

Purdue University Writing Lab Report

1994-1995

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Abstract

During the 1994-95 academic year, the Purdue University Writing Lab assisted almost 6,000 student writers and their instructors with a variety of services. Evaluations indicate that the Writing Lab continues to provide extensive help which results in improvement in student writing. By offering a variety of services in addition to tutorials, our small staff is able to provide some form of individualized assistance with writing skills to over 15% of Purdue's student population. Particularly worthy of note this year is the further development of our online distance learning project, OWL (Online Writing Lab), which was used by thousands both here at Purdue and all over the world via the Internet and which resulted in an extensive number of articles in newspapers, magazines and journals about this unique service at Purdue. Also noteworthy is statistical data which shows a strong correlation between the new required tutoring program for English 100 students (a course for at-risk students entering the university) and higher course grades.

Writing Lab Services: 1994-1995

During the 1994-1995 academic year, the Writing Lab continued to provide Purdue students with individualized tutorial assistance with writing skills as well as a variety of other services detailed in Appendix A. Statistical reports of this use are included as Appendix B; the table showing the correlation between grades in English 100 and tutoring; and evaluations and comments from users of a variety of the Writing Lab's services are included in Appendix D. New programs and noteworthy recognition of this year's work of the Writing Lab are detailed here.

- **OWL (Online Writing Lab)**

With support from the Dean of Liberal Arts, the Writing Lab has continued to develop online tutorial services. Computer users with accounts connected to the Internet can send online questions to Writing Lab tutors or request any of over one hundred instructional handouts on writing skills available through e-mail, WORDS, FTP, Gopher, and the World Wide Web page. OWL users can also link to useful resources on the Internet for writing research papers. Data collected from February to May (in Appendix B) indicate that WORDS, the program available only to Purdue students, was used 2,182 times; and Purdue users accounted for 6,419 uses of OWL's World Wide Web page. Data also indicate that among the 27,921 uses of the Gopher service and the 92,324 uses of the World Wide Web page, the majority were from the "edu" domain, indicating that universities were the prime users.

Purdue's OWL appears on dozens of university World Wide Web home pages or as part of online resources for college and high school courses both in the United States (e.g., University of Texas; Wellesley; University of California at Berkeley; University of Maine; University of Connecticut; Troy High School in Fullerton, CA; University of Illinois; University of Missouri at Columbia; University of Arkansas at Little Rock; Springbrook High School in Silver Spring, MD; University of Pittsburgh; University of Alaska Anchorage) and around the world (e.g., Chinese University of Hong Kong; University of Toronto; two universities in Japan; HUT Language Centre in Espoo, Finland; American University in Cairo; UNISA in South Africa; Swinburne University of Technology in Australia), and the link is described in very positive terms (e.g., "Purdue's incredible array of materials," "the rich resources at Purdue's OWL"). Over a dozen articles about OWL have appeared locally (e.g., *Lafayette Journal and Courier*, *Inside Purdue*, *Purdue Perspective*, *Purdue Impact*), in Indiana (e.g., the IHETS newsletter), and

elsewhere (e.g., *Graduating Engineer*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Toledo Blade*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Internet World*, *Business Communication Quarterly*).

If future support is provided from the Office of the Dean of Liberal Arts, OWL will continue to be developed. The goal for the next year would be to build instructor and student awareness by offering workshops and adding materials of particular use for research writing in various disciplines. The larger goal is to provide students with tools to learn how to gather online information needed in research paper writing. An additional benefit will be national and international recognition of Purdue's innovative use of technology, outreach to schools and communities, and models for other institutions developing these distance learning projects.

- **The English 100 program with tutors integrated into the classroom**

In the program for developmental writers (at-risk students), tutors are now integrated into the classroom and also meet individually with every student, every week in the Writing Lab. Data on course grades provided by the Registrar's Office (Appendix C) show significantly higher grades in 1993 and 1994, when tutoring was required, than in 1991 and 1992, when tutoring was optional. The most significant increase was in the percentages of A's and decreases in percentages of C's in semesters when required weekly tutoring was added to the curriculum.

- **Professional opportunities for the staff in the Writing Lab**

Both graduate and undergraduate tutors have had papers accepted at regional and national conferences and have been invited to two national conferences next fall. In addition, tutors have published papers on writing center theory in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. In addition, the Director has presented papers on writing center theory and administration and about online tutoring at national conferences. She has also been invited to keynote the National Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference next fall.

- **Availability of Writing Lab tutors in selected residence halls**

With funding contributed by residence halls, tutors from the Writing Lab were able to provide on-site tutoring several evenings a week in study rooms in the residence halls. Response to this program was very favorable and will continue if funding is again available.

- **Resource for research, course projects, and internships**

The OWL project is providing research information for a doctoral thesis and provided an opportunity for a class to develop OWL brochures in a course on writing for publication. The Writing Lab was also the site for a professional writing major's internship.

- **Creative writing workshops**

In the Fall 1994 semester, a series of creative writing workshops, with a workshop coordinator (privately funded), were held in the Writing Lab and attracted creative writing majors as well as other students in the university who sought an audience for their creative efforts.

Appendix A: Staff, Services, and Users

1. Staffing

The 1994-95 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, a graduate student served as the system designer and programmer for OWL (Online Writing Lab). Clerical help was provided by a receptionist, a secretary, and work/study student assistance.

2. Services

Services offered by the instructional staff include the following:

- tutorials
(half-hour tutorial appointments with tutors)
- drop-in assistance
(tutorials available on a first-come, first-served basis)
- required lab component for the English 100 program
(tutorials with every student, every week, in addition to having tutors integrated into classroom work)
- Credit courses (English 390, English 502W)
(training practicums for one group of graduate students and two groups of undergraduates preparing to be peer tutors)
- Traveling Tutor sessions
(workshops held in classrooms by invitation of instructors)
- instructional handouts
(hundreds of individual handouts on a variety of writing skills)
- ESL Self-Study Center
(tape cassette programs for international students to improve listening and reading comprehension, plus pronunciation and speaking skills)
- Grammar Hotline
(responses to questions called in by students, staff, and faculty at Purdue, as well as calls from around the nation)
- a peer tutoring program in selected residence halls
(peer tutors offering tutorials in a residence hall, funded by the hall)
- computers for word processing and computer-assisted instruction
(open lab facilities for word processing, plus computer programs for journalism students and for international students working on English skills)
- faculty development
(workshops and meetings with staffs to discuss the use of writing in various disciplines)
- faculty assistance with creating writing assignments and grading
(assistance with integrating writing into courses and with using the Writing Lab)
- library of books, journals, and reference materials
(library of reference books, plus handbooks to check out)
- OWL (Online Writing Lab), online tutorial assistance
(a variety of online tutorial services being developed for computer users requesting help with writing)

- *Writing Lab Newsletter*
(edited by the Writing Lab Director and published by the Department of English, this newsletter is one of two nationally distributed and indexed publications on writing center theory, pedagogy, and administration)

3. Users

The populations served represent a wide variety of writers, teachers, and others, both on-campus, nationally, and internationally

- students enrolled in English Department writing courses
- students learning English as a second language
- students writing papers for hundreds of courses on campus
- students engaged in other writing projects such as resumes, professional school applications, dissertations, co-op reports, etc.
- teachers using Writing Lab handouts in their courses
- teachers assigning writing in various departments across campus
- writing center administrators from other institutions studying the Writing Lab as a model in on-site visits
- writers on the Internet using OWL handouts
- school districts, universities, and other institutions building collections via OWL of writing materials
- writers from all over the world sending questions about writing to OWL

Appendix B: Statistical Use of the Writing Lab

1. Types of usage

	<u>no. of requests</u>	<u>no. of users</u>
Tutorial appointments	2143	1364
Drop-in sessions	1440	1111
Handouts to students	943	860
Handouts to instructors	87	70
Microcomputers	167	85
Self-instruction tapes	12	12
Writing/studying in the lab	196	93
English 100	1628	240
Traveling Tutor workshops	867	867
Grammar Hotline	337	337
Unspecified	2	2
OWL e-mail tutorials	982	679

2. Most frequent use of the Writing Lab by departments

<u>Dept.</u>	<u>no. of requests</u>
English	4094
AGEC	173
Com	105
Mgmt	80
Biol	78

3. Usage of the Writing Lab by schools

a. Including students in freshman composition courses (no. of students= 5,835)

Liberal Arts	27.1%
Mgmt	13.8%
Engineering	12.1%
Ag	10.5%
CFS	8.4%
Tech	8.3%
Sci	7.9%
Pharm	6.7%
Ed	5.2%

b. Excluding students in freshman composition courses (no. of students= 2,437)

Liberal Arts	31.2%
Engineering	14.1%
Ag	10.0%
Mgmt	9.9%
Tech	8.0%
Ed	7.8%
Sci	7.4%
CFS	6.2%
Pharm	5.3%

4. Use of OWL

(data available only for February 1-May 10, 1995)

A. E-Mail

total usage: 19,493

B. WORDS

total usage: 2,182

	expert	mentor	sage	mace
requesting handouts	139	247	100	44
looking for e-mail	79	68	31	11
defining words	83	79	56	13
checking spelling	40	29	33	14
connecting to THOR	103	29	45	48
consulting phone dir.	162	105	86	25
asking questions	16	18	8	2
requesting help	46	26	28	15
sending feedback	325	156	27	2
totals	993	601	414	174

C. Gopher

total usage: 27,921

topmost domains:

edu	13748
com	3084
us	1906
gov	1605
net	1410
ca	1094
org	726

D. World Wide Web

total hits (uses): 92,324

top users:

purdue.edu	6419
ctc.edu	961
netcom.com	625
utexas.edu	407
uconn.edu	375
mtu.edu	365
washington.edu	352
ac.uk	342
cmu.edu	313

topmost domains:

edu	22115
com	6475
net	2857
ca	2282
us	870
org	769
gov	571
au	548
uk	536

Appendix C:
Correlation of Tutoring and
English 100 Course Grades

year	tutoring	English 100 letter grades:						
		A	B	C	D	F	I	W
1991	optional	15%	47%	27%	2%	6%	-	3%
1992	optional	29%	38%	21%	5%	4%	.5%	3%
1993	required	42%	35%	8%	3%	7%	-	5%
1994	required	38%	34%	10%	2%	11%	1%	4%

Appendix D: Evaluations and Comments

Evaluations

Evaluations of individual tutorials (based on 3,169 responses):

a. Quality of instruction:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----|
| • very helpful | 94% |
| • somewhat helpful | 6% |
| • not helpful | 0% |

b. Amount learned:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----|
| • learned a lot | 87% |
| • learned a little | 13% |
| • learned nothing | 0% |

c. Likelihood that student would return to the Lab if further help is needed:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----|
| • very likely | 92% |
| • somewhat likely | 8% |
| • not likely | 0% |

Comments

A. From instructors whose students used the Writing Lab

- You folks are doing great work, and I really appreciate it. Keep it up. (R. Davidson, English)
- The Writing Lab relieves me of the necessity of devoting class time in literature courses to matters covered in 100-101-102 while it offers help to students who need it. (L. Gottfried, English)
- My sincere thanks to you for your assistance in helping my students to understand the process of writing. . . . Many students report confidence now in their ability to write because of the Writing Lab. (D. Henderson, EDCI)
- The personal, face to face tutorials seem to help my students the most....Expand the staff. My students crave one-on-one help. (S. Bowers, English)
- The Writing Lab does an excellent job! (M. Summers, SPV)
- The help and enthusiastic manner of its availability are most encouraging to our efforts to have writing exercises/practice represented across our curriculum. (Dr. R. Chalmers, Pharmacy)
- As far as I can see, the Writing Lab works for all of us. (M.M. Rowe, English)

- I have appreciated all the help you have offered to my students. It's great to have a place to send them for help, particularly when the size of the class (35+) prohibits the amount of time that I can spend with each student. (S. Somerville, English)
- I am grateful that the Writing Lab is available to pick up the slack when I cannot work with my students as closely as I would like. (K. Conner, English)
- It is important that I have a resource like the Writing Lab to which I can refer students. (Prof. J. Goldman, CPT)
- The Writing Lab acts as a great support system for all the students in my classes. With the "input" of the Lab, my students have become better writers. (R. Morris, English)
- The only complaint I had from my students was in not being able to get in to see someone in the Writing Lab. (M. Gray, Biology)
- I'm grateful for your services because students improve when they seek out the Writing Lab. Bravo to you all! (Dr. D. Henderson, EDCI)
- Many of my students took advantage of weekly sessions. Most reported their grades were at least a letter higher than they anticipated. (T. Krause, English)
- The two students of mine that used the lab regularly showed significant improvement from early to final drafts... My students that used the Writing Lab expressed strong satisfaction with its services. (A. Kunka, English)
- I think you're doing a great job. (M. Losey, PHPR)
- The students need much more one-on-one help than I can possibly give myself...The two or three students I had who went to the Writing Lab consistently and often needed up with some of the best papers in the class. Thanks for all your help. (V. Munro, English)
- My students have benefited from the advice available at the Lab. (S. Nelson, CDFS)
- I really enjoy working with the UTAs (in English 100)—they're a great source of feedback and support Having the tutors come to class and talking directly with them about the class/tutorial connection has been especially valuable. Thanks. (K. Parvin, English)
- Providing a safe, nurturing, friendly environment where the atmosphere is upbeat, positive. This kind of environment transforms a potentially negative situation (problems with writing) into a positive one (opportunities to learn). ... I'm pleased with the Writing Lab—great people, great work. (M. Price, English)
- Thanks for being there! (Dr. R. Taylor, AGECE)
- English 100 tutors help my students tremendously in taking control of their own writing and in having confidence in writing. (L. Toner, English)
- It's great that the Writing Lab is on the "cutting edge"—that World Wide Web site is a great idea! (M. Zerbe, English)
- I think you provide a valuable service. When my students chose to go the Writing Lab, I always see an improvement in their skills. (C. S. Douglas, English)

B. From students who met with tutors in the Writing Lab

- He helped me see what wasn't clear and concise to the reader.
- What I had was a good paper, and now it's transformed into a great paper!
- I was impressed how good he can help. I learned exactly what I wanted.
- My paper seemed to be choppy before I came to the Writing Lab. I am now more confident in my paper.
- Writing Lab is one of the best offers from Purdue. Maybe the best.
- This is so helpful. It's the best way to learn. Thanks for having this lab.
- I got more ideas but he made me think of them myself as opposed to just telling me.
- He taught me how to catch my errors when I proofread.
- They help me see my errors.
- I was helped enormously. I only had enough ideas/material to write a one page paper and now I can write the three page paper I want.
- This session helped me to see more behind the surface of my paper.
- It's a wonderful program that brings back the one-on-one interaction which college lacks.
- Great place. Everyone here seems to want to help. They don't tear you apart here.
- I came in here with no idea of what to write about and now I have a general outline.
- I learned a new way to write here. They listen to me and help me personally.
- I'm a senior and need this place to brush up. I was getting rusty.
- She made me think about it instead of just telling me.
- Students need more time here. Get more tutors.
- Helped me work through my problems not just tell me what I did wrong.
- She removed all of my fears about writing.
- This place is a major help because the info she gave me was very helpful, yet she also made me do it on my own.
- This is the first place where my questions are really answered.
- She made me feel more confident about my writing abilities.
- I now feel very confident about my paper. I trusted her to help me. This was a professional, but comfortable atmosphere. I had no idea that the Writing Lab would be this helpful to me. I am very glad I came.
- She didn't just tell me what to write, but she showed me how to do it.
- Any question I might have could be answered or discussed until I understand it. You can't ask all these questions in a classroom.
- You need more tutors. Time was wasted waiting for available persons.
- She was very helpful and spent lots of time. She made me correct my own papers which enhanced the learning process. This is the way to learn!
- I wish the Writing Lab could have more hours for students.
- I'm happy I am at Purdue. This lab is a good idea. Every school and college should have such a facility.
- When you need a book, you go to the library, need a beer, go to a bar, need help with a paper, go to the Writing Lab.
- He could relate to me as a student. Great program!
- You are awesome!
- Ted made me do the work, yet he guided my thoughts. He didn't make me feel stupid—but he did make me think! That's important. I usually get frustrated, but Ted jumped in with commentary at just the right times.
- I enjoyed coming and didn't feel intimidated about my dumb questions.
- Even though it took forever to get in, the Writing Lab proved very useful.
- I learned here that no question is stupid!
- I had no idea what was going on with my paper when I came in. When I left, I fully understood everything.
- It isn't just my grade that benefits. I do too.
- He asked me questions instead of telling me what to do. He made me answer my own questions.

- One-on-one is what you need for writing.
- Jeff did not correct my essay, but he helped me to correct my essay. I actually learned something!
- I was hesitant about coming, now I can't wait to come again.
- I like the fact that he did not write the paper for me, but I think the problems I was having were personal toward my writing.
- Helped me to understand my assignment w/out telling me, made me learn.
- It's hard to get a drop-in appointment. I have to wait for a week! However, the tutor I finally saw was great.
- This is the best place on campus for help that I have found.
- She doesn't make you feel bad for not knowing.
- The help was fantastic....extremely helpful.
- I never knew that this could be so helpful, it's nice to look for help and finally get some that's worth while.
- She made me think for myself.
- He made me do the work which allowed me to better understand.
- He helped me to improve my writing in a very short time.
- I was almost to the point where I was stuck, but now I am very eager to write more. I would suggest to every student to come in.
- He made me realize and fix my own mistakes.
- I think I will be able to excel in my writing skills if I am a regular visitor to this lab.
- I really had no focus when I came in and now I have a direct plan of action.
- Friendly and willing people that went out of their way to help me.
- I'll be back because I see now that the Writing Lab helps me with just about anything.
- I should have come earlier! This is very, very helpful. Thank you.
- The people who work here truly care about my success with my papers and take the time to understand what I want to convey and understand my learning blocks. Keep this place, it works—most helpful department (except Health Promotions) on this campus!
- The lab is helpful. Each time I come here I learn more and my papers are turning out better and needing less work.
- She asked "mind jogging" questions which helped me develop a focus topic for a paper.
- I always get great help when I come to the Writing Lab.
- He listened to my comments and worked with me very personally.
- He taught me a lot about the thinking process before actually writing the paper.
- The Writing Lab has helped me in many ways to better my writing.
- The Writing Lab is well respected here on campus.
- I had no idea that I knew the amount of information she forced out of my head.
- I very much admire the friendliness and dedication of the tutors in this Lab.
- She was able to get me to think about what I was trying to say.
- This is a big service, I'm glad I discovered it & I am thankful & have learned a lot.
- She got me to think about what I wanted to say. Because of the mutual thinking we did, I will be able to continue thinking critically, developing my ideas, and expressing them.
- My tutor was very nice and asked many questions which made me think in new ways and I came up with different solutions.
- I feel comfortable with the help I got. Also, every time I come I learn something new. I would like to thank Mr. Morris because he is the person behind my success. Also, I would like to thank Purdue for offering this program.
- Richard didn't tell me what to do. He made me help myself. By doing that I learned a lot about what I need to do to improve my paper.
- I had fun and I learned.
- This is a great program which I hope continues for everyone else. I wish I had this in high school.
- Very professional help and I feel lucky this service is offered to me as a Purdue student.
- The help will probably help me to find a job (intern).