

Purdue University Writing Lab Report

1996-1997

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Summary

During the 1995-1996 academic year, the Purdue University Writing Lab had 13,219 requests from 6,186 users for a variety of services but had to turn away 615 student requests for tutorials.

Our OWL (Online Writing Lab) had a total of 1,440,755 requests (Web, Gopher/FTP, and e-mail). Of that number of OWL users, 42,845 requests on the Web site and 542 on the Gopher/FTP site were from Purdue users. The other requests came from 95 countries around the world, with users from high schools, government offices, other educational institutions, the general public, non-profit agencies, and military users in the U.S. and abroad.

Other noteworthy efforts in this year's work are the following:

- **Continued excellence in evaluations**

We are pleased that during a busy year, our student evaluations continue to remain very high, with 94.3% of the students reporting the quality of instruction as very helpful.

- **Use of OWL to provide campus instruction in Internet use**

In addition to instructors who made use of OWL materials for their classes and students who used OWL when writing papers, Writing Lab staff presented 26 workshops on OWL and the Internet in classrooms in various departments across campus.

- **University support for OWL**

Funds from the Faculty Reinvestment Program, the School of Liberal Arts, and the English Department made possible two .25 TAs (one of whom served as the OWL Coordinator and the other as OWL Technical Coordinator) and provided a much-needed new OWL server and upgraded equipment. This resulted in improved instructional capabilities and facilitated more workshops on OWL, both in the Writing Lab and in classrooms or campus computer labs.

- **Off-campus recognition of OWL**

OWL continued to serve as an ambassador for Purdue as the site was given numerous awards, including a four-star rating by the Excite Web search program; four stars by Netguide, a Web review site; a "Best of the Net" award by EZ Connect (and described as "one of the best and most useful sites on the Internet"); and four stars by Luckman Interactive (and included in their best CD-ROM). OWL is mentioned and pictured in various books and textbooks, including a textbook for college computer science classes and a high school textbook for college-bound students. A commercial company that sells educational Internet materials has licensed some of OWL's instructional materials on writing (and prominently displays a notice that Purdue University is the content provider) for a program purchased by hundreds of high schools throughout the U.S.

- **Professional development for the Writing Lab staff**

Both graduate and undergraduate tutors read papers at national and regional conferences, and the OWL Coordinator completed a doctoral dissertation focusing on our OWL and uses of technology for writing instruction (for which he won a National Writing Centers Association scholarship). In addition, the Director had articles and book chapters

accepted for publication, read papers on writing center theory and administration at national conferences, and was a keynote speaker at a national conference.

The Writing Lab continued to provide Purdue students with one-to-one tutorial assistance with writing skills as well as a variety of other services detailed in Part I. Statistical reports of this use are included as Part 2; and evaluation figures and comments from users of the Writing Lab's services are included in Part 3.

Part One: Staff, Services, and Users

1. Staffing

The 1996-97 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, two graduate students served as coordinators 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 (Developmental Composition)
(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
(63 workshops held in classrooms by invitation of instructors)
- instructional handouts
(4534 requests for 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 402 questions called in by students, staff, and faculty at Purdue, as well as calls from around the nation)
- 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), Internet writing 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 and is an affiliate publication of the National Council of Teachers of English)

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 and literature courses (requests originated from 42 different courses in the fall and 43 different courses in the spring, representing an increase over last year of 4 more courses)
- students learning English as a second language
- students writing papers for hundreds of courses on campus (requests originated from 149 different courses in the fall and 123 different courses in the spring, representing an increase over last year of 49 more courses)
- students engaged in other writing projects such as resumes, professional school applications, dissertations, co-op reports, etc.
- 98 teachers using Writing Lab handouts in their courses (representing an increase over last year of 19 more teachers)
- teachers assigning writing in various departments across campus
- writing center administrators from other institutions studying the Writing Lab and the Lab's OWL as models 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

Part Two: Statistical Use of the Writing Lab

1. Types of usage

	<u>no. of requests</u>	<u>no. of users</u>
Tutorial appointments	1941	1234
Drop-in sessions	1601	1214
Handouts to students	915	848
Handouts to instructors	3619	98
Microcomputers	1286	433
Self-instruction tapes	3	3
Writing/studying in the lab	592	206
English 100	1350	238
Traveling Tutor workshops	1498	1498
Grammar Hotline	402	402
Unspecified	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>
totals:	13,219	6,186

OWL

World Wide Web	1,421,546
Gopher/FTP	15,618
E-mail	<u>3591</u>
totals:	1,440,755

(A detailed statistical report of OWL usage is available at:
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/stats/welcome.html>)

2. Most frequent use of the Writing Lab by departments

<u>Dept.</u>	<u>no. of requests</u>
English	3907
Communication	184
Ag Econ	179
Pol Sci	90
EDCI	58

3. Courses with 10 or more requests per semester

<u>Course</u>	<u>no. of requests</u>
Engl 101	1400
Engl 100	1352
Engl 102	553
Engl 103	165
Ag Econ 396	105
Engl 390	96
Com 114	76
Engl 420	67
Ag Econ 331	57

Com 252	44
Engl 232	34
Engl 250	30
Pol Sci 223	29
CSR	27
Pol Sci	27
EET 257	23

3. Use of the Writing Lab by schools

a. Including students in freshman composition courses (N= 6,832)

Liberal Arts	31.3%	Ag	6.1%
Mgmt	13.0%	Pharm	5.8%
Engineering	11.0%	Ed	5.1%
CFS	8.3%	Unknown	3.7%
Sci	8.2%	Vet Med	0.1%
Tech	7.4%		

b. Excluding students in freshman composition courses (N=3,642)

Liberal Arts	40.7%	Ag	7.0%
Engineering	10.9%	Mgmt	6.4%
Tech	8.5%	CFS	5.7%
Sci	7.1%	Pharm	4.9%
Ed	7.1%	Unknown	1.8%

The sharp rise in the percentage of SLA students (from 25.2% last year to 40.7% this year) was caused by an increased use of the Lab by upper-level English courses and by other depts. in the School (primarily Communication, History, Political Science, and Psychology).

Part Three: Evaluations and Comments

Evaluations

Evaluations of individual tutorials (based on 3,035 responses):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. Quality of instruction: | |
| • very helpful | 94.3% |
| • somewhat helpful | 5.6% |
| • not helpful | .1% |
| b. Amount learned: | |
| • learned a lot | 89.8% |
| • learned a little | 10.1% |
| • learned nothing | .1% |
| c. Likelihood that student would return to the Lab if further help is needed: | |
| • very likely | 95.3% |
| • somewhat likely | 4.6% |
| • not likely | .1% |

Comments

A. From instructors whose students used the Writing Lab

- "The Writing Lab gives my students one-on-one attention they need." (M. Shugars, English)
- "I was glad that my students received help in specific areas such as organization or grammar that they were having problems with." (A. Matsuda, English)
- "I really appreciate the tutorial program the Writing Lab offers. My students have benefited from having another perspective on their papers." (L. Behr, English)
- "The lab is most helpful because of 1:1 contact with students. I know that students can work through all aspects of writing in the lab. I'm very happy with student response to the lab. (L. Davies, English)
- "Thank you very much. You do a great job, and I know students appreciate your services." (S. Emmert, English)
- "I think the WLab needs more tutors—students can't get an appointment sometimes, and they're reluctant to drop in as they say they're "too busy to wait around." (C. Brice, English)
- "My students had very positive experiences in the lab. I have almost 100 Writing Lab reports this semester." (A. Brunk, English)
- "My observation is that students who use the writing lab improve their scores on written assignments significantly. I appreciate the availability of this resource on campus." (H. Mason, PHPR)
- "I think it's a great service." (J. Danesi, Com)
- "The students definitely learn how to write better, and thereby argue better in essay form. Keep up the good work." (M. Smith, History)
- "It's very reassuring to know that the Writing Lab is just down the hall from my classroom/office. I often drop in spontaneously with students when something comes up and we need a handout." (J. Lax-Farr, English)
- "My students have found your lab assistants to be knowledgeable, professional, and personable." (E. Kelly, AUS)

- "The assistance with resumes in the Writing Lab is invaluable to my class." (S. Nelson, CDFS)
- "Your lab helps my students to become better writers in the process of completing their assignments. This service is especially important for foreign students." (P.C. Abbott, Ag Econ)
- "I saw improvement so thanks for the help!" (B. Davis, SPV)
- "Several of my students went to the lab and said that it was too crowded and the wait was too long. Be more accessible to students during crunch time." (P. Boulware, English)
- "Those students who seek help in the Writing Lab have tended to improve their writing the most." (H. Coleman-Trippel, Pol Sci)
- "Many kudos. OWL, in particular, is an enormously helpful and convenient resource." (D. Penkoff, Com)
- "You're great!" (L. Mae, Psych)
- "Since we're in a computer lab, we certainly took advantage of the Web page." (T. McHenry, English)
- "I have seen great improvements in the students I have sent to the lab! You are doing good work!" (G. Till, Com)
- "Keep up the good work! You do a wonderful job helping a large number of students with very limited time/people/money resources. I've also made use of OWL on several occasions. A terrific program!" (J. Fisher, English)
- I just wish all my students took advantage of the lab. (O. Wood, F&N)
- You provide a much-needed service! (A. Zeitler, PolSci)
- The lab helps by providing my students with an unintimidating environment in which they can get real help with their work. All the services have been quite effective. Thanks. (J. Walker, English)
- The lab assistance reminds my students that any paper can always be improved—and should be. I am entirely satisfied with your service. Please keep up the good effort and work. (J. Uhl, AgEcon)
- The friendly and hard-working staff are always going far out of their way to provide my students with top-notch help! (M. Stumpff, English)
- The students who visit the lab seem to understand my comments better. Also, the post-visit reports help me identify student questions (M. Kelley, English)
- You all help so much in clarifying organization, clear thesis statements, specific examples, showing vs. telling so much, transitions, and grammar. Thank you. You provide a valuable service to teachers and students. (R. Herber, English)
- Thank you very much for continuing to offer your services. I know that my students who use the lab benefit from it. Students can get the kind of focused help I can't always give them. (S. Emmert, English)
- As a computer classroom we used OWL extensively as a resource for answering everything from usage questions to citation styles. I liked being able to show students how to answer their own questions, as this really empowers them. (M. Reimer, English)
- I feel the Writing Lab is doing an excellent job in helping my students. I see improvement in my students' writing skills, which reflects the good job you're doing. (M. Rucker, Com)
- The Lab provides students with broad and useful (technical) assistance relating to all stages of the writing process. (W. McLauchlan, Pol Sci)
- Good job, folks! Keep up the excellent work—and keep the popcorn poppin'! (J. Gilligan, English)
- You are doing a fine job! (K. Linden, Ed Studies)
- My students received help with paper content and showed marked improvement after even a single tutorial. (P. Douglas, English)
- I like OWL. Good stuff there. (S. King, E&AS)
- The services are very helpful, and I plan on making more use of the lab in the future. (H. McBee, English)

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

- He was kind, encouraging, and instructive.
- He did not intimidate me in any way. I felt at ease to ask questions without being put down.
- He was very knowledgeable and helpful. I greatly appreciate the Lab help.
- It's a good place to have questions answered.
- The tutoring was helpful because it helped me think.
- It's great that Purdue has a writing lab. I'm sure I'll be back.
- I got an A on that paper! First one! I'll be back.
- She promoted my self-esteem.
- A great place to learn!
- She talked with me until I understood.
- WOW. Super!!
- I'll be back because my grades always improve after a visit to the Writing Lab.
- Very helpful in finding your own mistakes.
- She helped me understand what my paper needed.
- She answered all my questions, talked with me about what I wanted to learn, and she helped me find the problems I was having in my rough draft.
- They're able to promote thinking skills.
- Helps me clear my thoughts.
- She helped me think of things to write about and made me talk about what I wanted to say.
- I actually thought deeper than I normally do.
- She helped me think of things to write about and made me talk about what I wanted to say.
- I think this is the best way to make the paper perfect.
- They're so easy to talk to.
- I love her bubbly always ready to help attitude.
- A good way to learn by seeing your own mistakes and trying to figure them out with help.
- She was definitely helpful and I appreciate having a place set aside to work on writing.
- Having me read my paper aloud made me more aware of my mistakes.
- She understood what I was trying to say.
- I want to receive A's on my papers and will do everything possible to correct my papers and make them acceptable in the eyes of my instructor.
- This is my fourth time here, and I love the help.
- She helped me to understand why and in what ways my paper needed improvement.
- The lab helps me organize my thoughts better.
- He is very wonderful, patient and urges you to fix the problems on your own. He hints at them and helps you through them, but it gives you (the writer) a sense of accomplishment.
- Got me to think about some of the points in my paper.
- Very interested in my work. Thanks!
- I learned a lot about the subsurface of my paper.
- It is an invaluable service. Pls keep the Writing Lab operating!
- It helps to talk to someone about my thoughts.
- He's patient with me.
- It's a good way to make sure you're on track.
- I learned a technique I can use myself.
- It helps to have visuals and examples. Some place to begin. It isn't hard to proceed from there.
- He let me do all my own thinking and helped me by asking questions.
- He let me do my own thinking; he didn't think for me.
- It helped me understand where I wanted to go with my paper.
- Thanks for the friendly help.
- This place is great!

- He was extremely helpful. I was scared that he would just fix the commas. Instead he showed me how to fix the problem permanently.
- He showed me a trick to help get past my writer's block and also gave some words of encouragement. Over the past semester, I think he's helped me double my ability as a writer.
- He helped me deal with my anger.
- I felt it was a supportive environment.
- I always feel more enlightened when I come in here.
- It's always helpful for feedback.
- I feel more confident of my writing after visiting the Writing Lab.
- This place is "user friendly," no pain involved, easily accessible and helpful.
- Helped me with content and confidence.
- They ask you to tell them, that makes you realize things without coming out and saying it.
- I was very depressed on not knowing what to write and now I'm confident on writing my paper.
- She helped me think more about my perspective.
- She asked a lot of thought-provoking questions to help me clarify my paper.
- She gave me the confidence I needed to go ahead and finish my paper.
- Everyone here is good at their job.
- She helped me understand better.
- They help you push your paper to the next level.
- She helped me pull my ideas together.
- She's able to answer all my questions.
- I find the Writing Lab extremely helpful. My grades improve drastically when coming to the Writing Lab.
- I learned more about writing in 30 minutes than I have in 4 years at high school!
- This helped me a lot, and they made me feel welcome.
- He understood my point of view.
- He helped me with questions I had, not what he had.
- He understood me, knew what I was trying to do.
- He was very helpful in . . . guiding me in a way that's my own, not through a universal structure.
- I always learn more and tend to produce better quality papers after visiting the Writing Lab.
- It was extremely helpful and confidence building.
- I think the lab should have more times available. I would like to come in every week but the schedule is booked!
- One-on-one time is very helpful for assignments from a large class setting.
- She helped me without doing the work for me.
- This session proved to be very helpful. It was dynamic and productive. Keep the Writing Lab going. It's great!
- It would be really helpful and convenient if there were more hours available at the Writing Lab because some assignments are given a rather short time to work on.
- She let me expand on my ideas further.
- She made me answer questions—not tell me them.
- I learned how to better organize my paper.
- The handouts are excellent!
- They know how to explain on your level.
- He made me think, he didn't do my thinking. He helped me develop my paper.
- This Writing Lab is a great idea to help students!
- She didn't just tell me the answers. She made me think about it myself.
- This program is great! I believe they should have more labs around campus like this.
- This is good help in getting yourself to figure out what you are trying to say in your paper.
- It helps me to organize my thoughts before I put them on paper.
- The last time I came in on a paper I got a 93%!
- It is a low stress environment with the perfect help.

- It doesn't take much time while I got much to learn.
- The Writing Lab is a good place for international students. Yes!
- Everyone is so willing to help, and they care.
- I learned to do more critical thinking.
- He made me think about the structure of my paper.
- By the end of the session, I was catching the mistakes she had to point out initially.
- I had trouble seeing the paper's problems before the tutoring session.
- It definitely gave me more confidence about writing my paper!
- The tutors take a lot of time with you individually.
- By talking out my paper, it is so much easier to hear what I want to say or what I need to say.
- I was offered one-to-one help, not just general help.
- I think the lab is an awesome resource.
- Handouts are helpful and are there to help when I can't get in for tutoring.
- The Writing Lab is one of the most under-rated resources in the university. I highly recommend its services to anyone who might even be thinking of writing or applying for a job.
- He makes you reflect about your own work.
- I understand more when I come to the Writing Lab.
- He helped me think rather than thinking for me.
- She made me think!
- The tutors are extremely well qualified.
- Every time I come here, I learn something new!
- The lab helps me keep my grades up!
- They're so helpful and friendly. I've had two tutors, and both were patient and friendly. Now I understand more. Thanks.
- Helpful and definitely non-judgmental of what I tried to do/write before I got here. Made me feel comfortable to ask questions.
- From my past experiences in the Writing Lab not only did it help me to improve my writing skills but to improve my grades too.
- I learned a lot about organizing my paper.
- Good handouts.
- It's always important to get another perspective.
- He is really good at not telling me what to do, but draws it out of me. I actually come up w/the ideas but he helped me to organize my thoughts. He is very good.
- I'm not an English major, so it's very important that there's a resource like this place.
- Although I didn't have serious problems, he was able to motivate me to appreciate my writing.
- He made me answer my own questions, provoked thought, and helped push my thinking further.
- One-to-one with a knowledgeable person is the experience for learning. You can't get that in class.
- He showed me how to correct my work, instead of just doing it for me. He had me correct it myself.
- It's very helpful. I got ideas on how to improve my papers.
- This is the third or fourth time in the Writing Lab over the course of 3 years, and I am still continually impressed with the caliber of knowledge and experience in an encouraging setting.
- She gave me confidence in my writing.
- She helped me without cutting me down.
- My tutor was very helpful and actually showed me what I did wrong and I had to correct it. It wasn't just done for me so I wouldn't learn.
- I am surprised at how informative a 20 minute session could be.
- The Writing Lab is wonderful. I like the atmosphere.
- She let me understand my own mistakes.
- My skills are definitely shooting upwards.