

# **Purdue University Writing Lab Report**

## **1991-1992**

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# Purdue University Writing Lab Annual Report 1991-92

## A. Services Offered

### •Student services

As a campus-wide support service for writing skills, the Purdue University Writing Lab worked with 6036 students, enrolled in 191 different courses in the Fall semester and 167 courses in the Spring semester. The constituencies served include the following:

#### Undergraduates:

Students requesting tutorials were writing papers for composition courses or a wide variety of other courses on campus (see Appendix C), learning English as a second language, or writing resumes and job applications.

#### Graduate students:

Graduate students requesting tutorial help were preparing for the English proficiency exam, learning English as a second language, writing papers for courses, or writing dissertations.

We are pleased to report that our services, when adjusted for the 30% reduction in instructional staff this year, increased 3% over last year.

### •Faculty support and outreach

The value of Writing Lab support to classroom teachers is reflected in some of the "Comments from Instructors" in Appendix D. Additional faculty support was offered through CIS workshops, personal consultations, and lab instructional materials. Outreach activities included meeting with on-site international and American visitors who came to study the lab as a model, speaking to local organizations, and answering Grammar Hotline questions and phone and letter requests for information about tutorial instruction in writing.

### •Planned expansion of services

A major expansion of lab services for international students will begin next fall. With a Faculty Development Fund Grant from the Dean of Liberal Arts to purchase materials, the Writing Lab is establishing a Self-Study Center for Students Learning English as a Second Language. New materials will help students improve listening comprehension, English pronunciation, and language skills. Tutors in the room will be available when needed to assist with selection of materials, answer questions, and reinforce learning.

## B. Goals Achieved

The Purdue University Writing Lab works to further University goals as articulated in the most recent edition of *Purdue University Self-Study, West Lafayette Campus*:

### •Enhancing the quality of the undergraduate and graduate experience:

- Over 6000 Purdue students, in more than 350 courses on campus, received individualized tutorial assistance with writing skills.
- A staff of 11 graduate lab instructors and 20 peer tutors gained both professional expertise in tutoring writing and also preparation for future

employment. (Almost 20 graduate students have now gone on to become writing center directors at other institutions.)

- Tutor training courses for 35 undergraduates introduced them to theoretical and pedagogical approaches in teaching writing and enhanced their own communication skills.
- A Freshman Scholar worked on an instructional materials development project with the Director.
- Hundreds of undergraduates who added comments to their evaluations noted that they appreciated being in the lab because it offers friendly, personal help in an otherwise large, impersonal institution.
- The availability of a place for assistance with writing and for faculty consultation on adding writing to courses promotes more writing in courses.

#### •Diversifying the University's population (through retention)

- The Writing Lab actively promotes retention of a wide variety of students by providing the kind of personal attention advocated by recent speakers on campus who addressed the issue of retention. Specifically, the lab offers: 1) supplementary instruction to students who might not otherwise be able to successfully complete courses (learning disabled students, returning students, international students, etc.), 2) a support place where students find a place on campus where they "belong," where some tutors-in-training have found a career interest, and where students at all levels can mingle and share problems, and 3) a collaborative atmosphere in which motivation to learn is increased because students are encouraged to become active learners in control of their own writing skills.

#### •Expanding research activity

- The Director and graduate student instructors presented conference papers and published articles in major journals in the field about their work. This year, the Director won a national award, the "Outstanding Scholarship in Writing Centers," for one of her articles on writing center theory.
- A 25-page description of the Purdue University Writing Lab as a model for writing centers in large research institutions will appear in a forthcoming book to be published by the National Council of Teachers of English.
- Students doing their own research in a variety of disciplines used the Writing Lab as a source of data for their projects.

#### •Expanding outreach

- Of the 563 people who called the Grammar Hotline, over half were from off-campus, including callers from local and out-of-state businesses, libraries, educational institutions, and state and federal government offices.
- Among the on-site visitors who came to study the Writing Lab as a model for their own institutions were members of Denmark's Ministry of Education and Research, as well as visitors from American universities and high schools. Next year, the lab will be visited by a faculty member from the province of Yunnan, in the People's Republic of China, who has asked to spend time in the lab in order to study its theory, structure, and administration in preparation for introducing the concept in China.
- The *Writing Lab Newsletter*, edited by the Director and published through the Department of English, has over 900 subscribers across the United States, Canada, and several foreign countries.

The Purdue University Writing Lab thus contributes to Purdue's missions:

•**Discovery of knowledge**

- Through research on individualized instruction in writing, the pedagogy of tutorials, and the theory and administration of writing labs

•**Dissemination of knowledge**

- Through publication of research findings
- Through conference presentations
- Through meetings with on-site visitors
- Through responses to written and phone requests
- Through workshops and meetings with Purdue faculty
- Through publication of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*
- Through three practicum courses in tutoring writing offered every semester

•**Application of knowledge**

- Through tutorial instruction offered to thousands of students every semester

**C. Evaluations**

Evaluations indicate that over 91% of the instructors reported improvement in their students' writing skills as a result of lab tutorials and that 93% of the students reported writing improvement. In evaluations of individual tutorials, 85% of the students reported that they had learned a lot in the tutorial.

**D. Future Needs**

•**Personnel**

Assistant Director

The present responsibilities of directing the Writing Lab include mentoring new graduate assistants who tutor in the lab; teaching tutor training courses for peer tutors; monitoring three staffs of tutors, clerical workers, work/study students, and a computer consultant; directing various programs in the lab; serving as liaison to faculty; and handling various administrative tasks. A permanent assistant director, in a professional position (not faculty), would relieve this overload, provide continuity, and assist in developing new programs.

Graduate Student Lab Instructors

Staff reductions for this year caused severe cutbacks in services. At least two, preferably all four, one-quarter time slots are needed to return the lab to full strength and to end the current problem of turning away between ten and fifteen students every day. A sampling of instructor and student complaints about inadequate staffing is included in Appendix D.

Hourly Wage Earners

Because of the reduction in the hourly wage budget for this year, the availability of peer tutors for English 100 was severely limited. Since tutoring is part of required English 100 work, students enrolled in this course were unable to receive all the required instruction for the course. In addition, because of decreased work/study student assistance to work as receptionists as well as enough tutors, lab hours had to be reduced, eliminating late afternoon, evening, and Friday afternoon tutorial assistance.

## •Equipment

### Computer needs

Because many students in writing courses are now enrolled in classes in the Mac lab, they rely on the one Macintosh in the Writing Lab to complete papers for these classes. (Open hours in the Mac labs seem to be insufficient for many of these students.) A second Macintosh in the lab is needed to handle this traffic, and a laser printer is also needed for students who do not have access to those in the Mac labs. In addition, with another new Macintosh, lab instructors could begin to offer electronic tutoring. Finally, two laptop computers for tutoring tables would permit the lab to introduce computers into the planning stages of writing in tutorials.

### Tutoring tables

Several years ago the Writing Lab was given funds for two round tutoring tables in each room of the lab. These have been highly successful in promoting the appropriate tutorial setting. Two more round tables would end the competition among tutors to get to the round tables.

## •Space

The Writing Lab works with thousands of students each semester in crowded conditions which detract severely from the quality of instruction being provided. In Room 224 Heavilon, noise from a secretary's typing and phone calls as well as computer printers distracts both international students who are trying to listen to self-instruction tapes and English 100 students who must work with tutors in close proximity to all this noise. Tutorials in Room 226 are conducted in close proximity to each other and the midst of phones ringing at the reception desk, the Director working at her desk and meeting with people, Grammar Hotline calls, and teachers coming in to discuss instructional needs. Because of lack of table space, several tutorials often must be conducted at opposite ends of the same table, and space between tables in both rooms is limited because the rooms must also be storage facilities for instructional materials, newsletter archives, office supplies, and data entry equipment. An immediate need is for more storage space outside the lab, and a long term need is for more tutoring space in the lab.

## **Appendix A**

### **Staff and Services**

#### **1. Staffing**

The 1991-92 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. Because of budget cutbacks, the number of graduate teaching assistants was reduced from fifteen to eleven, the number of hours available for peer tutoring was cut from 60 to 40 hours/week, the number of hours for a computer consultant dropped from 20 hours/week to 10 hours/week, and the number of hours of work/study clerical assistance was reduced from 35 to 20. As a result, the total number of hours the lab was open each week had to be reduced from 54 hours/week to 37 hours/week.

#### **2. Services**

Together, the instructional staff offered tutorials, drop-in assistance on a first-come/first-served basis, workshops, Traveling Teacher sessions in writing classes and in other classrooms across campus, instructional handouts, self-instruction tapes, tutor training practicums, a Grammar Hotline, computers for word processing and computer-assisted instruction, faculty workshops, and a library of books, journals, and reference materials.

The population served represents 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)
- 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 a variety of literature courses in the English Department (English 201, 202, 203, 227, 231, 232, 237, 238, 240, 241, 250, 257, 264, 266, 267, 271, 305, 306, 327, 309, 337, 350, 358, 373, 376, 391, 396, 406, 442, 470, 490, 496, 509, 515, 518, 520, 542, and 575)
- Students writing papers for a wide variety of courses in other departments and schools (AAE, AD, AGR, AGECE, AUS, BC, BCHM, BIOL, CDFS, CE, CHE, COM, CPT, CSR, ECON, ED, EDCI, EET, FLL, FN, GS, HIST, HSCI, IE, IET, IT, ME, MGMT, MSE, PHIL, PHPR, POL SCI, PSY, RHI, SOC, SPV, and SWRK)
- Students using computers for writing assignments, simulations, and self-instruction
- Students in three sections of practicum courses offered every semester in tutoring writing (English 390 and 502W)
- Students preparing resumes, job applications, and graduate school and professional school applications

- Students in classes across campus whose instructors requested workshops in their classes
- Graduate students taking the English Proficiency Exam in the Office of Writing Review
- Graduate students writing dissertations
- Composition instructors who need professional journals, books, and instructional materials
- Purdue faculty who request assistance in adding writing skills to their courses and who attended CIS workshops on designing writing assignments and on grading student papers for writing skills

### **3. Other activities this year**

- Graduate teaching assistants presented papers about their Writing Lab work at the national conference on composition, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and at a regional conference, East Central Writing Centers Association, and peer tutors presented workshops at the national Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference.
- Two former teaching assistants in the lab served on the Executive Board of the East Central Writing Centers Association.
- The *Writing Lab Newsletter* was published and new instructional handouts were developed with desktop facilities provided by Donald Brown, Dean of Academic Services.
- A Freshman Scholar worked in the lab on an instructional design project.
- Resume workshops were held for university-sponsored student organizations.
- Tutorials to supplement an ESL course were offered by a graduate student who volunteered her time in order to learn more about teaching ESL.
- A Faculty Development Fund Grant from the Dean of Liberal Arts was awarded to the Director to purchase materials for a self-study center for international students.
- Graduate teaching assistants in the lab had access to a national electronic bulletin board for discussing writing lab issues.

## Appendix B

### Statistical Use of the Writing Lab

	<u>no. of uses</u>	<u>no. of students</u>
Tutorial appts.	1732	1196
Drop-in sessions	1552	1244
Handouts to students	1615	1442
Handouts to instructors	660	80
Microcomputers	208	147
Self-instruction tapes	57	27
Writing/Studying in lab	340	271
English 100	2894	371
Traveling Teacher sessions	695	695
Grammar Hotline	<u>563</u>	<u>563</u>
totals:	10,316	6,036



## Appendix C

### University Uses of the Writing Lab

#### 1. Depts. which make ten or more requests:

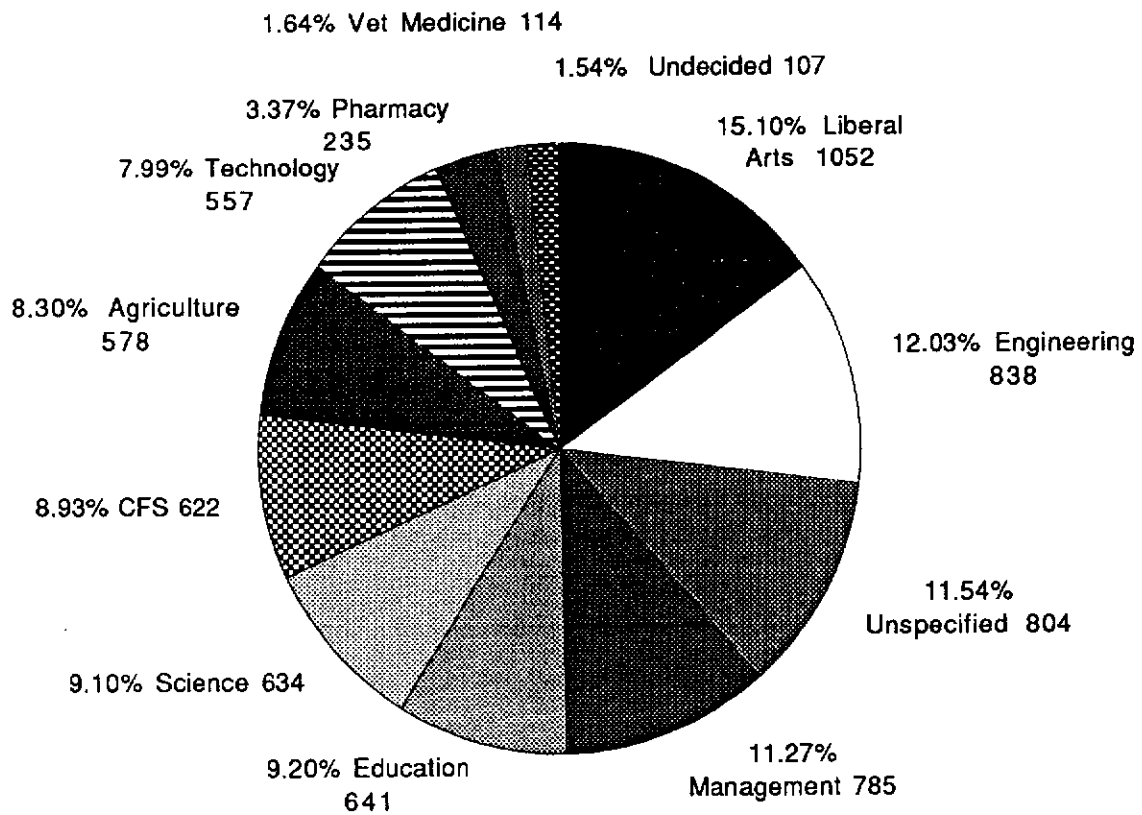
<u>Dept.</u>	<u>No. of requests</u>
AG ECON	124
AUS	11
BC	27
CDFS	30
COM	145
CSR	38
ECON	42
ED	89
EDCI	36
ENGLISH	5185
GS	25
HISTORY	25
MGMT	25
PHI	10
POL SCI	192
PSY	40
RHI	76
SOC	14
SPV	12
Unspecified	295

#### 2. Courses with ten or more requests:

<u>Course</u>	<u>No. of requests</u>
AG ECON 331	81
AG ECON 496	28
BC 200	14
CDFS 454	10
CDFS 521	10
COM 114	64
COM 252	31
COM 324	16
CSR 305	24
ECON 365	31
ED 311	16
EDCI 311	18
ENGL 100	2926
ENGL 101	1072
ENGL 102	620
ENGL 103	126
ENGL109	87
ENGL 201	13
ENGL 231	10
ENGL 237	11
ENGL 250	21
ENGL 266	23
ENGL 267	16
ENGL 304	27
ENGL 420	83
ENGL 421	33

GS 490U	11
POL SCI 101	19
POL SCI 141	76
POL SCI 380	17
POL SCI 460	13
POL SCI 548	10
PSY 285	11
PSY 366	15
RHI 590	15
RHI 600	17

Usage of Writing Lab by Schools 91-92 Academic Year



- "I am glad you are there to help students. Thank you." (W. Denton, CDFS)
- "Often, students complain that they cannot get an appointment in a reasonable amount of time—sometimes you're booked for 2 weeks." (C. Brice, English)

### **B. Comments from Students**

- "The tutors will give you the feedback that you need to write a better paper." (A. Westrich)
- "How helpful and friendly everyone is. I really enjoyed going!! I know I'll be back next semester." (M. Carlton)
- "The most important aspect was that we worked on a one to one basis. The tutor was present with you while you discussed what you wanted to achieve on your paper." (V. Albergo)
- "The most important aspect is close relationship between tutor and student. The tutor understands what the student is doing." (H. Fahmi)
- "It's important having people that are willing to help you out no matter how terrible a writer you are. The Writing Lab helps people better organize their thoughts." (S. Tesmer)
- "The Writing Lab is there to help anyone not just English majors or English students." (B. Stresino)
- "You should expand your helpful services so that it isn't so hard to get an appointment." (M. Carlton)
- "As an older student I really appreciate having someone to help me sort ideas out. It can be overwhelming to return to college. The Lab helps boost confidence and is a great resource for all students." (T. Davisson)
- "NEED MORE TUTORS!!!! It's ridiculous to have to schedule an appointment 2 and 1/2 weeks in advance. I wish I could have gotten in there more during the semester." (B. Dalbke)
- "I probably would not have survived English 420 if I would not have taken help from the Writing Lab." (H. Hite)
- "The most important aspect of the Writing Lab was that it helped me understand my subject." (D. Kumssa)
- "It built my confidence because I always left feeling my paper was in good shape." (M. McCrary)
- "The tutors help to get me to think about my topic more and build on my writing style." (D. Hoffman)
- "The Writing Lab helps students (especially international students) to know how to write English paper." (Z. Wang)

- "The aspect which most impressed me about the lab is how positive all the tutors are. They have all managed to at the very least boost my confidence enough to try to improve on my papers and revise them one more time." (J. Stuart)

### C. Summary of Evaluations

#### A. From instructors

1. Students' writing improvement:
  - great improvement 47%
  - some improvement 44%
  - little or no improvement 9%
2. Students' grade improvement:
  - one letter grade or more 55%
  - up to one letter grade 34%
  - less than one letter grade 11%
3. Students' attitude toward the Lab:
  - appreciation 42%
  - little or no feeling expressed 57%
  - resentment 1%

#### B. From students

1. End-of-semester evaluations:
  - a. Quality of instruction
    - very clear and helpful 84%
    - adequate 14%
    - not helpful or clear 2%
  - b. Writing improvement:
    - great deal of improvement 60%
    - some improvement 33%
    - little or no improvement 7%
  - c. Grade improvement:
    - one letter or more 68%
    - up to one letter 21%
    - dropped or didn't change 11%
2. Evaluations of individual tutorials (based on 1039 responses):
  - a. Quality of instruction:
    - very helpful 95%
    - somewhat helpful 5%
    - not helpful 0%
  - b. Amount learned:
    - learned a lot 85%
    - learned a little 15%
    - learned nothing 0%
  - c. Likelihood that student would return to the Lab if further help is needed:
    - very likely 95%
    - somewhat likely 5%
    - not likely 0%