WRITING LAB REPORT

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SUMMARY

In the Spring, 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 883 students were helped in tutorial appointments, on an immediate drop-in basis, in mini-courses, or through self-instruction materials available in the lab. While many needed help with basic writing skills, others recognized the need to continue to develop their writing proficiency and came on their own initiative to prepare for report or essay exam writing, graduate theses, applications for professional schools, or the English Proficiency Exam.

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 all of the students who worked in the lab showed definite improvement in their mastery of writing skills, and the grades for 86% of these students rose either one or two letter grades. Instructors also reported that 79% of the students evaluated showed noticeable improvement in their confidence in themselves and their abilities, and 100% indicated an increased motivation to write well. When students evaluated the lab, they all judged the quality of their lab instructors' help as adequate or better, with 95% reporting that their instructors were very helpful and very competent. Of the students who responded, 94% felt that they had made genuine progress in their writing skills.

The lab also continued to be heavily used by the composition staff who 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, the lab continued to respond to requests from faculty members from other universities who either wrote to request materials and information for starting their own labs or visited the lab to watch it in operation .

CONTENTS

A. WRITING LAB INSTRUCTION AND SERVICES

In the Spring, 1978 semester the English Department's Writing Lab continued to serve both as a supplement to the department's composition program and as a tutorial center for other students in the university by offering individualized instruction in basic writing skills. Using the instructional approaches, materials, and record-helping system described in the "Writing Lab Report--January, 1976," plus revised and new materials that have been added since then, the lab staff continued to provide both tutorial help and self-instructional materials needed by students to improve their writing competence. Specifically, the lab's work for the spring 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 new freshmen entering in the spring semester; sent full-page informative handouts to all students enrolled in composition courses; sent out an explanatory pamphlet, Using the Writing Lab, to all new instructors of composition; and visited classes when invited to answer questions about the lab's services. In addition, articles and reminders appeared in Purdue's 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 to work through an individualized plan of study. 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 teachers.

b. Drop-in help.

Because of the greatly increased need in the spring for immediate help with term papers, the lab staff doubled the number of hours allotted, or 2/5 of its available time, to drop-in hours. This permitted lab instructors to provide immediate help for students who had a quick question, needed hand-outs from the lab files, or wanted extra help during the preparation of their research papers.

When asked to evaluate the usefulness of the drop-in system, 79% of the composition instructors who responded indicated that it was of great help to their students, and the remaining 21% reported that it was of some help.

c. Mini-courses.

As in previous semesters, the Writing Lab again held mini-courses intended as small group instruction or review of the subject. A total of fourteen different mini-courses were offered to 357 students in thirty-five separate sessions, and in some cases new materials were developed for use in the courses. While the sessions were attended primarily by students in composition courses, the lab staff noticed a large increase in the number of foreign and graduate students who attended. When asked to evaluate these mini-courses, 87% of those composition instructors who responded reported that they were of great help, and the remaining 13% indicated that the courses were of some help.

The subjects taught in the mini-courses were either those which

are frequently needed by students coming to the lab or those which draw on special techniques or modes of presentation developed by lab staff members. Because of the interest by composition instructors in the less familiar approaches and topics, lab tutors have also been invited into classrooms for special sessions; and this suggests the need to add to the lab's services a list of "traveling teachers" who can be invited to classes, particularly those of newer teachers, to demonstrate the pedagogy to the instructor while providing instruction in special topics to the class.

Because of the interest by other labs in the Writing Lab's mini-courses, a lab staff member has written an article for the Writing Lab Newsletter on one of the special topics presented (and received numberous requests for the materials used), and another lab staff member has written a second article on the lab's mini-courses to be included in a future issue of the newsletter.

d. Self instruction materials.

The Writing Lab's extensive set of tape and booklet self-instruction modules on spelling, grammar, rhetoric, and vocabulary continue to be heavily used. In addition to the students who used these modules to supplement their lab work, 160 additional students came in for 272 hours of independent study as part of course work assigned by their instructors. Four new self-instruction modules developed by the lab staff were also in use during the semester, two of which were used to supplement class assignments.

The excellent evaluations of the effectiveness of the lab's self-instructional materials (discussed in Section C of this report) indicate that these programs will continue to be heavily used. However, serious lack of space for storage of materials and for more study

carrels and tape recorders prevents any expansion of their use. In addition, the over-crowding of the room has resulted in a noise level so high that even students using the self-instruction materials with head phones have complained of being unable to concentrate because of the noise.

3. Resource Center.

a. Resource File for the composition staff.

The Writing Lab's Resource File of materials on the teaching of composition continued to be in daily use during the spring semester. Several hundred entries on the sign-out sheet indicate that 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 books or journals on the practice, theory, and pedagogy of composition instruction. In addition, sound-slide programs continued to be borrowed for classroom use.

When asked to evaluate the Resource File, 81% of those composition instructors who responded reported that it was of great help while the remaining 19% reported that it was of some help.

b. Resource for other institutions.

As a result of the Writing Lab Newsletter, which is edited by the lab's director and mailed to over 275 labs and learning centers across the country, Purdue's Writing Lab has become a clearing house for information on labs. In addition, all specific requests for information describing the lab have been answered with copies of the lab's instructional materials, descriptive booklets, and semester reports. Several directors of new or proposed labs have come for extended visits, and a graduate student from the State University of New York at Albany,

who came for the purpose of gathering information for his doctoral dissertation on writing labs, observed the lab in operation and was also given copies of much of the lab's materials.

4. Future Growth of the Writing Lab.

For next fall, the lab plans to explore ways to expand its "traveling teacher" service described earlier in this report. In an early stage of planning for the year afterward is a proposal to request specialized equipment for the English 001 and 002 students so that they can add needed lab work to their course instruction. The addition of mateials for the teaching of English as a second language will also benefit the lab as it already works with large numbers of non-native speakers of English enrolled in composition courses, although without adequate materials for their special needs. Next year will also be spent planning and preparing for the type of tutorial instruction needed by those engineering students who will be coming to the lab in order to meet new requirements in writing skills to be initiated in the fall of 1979.

B. STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF THE USE OF THE LAB

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

Table 1. Total number of students using the lab.

1.	No. of students attending the lab for tutorial appointments:	167
2.	No. of students using the lab as a drop-in center:	199
3.	No. of students attending mini-courses:	357
4.	No. of students using the self-instruction modules:	160
	TOTAL	883

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	54	54
2	38	76
3	32	96
4	16	64
5	7	35
6	4	24
7	3	21
8	2	16
9	7	63

10	2	20
11	1	11
13	1	13
	TOTAL	493

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

No. of sessions per student	No. of students	Total no. of sessions
1	156	156
2	26	52
3	8	24
4	4	16
5	4	20
6	1	6
	TOTAL	274

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

No. of modules	No. of students	No. of uses of modules
1	103	103
2	32	64
3	9	27
4	8	32
5	3	15
6	4	24

7	1			7
			TOTAL	272

Table 5. Description by courses of students attending the lab

Course	No. attending tutorial appointments	No. requesting drop-in help	No. attending mini-courses	No. using self-instructional modules	Totals
A. COMPOSITION COURSES					
English 002	3	1	0	1	5
English 003	1	0	0	0	1
English 100	17	7	22	5	51
English 101	37	36	20	30	123
Ebglish 101X	1	0	0	0	1
English 102	37	63	226	39	365
English 102I	2	3	4	1	10
English 102M	23	17	40	11	91
English 103	1	0	0	0	1
English 105	9	5	19	3	36
English 405	2	2	1	0	5
English 420	4	8	0	0	12
English 421	4	2	2	1	9
B. OTHER COURSES					
Chem. 102	0	1	0	0	1
CDFS 540	0	1	0	0	1
Comm. 114	1	3	0	0	4
Comm. 252	1	1	0	0	2
Comm. 534	1	0	0	0	1
Ed. 249	0	1	0	0	1
English 185	0	4	0	21	25
English 264	1	0	0	0	1
English 286	0	0	0	35	35
English 376	1	0	0	0	1
English 396	1	1	0	0	2
G.S. 150	0	1	0	0	1
G.S. 490	0	0	0	1	1
Hist. 494	0	1	0	0	1
HPER 590	1	0	0	0	1
PSYCH. 120	0	1	0	0	1
PSYCH. 570	0	1	0	0	1
Undergraduate self help	6	13	3	8	30

Graduate	5	9	16	4	34
self help					
staff	0	1	0	0	1
faculty	0	1	0	0	1
C. GRADUATE STUDENTS PREPARING FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY EXAMS	8	15	4	0	27
TOTALS	167	199	357	160	= 883

Table 6. Description by school of students using the lab for tutorials, drop-in help, and self-instruction.

School	% of total
Agriculture	15%
CFS	8%
Engineering	18%
HSSE	20%
Management	13%
Pharmacy	2%
Science	14%
Technology	7%
Veterinary Medicine	1%
Unclassified	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 evaluation questionnaires to the composition instructors for each of their students who attended the lab. A tally of the responses indicates that while 23% of the students needed only some help, 45% needed much help; and 32% needed a great deal of help. Responses to the question concerning subject mastery indicate that all of the students demonstrated improvement in the areas of writing skills studied in the lab, with 57% showing some improvement and 43% demonstrating a great deal of improvement. The grades for 86% of these students also rose one or two letter grades. Composition instructors also reported that 76% of their students

indicated to their instructors that they appreciated the lab's help, and 79% of the students evaluated showed noticeable improvement in their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Of the students evaluated for motivation, 100% indicated an increased desire to write well. Responses to the question asking about feedback from the lab indicate that 90% of the instructors evaluated communication from the lab instructor as adequate to excellent. Of those instructors whose students used self-instruction materials, 25% rated the modules as being of some help, 19% responded that they were of much help, and 56% 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, 38% of those who responded rated the quality of their instruction as very clear and very effective, 45% responded that it was clear and effective, and the remaining 17% reported that it was adequate. When asked to evaluate their progress in writing skills as a result of their lab work, 94% of the students reported definite improvement, and 81% 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 95% reporting that their instructors were very helpful and very competent. In the space provided for further comments and suggestions, many students appended notes expressing their appreciation for the lab's services and their lab instructors' help. While there were no complaints, some students expressed their regret that they had not come in sooner, and several students requested that the number of hours available for help be extended.

Of the students who used the lab's self-instructional materials, 25% rated the quality of instruction provided as very clear and very effective, 36% reported that it was clear and effective, and the remaining 39% responded that it was adequate. As a result of using these modules, 35% of the students reported a great deal of

improvement in their writing skills and 44% noted some improvement. When asked whether they liked or disliked using self-instructional material, 91% of the students reported that they did like it, and the most often cited reasons were that they could learn at their own pace, concentrate on what they particularly wanted to learn, and work at times that were convenient for them.