



The Newsletter of the Writing Lab at Bristol Community College

A Brief History of a Decade: The Writing Lab Past, Present, and Future

Howard Tinberg

In celebration of the Writing Lab's first decade, this issue of *Writing Matters* provides a brief historical overview of the Lab's past, an account of its present, and a glimpse, albeit speculative, of its future.

Beginnings

In the fall of 1992, the college received its first Title III grant, one facet of which was directed at setting up an interdisciplinary, faculty-driven writing center. Several people were involved in the writing: Paul Fletcher then Assistant Dean of Language, Humanities, and the Arts; Ray LaVertue, then and now, Assistant Dean for Behavioral and Social Sciences; Chris Gilbert, Professor of Psychology; and Ron Weisberger, Director of Tutoring. Having secured the grant, the team set about finding a location on campus. Two classrooms on the second floor of the library were found. I was hired as faculty coordinator, and a full-time lab technician was also added to the staff.

Much work still needed to be done, however, before the Lab could officially open in the spring semester of 1993. Most importantly, tutors needed to be found. According to the grant, the Lab would be staffed by sufficient full-time faculty to represent each academic area on campus, assisted by a comparable number of peer tutors. The latter were selected from among those tutors then working in the college's tutoring center, TASC. A call went out to all full-time instructors to apply for the faculty positions. Eventually, a team was selected. The Writing Lab's first

faculty team:

Alan Powers (English)
Art Gelenian (History)
Chris Gilbert (Psychology)
Diana Yohe (Office Science)
Jim Constantine (Chemistry)
Diane Silveria (Nursing)
Patricia Massey (Dental Hygiene)

The first group of peer tutors included:

Christianne Carvalho
Natasha Costa
AnnMarie Desilets
John Feld
Duane Gatenby

The Lab's first technician was Greg Cupples.

The grant also paid for the use of several computers, which of course needed to be purchased and set up. All this preparation took place during that fall.

Mission

From its beginnings, the Writing Lab has had a complex mission. In fact, the Lab, in the terms of its founding grant, set out to achieve what some have seen as distinctly different goals:

1. To assist students with their writing
2. To promote the use of writing across the curriculum
3. To assist faculty in the development and integration of writing assignments.

Certainly, this writing lab, like other writing centers, would have as its prime goal to assist students with their writing needs. Of course, we would have little to work with if the classroom instructor had not assigned the work in the first place. Therefore, the Lab was entrusted with promoting the use of writing across the curriculum. It was expected that the faculty who worked in the

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Lab would use writing assignments in their own courses and would mentor other faculty to do the same in their classes. Moreover, the Lab would host professional staff meetings and workshops to assist faculty in the designing of effective writing assignments. The Lab has hosted several such workshops, highlighting both faculty assignments and student writing from a wide range of disciplines and subject areas.

Ultimately a mission statement was drafted, the product of a collaboration among faculty and peer tutors. The mission statement reads thus:

Offering an open-door policy to all members of the college and the community at-large, the Writing Lab assists all writers regardless of the subject that generates the writing and the writer's level of experience and expertise. The highly trained staff listens to the writer's concerns, establishes a dialogue, identifies the writing issue(s), and offers encouragement either to begin the writing process or improve the paper by revision.

Summer and Winter Workshops

The founding grant called for the scheduling of a three week workshop for tutors focusing on writing in the disciplines. In July of 1993, the first summer workshop was held. As participants can attest, we had plenty of reading and writing to do: we consulted the scholarship on writing and thinking in the disciplines as well as on best tutoring practices. Through it all, we kept journals of our own in response to readings and discussions, entries which we would share at the beginning of each day's session. We broke bread together (prepared by my ever productive bread machine) and many, many insights.

It became clear to most of us that while the summer workshop was invaluable in giving us a scholarly context for our teaching and tutoring practice it would also be valuable to have a workshop in the winter, prior to the semester during which tutors actually work in the Lab. As a result, the winter workshop was born, a two-day session on the nuts and bolts of responding to student writing.

The Writing Lab Goes Online

Early on in the Writing Lab's history, it became clear that we could extend our services by going online. A web page could, for example, provide handouts that guide students in any aspect of the writing process, from How to read an assignment, How to get started writing, to How to put together a Works Cited list in the Modern Language Association format (or a reference section in the American Psychological Association format). In addition, a web page could provide hypertext links to other writing centers and to resources for tutors and students provided elsewhere in the World Wide Web. Finally, and we experimented with this early on, tutoring itself could occur online, via a chat room and/or email correspondence.

The Writing Lab's web went online in the mid 1990's due to the creative and tireless efforts of a faculty tutor, J.P. Nadeau. J.P. single-handedly, and on his own time, put the Lab on the web map, so to speak.

Currently, the Lab offers a full range of suggestions and links on its page (www.bristol.mass.edu/writinglab). Moreover, email tutoring is available to all.

The Future

What future awaits the Writing Lab? The Lab has worked collaboratively with various departments and sectors

on campus and will continue to do so. For example, writing lab tutors assist students who are revising portfolios for their English 10 and 11 assessment. In the near future, the Lab stands ready to help design criteria for the infusion of writing into college courses and programs, as part of the newly proposed changes to General Education.

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