	TOTAL NO. OF APPTS.	735

Table 3. No. of drop-in sessions attended by students

No. of sessions per student	No. of students	Total no. of sessions
1	166	166
2	26	52
3	4	12
4	2	8
5	1	5
6	1	6
11	1	11
13	1	13
	TOTAL NO. OF DROP-IN SESSIONS	273

Table 4. No. of self-instruction modules used by students

No. of modules	No. of students	No. of uses of modules
1	190	190
2	49	98
3	29	87
4	12	48

5	2	10
6	6	36
7	4	28
8	3	24
10	1	10
14	1	14
	TOTAL NO. OF USES OF MODULES	545

Table 5. Description by courses of students attending the lab for tutorial appointments, drop-in sessions, mini-courses, traveling teacher sessions and self-instruction modules.

Course No.	No. attending tutorial appts.	No. requesting drop-in help	No. attending mini-courses	No. attending traveling teacher sessions	No. using self-instruction modules	Totals
A. COMPOSITION COURSES						
English						
001	1	0	0	0	0	1
002	9	1	0	0	0	10
003	3	1	0	0	0	4
100	18	5	68	89	50	230
101	125	119	379	221	136	980
101I	2	2	0	0	1	5
101M	31	15	22	0	72	140
101X	1	0	0	0	0	1
102	14	13	57	0	12	96
102I	1	0	0	0	0	1
102X	1	0	0	0	0	1
103	6	7	4	0	1	18
304	0	1	0	0	0	1
420	1	2	0	0	0	3
421	1	0	0	0	0	1
B. OTHERS						
Other undergraduates	15	28	57	0	18	118
Other graduates	4	5	0	0	3	12

Other graduate students preparing for English Proficiency Exams	13	3	12	0	4	32
TOTALS	246	202	599	310	297	= 1654

Table 6. Description by school of students attending the lab

School	% of total
Agriculture	16%
CFS	6%
Engineering	18%
HSSE	17%
Management	11%
Pharmacy	2%
Science	15%
Technology	12%
Veterinary Medicine	1%
Other (including staff and unclassified students)	2%

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, 32% needed much help; and 48% needed a great deal of help. Responses to the question concerning subject mastery indicate that 88% of the students demonstrated definite improvement in the areas of writing skills studied in the lab, and the grades for 79% rose either one or two letter grades. Composition instructors also reported that 53% of the students indicated to their instructors that they appreciated the lab's help, and 73% of the students evaluated in this questionnaire showed noticeable improvement

in their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Of the students evaluated for motivation, 86% indicated an increased desire to write well. Responses to the question asking about feedback from the lab indicate that 95% of the instructors evaluated communication from the lab instructor as adequate to excellent. Finally, from those instructors whose students used self-instructional materials, 31% rated the modules as being of some help, 48% responded that they were of much help, and 31% reported that they were of great help.

2. Students' Evaluations of the Writing Lab

When students evaluated their work in the Writing Lab in a four-item questionnaire, 25% rated the quality of their instruction as adequate, 40% responded that it was clear and effective, and 35% reported that it was very clear and very effective. When asked to evaluate their progress in writing skills as a result of their lab work, 93% of the students reported definite improvement, and 93% stated that what they had learned in the lab enabled them to write better papers and receive higher letter grades. All of the students evaluated the quality of their lab instructors' help as adequate or better, with 84% reporting that their instructors were very helpful and very competent. In the space provided for further comments and suggestions, students repeatedly suggested that more staff is needed. Of the students who used the lab's self-instruction materials, 51% rated the quality of instruction provided by the modules as adequate, 27% reported that it was clear and effective, and 14% responded that it was very clear and very effective. As a result of using these modules, 59% of the students noted some improvement in their writing skills while 32% reported a great deal of improvement.