From the Editors

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This will be a rather long foreword to a short issue. We include it because we have found that our readers—and potential contributors—want guidance about the kinds of articles we are 'looking for'. In our first issue, you may recall, we admitted that we were "testing the waters, waiting to see the sorts of things writing center people are writing." We also offered three essay categories: the primarily theoretical; the theory into practice; and, finally, the experience-into-generalizable lesson type. We stand by that taxonomy, and the examples we offered for each, but we will try to offer an expanded description here. This time, we will focus on five key subject areas: Our Writers and Their Composing Processes; Tutoring and Tutor Training; Materials; Administration; and Evaluation.

Our Writers and Their Composing Processes

The interest in all of the teaching of writing, of course, is on the composing process. Incredibly, though, among all the manuscripts received, *not a single one* has focused on a student writer, except for anecdotal support. No one has offered a case study; no one has described the kinds of strategies—successful or unsuccessful—the writers they work with use. No one has offered a portrait of a student writer in a larger context—noting, for example, how a student's reading strategies are connected to her writing strategies.

In short, though writing center people spend nearly all their time working with individual students, they apparently spend very little time studying them and their needs. We would like to see, first, articles suggesting methods for writing center case studies, based both on experience and the case study literature of our own and other disciplines. Second, we would like case studies themselves, the basis for accumulating knowledge about what people do, successfully and unsuccessfully, when they write. We need analyses of written work, analyses of composing processes, analyses of anything relevant to writing. Such studies could include or emphasize any number of variables; early efforts may be full of flaws. But it is a collection of information that must begin.

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Tutoring and Tutor Training

We have had a few articles that deal with tutoring *per se;* in this issue, the Sherwood and Clark article deals with tutor training, and the Thaiss-Kurylo articles grow directly out of tutoring experiences. But there is much more to know. What, for example, is the position of the tutors with regard to the composing process? If they are to intervene, when should they do so? And how? We have had a few suggestions—Thomas Nash's heuristics in our first issue, for instance (and see bibliography here). But by and large, writing centers seem content to have tutoring just 'happen'. We need articles that *look at* tutoring sessions, that audio and-video tape them, that describe how to train people to observe them. How does tutorial interaction vary during composing? How do tutoring sessions change as the kind of discourse changes? How do tutorial relationships change over time? Are there ways to match tutor to student that make sense? For starting points on all these issues, we commend you to the bibliography at the end of this foreword (with special attention to the Karliner and Jacobs article, and Thomas Reigstad's dissertation).

Materials

We believe that *The Writing Center Journal* has a responsibility to seek out materials that have a solid theoretical basis; that are intended to alter the composing processes of people who use them; and that are truly individualized, in keeping with the special setting of the writing center. It is on that last criterion that most materials we have seen fail. In an effort to create 'efficient' materials, materials that will teach the same lesson to hundreds of students, writing center material makers tend to gloss over the idiosyncracies of individual writers, the linguistic and cognitive peculiarities that make writing difficult for just *one* student.

Most writing center materials, then, have to be flexible, things that tutors can adapt on the spot—a series of questions, let's say, that can serve to get students underway in writing a particular, specific assignment. Or, if they are not flexible, they need to be based on a very careful study of the population they are intended to serve. So, for instance, when the COMP-LAB founders at York College (see bibliography) designed their materials that teach editing, they did so only after careful consideration of just which features of the written code troubled their student population. Articles on materials and materials design, then, should consider these parameters.

Administration

This is the subject area of most of the articles we receive. Most have been superficial and anecdotal, accounts that might be called "What We Did Last Year" or "Yes, We Are Here". These are not what our audience needs. Instead, we are looking for insights that elevate writing

center administration above the seat-of-the-pants level. Muriel Harris' articles over the past eight years provide a pretty good model for the kind of piece we're after, as does a paper by C. Michael Smith (Winthrop College) given at the Southeastern Conference on Writing Centers, that draws upon management basics to help writing centers streamline their paperwork.

There are, obviously, hundreds of unwritten articles on writing center administration—creating an image, marketing, generating credit, arranging space, and so on. We want very much to print them. All we ask is that (1) when posssible, you draw on more than your own opinion or experience for authority and (2) you keep the articles as short and to the point as possible, using your own experience as support, not centerpiece.

Evaluation

We have made Evaluation separate from Administration because it is such a vital, and largely untouched, area. Until now, writing center evaluation has almost always been quantitative, counting the number and kind of people seen. This is a natural enough reaction in the academic setting; everyone needs statistics of some kind to prove to administrations that writing centers are, in fact, doing their job. The time is coming—or has come, perhaps—to measure success in more accurate ways: Does writing center instruction help students write better?

In large part, the question of evaluation returns to the first heading offered here, *Our Students and Their Composing Processes.* What constitutes growth for a student being tutored in a writing center? What kind of changes—in the text, in the writer—take place? What sorts of increments should growth be measured in? Holistically scored essays, for example, taken from a student at the beginning and end of three weeks tutoring are not likely to show significant change in score. Does that mean instruction has failed, or that the measuring is being done with too gross an instrument?

The case studies, then, can establish some criteria for growth. The next step will be to devise sensible ways of measuring that growth. Consider the following possibilities: Suppose one adapts the protocol analysis techniques of Flower and Hayes, and has a student compose aloud as a kind of pre- and post-test. Suppose, also, that one observes what happens during the tutorial sessions, either by taping or observation. What sorts of changes can one expect to find in the student's composing behavior before and after? Are they attributable to the tutoring? Or suppose one adapts Richard Lloyd-Jones' system of Primary Trait scoring, giving students pre-tests in, say, writing a description. Would six or eight tutorial meetings produce significant change in the primary traits? Few students make dramatic improvements in control of surface features in

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such a short time, but can they make dramatic gains in discourse-specific
knowledge? A demonstration that they do would make a very strong case
for the efficiency of tutorial instruction.

   Articles on writing center evaluation, then, will require some ingenuity
and some extra work. They may ultimately prove, however, to be the
most valuable of all. Writing center people are, as a group, far too sure
that the approach works—too sure, that is, for a group that has never
taken a really serious look at what it does.

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   The foreword, as we promised, has been long. It is not intended to be
exhaustive, just stimulating. We invite queries of all sorts, and ask that
you remember *The Writing Center Journal* whenever you decide to sub-
mit a manuscript. We also hope you enjoy the batch of articles in this
issue; they are a tribute to the hard work and ingenuity of their respective
authors.

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