

Southern Discourse

Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



Spring 2001

Volume 4, Issue 2



Lessons from the CCLC Castle: Practical Dimensions of OWL Development

By Lynley E. Loftin, Clemson
University, and James A. Inman,
Furman University

In recent years, writing center professionals have seen considerable attention paid to computer technology and the ways it can inform or even transform practice. More and more online writing labs (OWLs) emerge each year. At the same time, however, the field lacks resources for those who would like to explore and potentially implement such service options but do not know enough on their own. This article targets that need. We discuss our own collaborative development of a MOO service option at Furman University, and we use our experiences to share lessons for readers interested in OWL development in general.

Introducing the CCLC and the CCLC Castle

The Center for Collaborative Learning and Communication (CCLC) at Furman emerges from the writing center tradition but also includes equal attention to speech communication and to computer technology. The concept was developed by an interdisciplinary team of faculty and students to support the university's emphasis on "engaged learning" in the liberal arts—defined as problem-solving, project-oriented, and experience-based learning. Though always evolving, the general mission of CCLC is to promote writing, communication, and technology excellence and to support collaborative teaching and learning.

It is in the later design stages of the CCLC that the authors of this article began to work together. James was hired to direct the center, and he began a year before its scheduled opening. In that first year, he established a course titled "Teaching Communication in Multiple Media," which continues

to play a key role in consultant training and emphasizes both real and virtual teaching one-to-one. One of the students in the first course was Lynley, an English and German double-major preparing to pursue graduate studies in professional communication at Clemson University.

In the summer of 2000, we collaboratively designed the initial release of CCLC Online, including the development of email and MOO tutoring programs. Because the entire CCLC concept is new, we wanted to offer as many service options as possible so we could select what options seem best to support the Furman community and emphasize them at that point. We certainly have predictions about what aspects of CCLC Online will be used most often, but we realize that experience will be our best teacher, helping us understand more about who in the Furman community most uses the virtual services and what specific options they find most useful.



OWL users explore new options in the CCLC.

Our MOO design, the basis for this article, is titled the "CCLC Castle." We constructed it as a realm in Connections, an educational MOO run by Tari Fanderclai and Jay Carlson (see <http://web.nwe.ufl.edu/~tari/connections>). Visitors to the CCLC Castle first find a description that conjures up romanticized notions of medieval lore: "You have somehow traveled through time back to 13th-century Europe. You're standing in the Grand Entrance Hall of CCLC

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Southern Discourse Moves in New Directions

By Christine Cozzens
Agnes Scott College

Springtime has come to our region in its usual but always astonishing burst of color and lushness, and with it, new ideas and new plans for our organization and for *Southern Discourse*.

I have three exciting developments to report regarding *Southern Discourse*. At the SWCA executive board meeting in Auburn, the board members decided that from now on we should call SD the "publication" of the Southeastern Writing Center Association, instead of the "newsletter." The point was made that with its inclusion of research articles and other in-depth works, SD covers more than most newsletters cover. And aspiring writing center personnel who publish their works in SD might get more mileage at their home institutions and in tenure reviews or job-seeking efforts if they published their works in a "publication" rather than a "newsletter." So until we can come up with an even more catchy and representative term, *Southern Discourse* will hereafter be known as "the publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association."

Also at the Auburn meeting, the executive board and a group of very enthusiastic SWCA members who joined me for a discussion of the future of the publication agreed that as we seek to expand SD's coverage and develop its identity, we should move forward on the inclusion of more creative writing and other types of works. So I am very happy to announce that the Fall 2001 issue will be a special issue devoted to works of creative writing connected implicitly or explicitly to writing centers. An advertisement explaining this theme appears on page seven of this issue. Now we all have to get writing so that the special issue will actually come to be!

As I told those who attended the SD meeting, I am looking to form an editorial staff for the publication, both to ensure regular contributions and to prepare SD for moving forward in all kinds of ways. If you are interested in being a member of the editorial staff, in contributing articles on a regular basis, and in seeing your name appear on our mast-

How to Submit Articles to *Southern Discourse*:

Articles should be sent to Christine Cozzens via email, disk (MS Word), or fax. Please note the following deadlines:

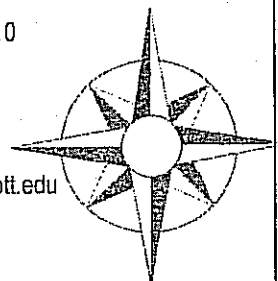
Summer 2001: May 1st
Fall 2001: October 1st
Spring 2002: February 1st

head, get in touch with me right away. The price for this honor is that you must agree to submit articles or other works for two of the three issues (Fall, October 1; Spring, February 1; Summer, May 1, 2002). These works may include articles that you dream up and propose, articles assigned by the editor, book or internet site reviews, and smaller pieces such as announcements or other projects. When you sign on, I will ask you to commit to a general topic and a deadline for two of the three issues. Regular columns on topics of ongoing interest to the readership are also welcome; for these, submit a proposal and a sample column to me.

In these ways among others, we hope to improve the quality and reach of *Southern Discourse* so that it may better live up to its wonderful, suggestive name. Now, I have one question for you to consider. What role will you play in these new developments?

Send all submissions to *Southern Discourse* to

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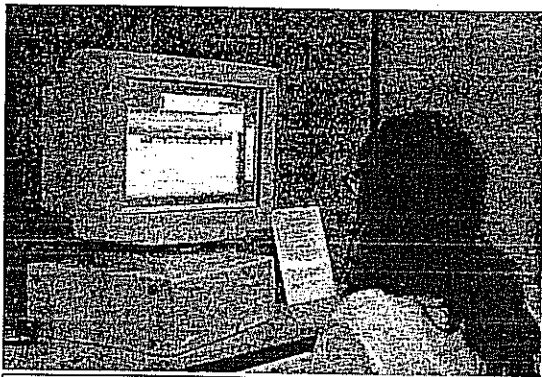


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Lessons from the CCLC Castle
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Castle. . . The Entrance Hall is draped in rich scarlet velvet, falling in folds on the stone walls and covering the floor with a soft carpet. Torches also line the walls, lighting the Hall with the candles in the round wooden chandelier hanging high above." This opening description engages visitors' imaginations with its specific spatial detail but also playfully introduces magic and surprise, elements that reflect the more informal, even fun nature of MOO environments. Such design, we believe, will help both consultants and clients to relax and feel more comfortable with each other and with the technology. Another space in the CCLC Castle is "Merlin's Magic Mousehole," a room "filled with soft murmurings . . . coming from the books lining the walls" and "a large black cauldron on the right side of the room . . ." that "smells like your grandmother's famous vegetable soup!" One aspect of our design strategy especially represented in the Mousehole is the way we have adapted traditional writing center practices. Centers often serve coffee, for instance, and its inviting smell helps consultants and clients to feel at home. While our cauldron does not hold coffee, its presence nonetheless represents the same administrative effort to create a comfortable environment. The cauldron, then, is one specific example of our respect for the valuable lessons writing center practice has provided over the years.



A student uses the OWL.

A key aspect of our CCLC Castle design is the way different disciplines are represented by different spaces. We wanted to construct environments that reflect our commitment to writing, communication, and technology excellence across the curriculum, and we realized that having generic spaces might not work. At the same time, though, we do not restrict consultants and clients to particular spaces; if music majors wanted to meet with a consultant in a science-themed area, we would encourage it. One of the first specialized environments we developed, "The Impressionist's Gallery," emphasizes the arts;

there visitors encounter "an extensive collection of all of the best Impressionist art in all of Europe." Another discipline-based space in the CCLC Castle is "The Mad Scientist's Laboratory," which emerges from the sciences. The Laboratory "is dark and spooky, regardless of the high windows and the pale yellow light bulbs swinging from their wires from the ceiling." We do not, of course, mean to suggest that scientists are actually mad. Instead, our purpose is simply to provide an environment that engages MOOers in a creative and comfortable way. Because we ultimately imagine welcoming others to construct aspects of the CCLC Castle with us, we realize that diversity will correspondingly increase in promising ways through the inclusion of such multiple voices and ideas, thus helping the realm to engage visitors from across the curriculum more effectively.

We have begun adding objects to the various spaces in the CCLC Castle as well, helping set the scene more fully and richly for possible consultations. As readers may know, MOOs allow people to construct a full range of objects, from slide projectors that make possible slide shows, to furniture on which MOOers can sit, and to recorders that, when activated, can capture a transcript of all interaction in a particular space. Meadville, an "early precursor to Jimmy Buffett's margaritaville," is one area in the CCLC Castle that includes several objects. Meadville features benches upon which visitors can sit, as well as a well-stocked bar, objects that add a great deal to the ethos of the room. Objects may also be characters, as demonstrated in the following activity:

BillyBob challenges KingArthur. KingArthur stands up quickly and looks for his magic sword.

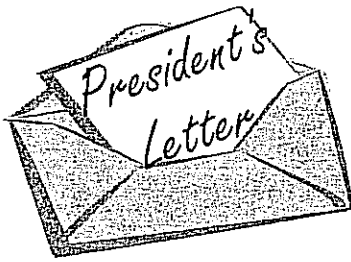
BillyBob hits KingArthur, but can't knock him down. KingArthur takes off his gloves and prepares to open up a can of whup-ass.

As evident in BillyBob's interaction with KingArthur, we designed KingArthur to tap into what some people associate with the Arthurian era: artful combat. Additionally, we used contemporary images to add fun to the space: the phrase "open up a can of whup-ass," for example, is widely popular from movies like *The Waterboy*, starring Adam Sandler, and from professional wrestling.

Lessons for OWL Development

In constructing the CCLC Castle, we learned a number of valuable lessons for readers thinking about OWL development.

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By Marcy Trianosky
Hollins University

If you missed the Southeastern Writing Center Association conference at Auburn in February, you missed a lot. Writing center administrators and tutors showed up in impressive numbers from across the southeastern region and from nearby states outside our region. We arrived Friday to find beautiful on-site facilities and accommodations at the Dixon Conference Center and a conference that was very ably coordinated by Isabelle Thompson and her staff at Auburn University. Choosing from among the many interesting and thoughtfully presented sessions proved difficult; many attendees commented on the professional caliber of the presentations. The careful selection process that proposals went through under the guidance of Glenda Conway of Montevallo University and her staff was apparent in the diversity of topics and institutions represented.

By the time Lisa Ede presented her keynote address at lunch on Friday on the nature and power of collaboration in writing centers, we had been steeped in the many aspects of collaboration possible in our work. Lisa urged us to look even more deeply into our experiences, and we continued to explore the possibilities through the remaining workshops. Another conference highlight was the presentation of the Southeastern Writing Center Association Achievement Award to Donna Sewell of Valdosta State University, who epitomized the essence of collaboration when she pledged to use the monetary portion of the award to bring more tutors to the conference next year.

For me, one of the most exciting moments of all was the enthusiasm shown during our breakfast buffet and business meeting on Friday morning, when a number of conference attendees expressed their willingness to help the organization continue to grow and prosper. The evidence was right in front of us: working together and sharing our knowledge make the whole stronger than the sum of its parts.

After leaving a conference, it's common to experience two things: either we feel exhausted or we feel elated. Sometimes it's both. The SWCA board members who went to the conference probably felt both, with one notable ex-

ception. Bryan Moten, from the writing center of the Medical University at South Carolina and member-at-large, returned home with a burning enthusiasm for building the membership of the association. There was no downtime for Bryan! Board members received an enthusiastic email from Bryan immediately upon our return. He had brainstormed a structure and a timeline for boosting our membership over the next year. Bryan has proposed selecting state representatives who would, in turn, recruit the support of those writing centers not currently in our database. In just a few short weeks, Bryan has recruited representatives in most of the nine states in our region (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas). Through the combined efforts of Bryan and the state representatives, the SWCA aims to substantially increase its membership. We hope that by this time next year we can report to you our successes in this area.

What better testament to the success of a conference with collaboration as its theme than a collaborative effort to reach out to other writing centers? Many thanks to Bryan and all the state representatives who are making this possible.

SWCATALK

Join in engaging conversation with other SWCA members on the organization's listserv,

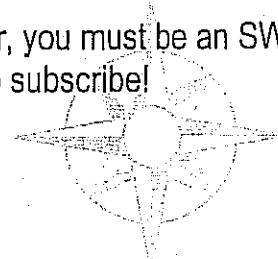
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Remember, you must be an SWCA member to subscribe!



Lessons from the CCLC Castle
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Lesson One: Including Many Different Voices in the Design Process. The CCLC concept was originally created by an interdisciplinary team of faculty and students at Furman, and this team is still together, now serving as an advisory committee to James, helping him to move the center forward. What became clear in the "Teaching Communication in Multiple Media" class to both Lynley and James, though, is that students have much more to contribute. Two students have been on the advisory committee at all times, but bringing more into the fold emerged as an important direction to pursue. In addition, we believe that staff should be actively involved in the design process; many staff members at Furman, as is no doubt the case elsewhere, have valuable perspectives and experiences to share.

With this background, we formed a network of colleagues and friends to help us with the design of the CCLC Castle, including the technical elements, as well as those thematic and conceptual. This network intentionally included both advocates of technology and individuals more generally opposed to its integration into the CCLC's work, and we think it is particularly important to have this distribution on any design team, instead of including only individuals who are protechnology. Lynley coordinated conversations with student respondents, emphasizing issues like access and interest. She asked, for instance, if students would consider MOO consulting at all and if downloading client software would be too difficult or time-consuming, and she used the responses to help direct the CCLC Castle's design. James solicited and brought back advisory committee responses, and he asked staff members what issues they saw of importance. These opinions all came together to help us see clearly what sort of MOO design would best serve the Furman community and thus enabled us to construct the environment in the most useful way possible.

Lesson Two: Connect OWLs and Face-to-Face Sites of Consultation Thematically. One of the most pressing needs in writing center practice, we believe, is for stronger programmatic links to be forged between OWLs and sites of face-to-face practice. It is common to see OWL pedagogies and programs that bear no resemblance at all to those offered face-to-face. This reality complicates consultant training and even the day-to-day work of the center. At times, even elements of the same OWL do not link together well; for instance, email interface design and MOOspace design for the same center may have no parallels, which is a shame. We're not, of course, arguing for all sites of consulting to have the same look; in fact, we believe that site diver-

sity is key. Our point is simply that a thematic link offers a great deal to all sites involved.

The CCLC Castle features a single word as its thematic link—magic. Language Lynley developed for CCLC Online well describes how this theme unites various sites of consulting:

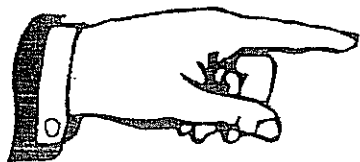
Writing has magical effects on everyone involved. However, magic is shrouded in mystery, mostly because so many of us do not really understand it and its powers. Therefore, to many students, writing is exactly that—a mystery, a product of magic that some possess and others only yearn for. The CCLC strives to unlock this magic.

For staff training, we use the idea of magic to talk about face-to-face consultations as well, and we specifically emphasize Lynley's phrase "unlock this magic" as a way of thinking about both OWL and face-to-face pedagogies.

Lesson Three: Encourage Consultants to Take On Leadership Roles. Consultants should have opportunities to take on leadership roles in OWLs. More, consultants should be afforded the chance to see ideas through to the end, even if administrators and other consultants think the result may not be positive. Obviously, we're not suggesting that dialogue be abolished; clearly talking about ideas and options with other consultants and with administrators can offer valuable feedback. Our point is that if the consultant remains convinced that her or his idea should be constructed and if it does not have any critical problems like offensiveness, then everyone else in the center should be supportive.

The benefits of encouraging consultants to take on leadership roles are considerable. If consultants are given building privileges in a MOO, for instance, they will begin to understand not only the inner workings of the MOO itself but also the inherent choices made in MOO building, such as audience, ethics, and cultural sensitivity. Building privileges enable consultants to tap into their creativity, as well as to reflect on and utilize their teaching and learning experiences, both of which in turn make the MOOspace being designed all the more advanced and diverse. Too often, it is only the consultants with the most advanced technological expertise who work with computer technology, a choice that further forges a digital divide between consultants comfortable with such technology and those not. Asking all consultants to take on leadership roles creates a shared community, one where multiple voices are heard and valued, not ignored or otherwise marginalized.

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What's the Point?

Out of the Slough: Point Me the Way . . . Please!

By Peter M. Carriere, Georgia College and
State University

People are surprised to discover that the Sandhills of Nebraska constitute the largest stable sand dunes in the western hemisphere. At 20,000 square miles, the Nebraska Sandhills cover an area larger than the country of Kuwait. But people would be even more amazed to discover that the linguistic Slough of Despond not only dwarfs the Nebraska Sandhills but covers the whole English-speaking world: the sun never sets on the linguistic Slough of Despond! And it seems to be growing: last week it claimed a journalism instructor at a university in Wisconsin who ignored the warning signs and brazenly stepped out into linguistic quicksand.

This instructor, in order to teach the difference between *that* and *which* as a means of knowing whether a clause is restrictive or nonrestrictive, wrote this sentence on the board for her students to scrutinize (I have left out the punctuation):

News writing which seems simple at first challenges even the brightest students.

Now this sentence illustrates a degree of academic despotism: "Students who don't follow the rules," this instructor told her students, "will fail!"

So how would you punctuate it? A comma after "news writing" and "first"? No commas at all? Here are the instructor's instructions:

1. If you can change "which" to "that" do it.
2. See if you can delete "that."

So let's see. Can we change "which" to "that"? Yes. So the sentence becomes "News writing that seems simple at first challenges even the brightest students." Great! So it should be "that." No commas.

But wait a minute. Suppose the writer of the sentence wants the clause beginning with "which" to be addi-

tional information only. Then we retain the "which" and use the commas according to standard usage.

I know what you're thinking. The clause cannot be additional information because it obviously relates to the main sentence which/that is about whether or not news writing is challenging: thus the which/that clause is necessary logically. Or is it?

What about this sentence: "The dog that had fleas died." Or is it "The dog, which had fleas, died"? Can we know for sure? If the "had fleas" part tells us which dog out of lots of possible dogs, then we need it. But what if it's additional information? Then we don't need it, and "that" becomes "which," and the only person to know for sure is the one writing the sentence.

Marshall T. Bigelow, described on the title page of his book *Punctuation and Other Typographical Matters* (which/that came out in 1881) as a corrector for a university press, declared that "almost the whole science of punctuation consists in the proper use of the comma in subordinate clauses, so as to show the precise meaning of the sentence" (9). Aside from the fact that I'm not sure about his comma before "so" in the sentence above, I don't think it's possible for a reader to second guess the writer as to whether the which/that/comma usage is "correct." And if you really want an exercise in pointlessness, read Matthew Arnold or John Ruskin, both of whom seem to have indiscriminately tossed *whiches* in whenever a *that* was called for. Here's an example from Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*: "But on a smaller scale, and in a design which cannot be mathematically defined. . . ." And here's one from Arnold's "Sweetness and Light": "Do not let us deny the good and the happiness which they have accomplished. . . ."

Here is a wonderful rule from Kate Turabian:

An element is nonrestrictive if it can be omitted without altering the meaning of the main clause:

These books, which are placed on reserve in the library, are required reading for the course.

I don't know about you, but I think the meaning of the main clause remains intact whether we keep the subordinate clause or not; whether we use "that" or "which" makes little difference. But what if we need the clause to

separate the books placed on reserve from some other pile of books? Well, then we should use "that." But our Wisconsin instructor said to change "which" to "that" if we could. And we can. But that really means—that I'm in the linguistic Slough of Despond.

The point is that *that* is sometimes *which*, and *which* is sometimes *that*, and *that* is often used in place of *who*, and *which* is falling out of favor in favor of *that*, which is beginning to replace it, although classic pointers insist on recognizing that *that* is not *which*, and that *who*, which is sometimes rejected in favor of *that*, especially by. . . Rats nests! I seem to have lost the point. It was around here somewhere.

Help!

I've lost my point and I can't get it back!

Rats!

Southern Discourse Walks on the Wild Side!

Announcing SD's First-Ever
Special Creative Writing Issue,
Fall 2001

By Christine Cozzens, *Southern Discourse* Editor, Agnes Scott College

The Fall 2001 issue of *Southern Discourse* will be a special issue celebrating the creativity of those who work in or come to writing centers. For that issue, we invite you to submit creative writing connected in some way to writing centers or writing. We welcome essays, poems, short fiction, dramatic writing, and cross-genre pieces. The connection to writing centers or writing may be explicit (a poem about a tutoring session) or implicit (a piece of creative writing for which the author received tutoring).

Writing center administrators, staff, tutors, tutees, and friends are all welcome to submit their works. The deadline for the issue is 1 October 2001. Submissions should be sent by email attachment in Microsoft Word to Christine Cozzens, *Southern Discourse* Editor, at ccozzens@agnesscott.edu.

This is your chance to show the world how the writing center has inspired you!

Call for Proposals: 2003 SWCA Conference Location *Proposals Due 15 June 2001*

By Marcy Trianosky, SWCA President,
Hollins University

Yes, that does say 2003. Believe it or not, planning this far ahead can be extremely helpful to all of us. The SWCA is interested in broadening its effectiveness within our region, and hosting our annual conference in different parts of the region is one way of doing this. States in which a conference has not been held for some time include Tennessee, North Carolina, and Florida.

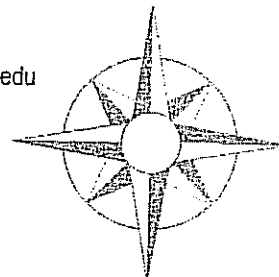
If you believe your institution or city would be a good site for the 2003 Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference, please submit a proposal in writing or send an email attachment by 1 June 2001 to Marcy Trianosky, SWCA President, at the address below.

The SWCA executive board is in the process of developing a list of questions that would help potential sponsors determine their readiness for hosting a conference. Answering these questions will also help you prepare your proposal. By the time this issue of *Southern Discourse* is in print, we hope to have such a list available. Please contact Marcy if you would like a copy of these questions, or if you have any new questions of your own.

The SWCA Board will hold its semiannual meeting in late June of 2001, and we will consider all proposals at that time. Please remember that your proposal must be submitted in writing.

Thank you!

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Going Mobile: Making a Writing Center at a Two- Year College Mobile to Promote Writing Across the Curriculum

By Jim Booth, Surry Community College

At Surry Community College, a rural two-year institution located in northwestern North Carolina, we made the commitment to institute a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program during the 1999-2000 academic year. The college's writing center has been instrumental in promoting the WAC program. Here's what we did.

The Writing Center's Role in the WAC Program

The Surry Community College WAC program was implemented in the fall of 1999. Five instructors agreed to teach pilot courses to allow the program to determine qualifications and guidelines for those seeking to become WAC Instructors. We decided to make instructors the focus instead of courses—an idea I picked up from Todd Taylor, assistant director of the writing program at UNC Chapel Hill, who led our first WAC workshop in the fall of 1999.

In my role as writing center director, I decided upon the following strategies as ways to help those fledgling WAC instructors with their courses: Writing Center Presentations/Field Trips; Tutors in the Classroom; The Virtual Writing Center. What follows is an in-depth explanation of the strategies.

SCC Writing center Presentations for WAC Classes: Selling the Soap

My writing center presentations are generally done in fifteen to twenty minutes. I use an FAQ handout that offers students and faculty written reinforcement of my remarks and explanations. A typical presentation structure covers the following details about the writing center.

- 1) Purpose of the writing center.
- 2) Association of the writing center with our WAC program.
- 3) Explanation of a conference.
- 4) How to use the writing center.
- 5) How to use the writing center web site.
- 6) Hours of operation.
- 7) Writing center's activity levels (We conduct over 2000 conferences a year—usually about 1200 in the fall and 900-1000 in the spring. These numbers encourage them to get to us before the last minute. Sometimes,

anyway.)

- 8) How to reach the assistant director or me if they have any questions or problems.

The presentation generally gets students in WAC classes thinking about us in a way that promotes usage and helps associate the writing center with their classes, not just with the English department. That's the point.

I went to each of the WAC classes and gave this presentation about the writing center and its services. This strategy helped to introduce to the center students who had not had contact with it. I also encouraged WAC faculty to bring their students to the writing center for brief tours and introductions to tutors and "the system" of our center. That way, students would be able to connect what I'd presented to them to the real place, the writing center.

Tutors in the Classroom: Bringing the Writing Center to the Mountain

Our "Tutors in the Classroom" service allows the writing center to accomplish two important tasks. Students in WAC courses get introduced to (or refreshed about) what happens in the writing center. This reminds them of our chief message—the writing center is a place where they can get help with their writing, no matter what kind of writing it is. It's really an ecological message: as college students, they live and work in an environment of writing that embraces a variety of modes of discourse, all of which are helped by using the writing center to get responses to their work.

Tutors get valuable experience (and refreshment of technique) in working with peer groups and performing efficient and helpful conferences; nothing like a roomful of peers to get them to do their best tutoring. They also learn a lot about writing in other subject areas. This knowledge makes them better tutors and in turn stimulates the WAC program. Tutors who can talk about the problems of writing in biology make biology students who are writing more willing to write about biology—or at least a little better able to do so.

As a special aid to these new WAC instructors, I offered them the option of having tutors come to their classes on designated days to assist with leading peer groups, serving as on-site reference sources and conducting mock tutorials to ease student anxiety about the writing center. The mock tutorials were, of course, devised in conjunction with the WAC instructor so that they were relevant to the courses the students were taking.

The Virtual Writing Center: We're There When They Need Us



Our on-line English courses use the virtual writing center readily; getting students in WAC classes to use the writing center by email or to visit the web site has been a challenge we're still figuring out how to address. Thus far we've tried a couple of strategies.

During our presentations on our services, we've emphasized the usefulness of the virtual writing center for students who have heavy school/work/family time budgets to balance. The virtual writing center, of course, attracts many older students who face these problems. It has been less successful for traditional-aged students, although they are now becoming much more active.

The instigation of online discussion groups has helped foster some use. I monitor these (only about half of the professors offering WAC courses in a given semester use them, so the task isn't as onerous as it sounds). When a professor suggests to a student that a topic he or she has brought up might make good material for a paper, I jump in with an offer of help from the writing center. Besides reinforcing the professor's encouragement to the student to write, this approach also gives me and the writing center a certain air of omnipresence.

We often have more than one tutor respond to a student's paper via email. This makes the student feel well looked after (that security thing again) and creates goodwill with students, faculty, and the administration.

We have had a lively use of our online tutorial services; this has alleviated some stress for students with tight school or work schedules.

Outcomes

Surveys of both students in WAC courses and faculty teaching these courses indicate a couple of things. The most interesting of these doesn't relate to writing center services, but it does provide a little insight, so I'll include it. Students indicate by an overwhelming majority (over eighty-five percent) that they think they're doing an adequate amount of writing in their WAC courses. Faculty indicate by an impressive margin (seventy-five percent) that they think students in WAC courses are not writing enough.

Our writing center database also provides some helpful information. In the WAC courses, some ninety-four percent of students in the pilot WAC courses used the writing center at least once during the semester. We conferred with them on a variety of issues ranging from finding ways to add more content, to explaining proper use of MLA or APA citations, to offering punctuation advice.

Announcing...
The 18th Annual National Conference
on
Peer Tutoring in Writing :
Writing From the Center
November 2-4, 2001
Muhlenberg College
Allentown, PA

The essayist Scott Russell Sanders has given us a metaphor for our conference: writing from the center. As students, teachers, administrators, scholars and writers, we value writing, but to what extent do we want writing to be our center? Our answers might be determined by factors outside our control, such as institutional backgrounds, WAC or WID, the size and shape and financial resources of our writing centers and labs, composition and first-year seminar programs, the theories and practices we've embraced. But what are we doing that encourages our own writing from the center, however scholarly or creative? To what extent do we even talk about writing as a creative act? How are we responding to the conditions we currently face? Are we aiming to center writing by working with or against our institutions, by working in- or outside our institutions? What writing and tutorial practices have we invented (or discarded)? How are our writing practices and theories changing as we confront the ever-moving center of writing?

Call for Proposals

Proposals addressing these and other issues are invited from peer tutors, writing center administrators, and faculty. We encourage tutor-led, active presentations.

Please include the following in your proposal:

- * name and title of contact person
- * address, phone number and e-mail address
- * time required (50 or 75 minutes)
- * intended audience
- * format
- * participants and their titles
- * description in 300-400 words
- * abstract of 50 words (for the program)
- * equipment needed

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Eggs and Flour

By Christine Meuschke,
College of Charleston

I was sitting at one of the three five-foot white tables that fill the space in the College of Charleston Writing Lab when a young woman entered and began to write her name in the log. Two other new consultants exchanged nervous glances with me from the other tables. We had been instructed to hop immediately from our seats to greet clients, but no one wanted to move. After about thirty seconds of hesitation, the more courageous consultant pulled herself up from her chair to begin her first consultation.

I approached my first few weeks at the Writing Lab reluctantly. While the veteran consultants offered friendly advice, the other new consultants and I discussed our apprehensions about our first and future consultations. *How are students going to react to my advice?* I wondered. *Why would anyone listen to me, another student?* In all of my pondering, I never anticipated the experiences I would have in the lab.

During my freshman year of college, my roommates often brought their papers to me for proofreading and editing. I would return their papers covered with pencil marks indicating punctuation errors and often arrows or other directions intended to enhance the flow of their writing. The girls would smile, carry the pages to their bedroom as I called out explanations behind them, and close the door while they fixed the commas and ignored everything else. I would stand in the hallway, dejected, wondering why they bothered to seek my help. I expected that clients would carry this "fix-me" attitude into the lab, that they would ignore my suggestions, or worse, defend their own style vehemently. I imagined angry clients telling me that I was useless, then storming from the lab in a gust of heated air.

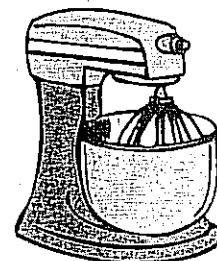
To my surprise, clients have proven to be receptive and even eager. A senior came in one morning with a particularly well-written paper that needed only tweaking. He pointed to various sentences, asking how they could be more powerful. Often a simple change in punctuation (a dash or a colon) helped give the sentence panache, although sometimes we worked together to find those words that held the perfect connotations. Before we finished, he scanned the pages again carefully, searching for other sentences to polish. This client and others like him have helped me realize that students who come to us are inviting advice to make their writing sparkle.

Along with the clients who bring in near-perfect papers come the clients whose papers beg for a complete overhaul. One enthusiastic client brought in a paper that resembled more of a stream-of-consciousness manuscript than an argumentative essay. We were not facing a daunting blank page but pages filled with text that had to be rearranged or even discarded in order to create a solid line of reasoning. I breathed in deeply, and we began, eventually extracting a strong thesis and a coherent supporting argument from the jumble before us.

Although after hours of work the client and I had constructed an organized essay, we had not had time to work extensively on grammar and diction. "Ugh," I thought, "we left so much work to be done!" I could not escape the feeling that I was failing my clients by not covering everything in a single session. Then, after a few weeks, another client returned to me for help with a second paper, thanking me profusely for what she deemed invaluable help the first time. We, too, had only covered the main points in her paper, but she helped me recognize that any help I can offer is better than no help at all. Many relieved smiles have crossed the faces of clients who simply needed someone to listen to their ideas or help them organize their thoughts.

I knew consultants helped students with papers, but only after I had worked with a few students did I realize the ultimate role a consultant plays. I do not merely point out weaknesses and mistakes in papers; instead, as I now tell every new client, I help the clients help themselves. I put them in control of their papers, awakening the creative process and encouraging them to focus on structure and content, or the eggs and flour of their arguments. I no longer worry that clients expect perfection from the Writing Lab, for they are usually inspired by their progressive improvement.

After finishing a two-hour session with an ESL student recently, I collapsed back into my chair. "What do you think this paper is?" he asked. "C? B?" I smiled and explained that every professor is different, but I thought we had made significant improvements. "Yes, yes!" he exclaimed. "We got rid of all that" waving a hand around "stuff, and I think it's very good. Yes." I nodded and smiled again, reassured that whatever his final grade, he was happy with his work.



The Imposter Syndrome

By William V. Sinski
Georgia Military College

"Where did you learn your grammar?" I heard Donna ask someone. I was tutoring a student and did not think she was talking to me.

"Will," she said to get my attention, "Where did you learn your grammar?"

She was talking to me; I was taken by surprise. Donna, another tutor, was a graduate student. At the end of the semester she would have her master's degree. She was already teaching high school English as part of her internship. I was years away from being in the position Donna was in when she asked me her question more than a year ago. I have three different associate degrees; they do not include English. I have been tutoring English at Georgia Military College since 1998 and now attend Georgia College and State University half time, working to earn a bachelor's in English. I answered her by explaining that much of what I knew began when I spent my entire sixth grade year diagramming sentences. I had responded meekly. I understood the concept that a person with Donna's education might justifiably question my background. Donna had worked with us for the quarter. Soon the winter quarter would end, and we would be off until the spring quarter.

Donna began to cry. She was not questioning my ability at all.

"I don't belong here; I'm a fraud," Donna sobbed.

There were students and other tutors in the room. I gently encouraged her to calm down and not be critical of herself. "It's called the imposter syndrome," I told her, "I know how you feel. Last year I had to discuss this same problem with my therapist and several professors, they all admitted to suffering from it at one time or another."

She was not convinced. She related to me that she had no trouble writing a fine paper for herself, but she felt lost collaborating with the creation of a document constructed in another person's written voice. Often the people we tutor tend to use sentence structures that we avoid. We may avoid these sentence structures because we are unsure of the punctuation, or we may avoid them because some instructors differ on such questions of punctuation.

I understand this kind of frustration. Although I continuously attempt to improve the quality of my writing, I have spent years safely using the same style and voice that have earned me passing grades in my education. It's easy to help new writers understand that they can't write the way they speak. As new writers learn to substitute punctuation in their writing for the facial expressions that help us all to

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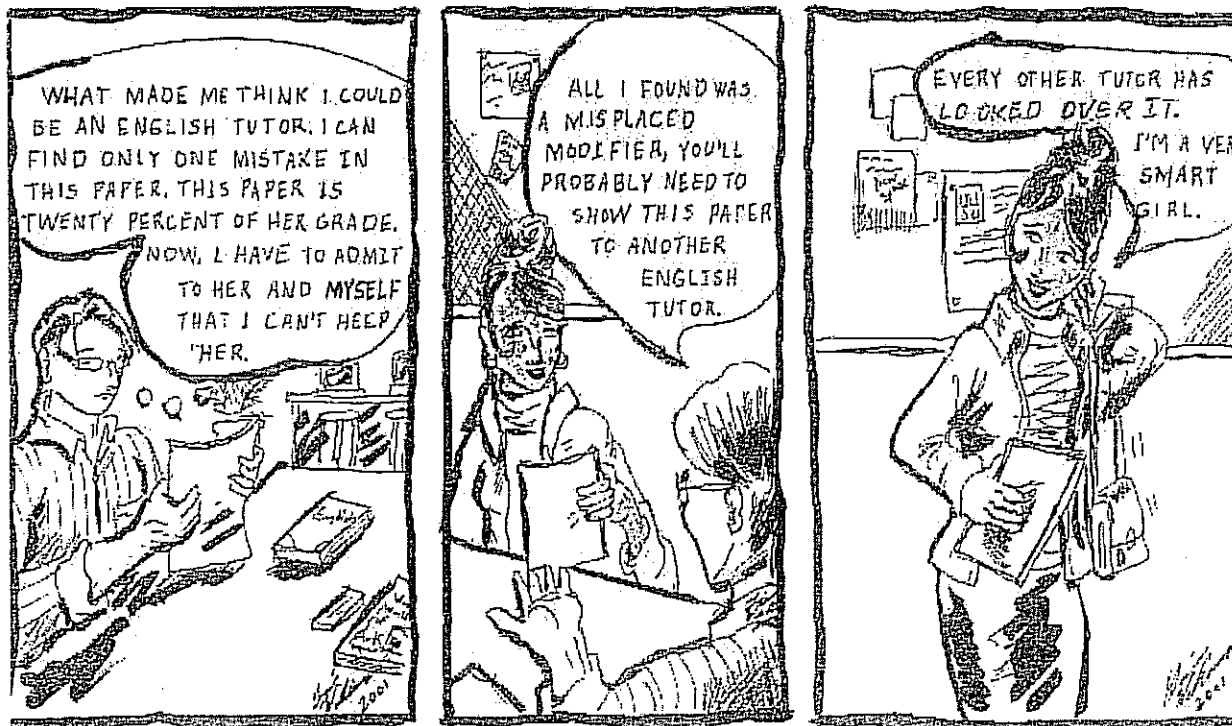


Illustration by Gail Williams



The OWL's Nest

Researching OWLs

By Donna Sewell, Valdosta State University, and James A. Inman, Furman University

We are often asked questions like "What will the next generation of OWLs be?" and "Do OWLs really prove helpful to clients, or are they just a fad?" And, as readers can imagine, we don't have the answers all the time. Many of the most urgent questions about OWLs require specialized knowledge from research studies. So in this issue's column, we would like to outline briefly several interesting approaches for studying OWLs.

One of the first places researchers might start is in working to understand the OWL itself: how it was first authored, why it was first authored, what changes have followed, why these changes were made. This task may be made easier if the various individuals who have worked on the OWLs kept notes, but our experience is that such records are rare. Without detailed records, researchers will likely be required to investigate the history themselves. Researchers should begin by looking for artifacts: notes about the OWL in old files, electronic archives of older OWL versions, and so on. Then an appropriate approach would be to interview individuals who were involved with the OWL in the past: authors, program directors, consultants, clients, and others. With these broad research approaches, some information should emerge, and the OWL's identity over time will be brought into more specific relief. Centers moving online now should work to save all documents and earlier hypertexts of their OWLs so that such historical documentation will be possible.

As scholars like Stuart Blythe have shown us, another interesting research project is to study the usability of OWL designs. Usability is a term from technical communication that means, in essence, the way that individuals use something, whether a book, a set of instructions, or an OWL. (Some readers may know human-computer interaction as an interrelated field with usability.) To perform usability studies of OWLs, researchers would need to create a space wherein they could observe volunteers at work.

These volunteers would be given a series of tasks to complete, such as "Locate the email tutoring directions, and read them. Look at the form, and enter appropriate information." Researchers have choices about how to study the volunteers as they work. Some usability researchers use industry-standard video cameras to record every action, so that they can go back and view the work over and over. Some usability studies have volunteers talk out loud about their actions, thus making video or audio recording a particularly suitable option. Other researchers prefer writing field notes in the moment without any sort of recording. What matters, finally, is that researchers can describe the volunteers' usability practices as a group and draw conclusions about the OWL design.

Last, we would suggest examining OWL tutorials. Of course, the term "OWL tutorials" covers many electronic environments: email, chat rooms, threaded electronic discussions, and MUD space. And, like the diversity of the space itself, diverse methods are possible for examining these tutorials. Researchers may want to read transcripts of OWL tutorials to investigate the same kinds of issues we study in face-to-face tutorials—issues related to power, gender, race, class, and language use. How much does the tutor write? How much does the client write? Whose topics are continued? Whose are ignored? Who controls the session? How collaborative is the tutorial? Do the tutors use closed or open-ended questions?

Other researchers may want to investigate the culture of online tutorials from the perspective of a participant-observer, keeping field notes of the experience of tutoring and being tutored online, as well as interviewing other participants in that environment. Finally, researchers may glean much useful information from studying the server stats. The server data reveals who the OWL serves and in what ways, tracking who benefits from the OWL and who doesn't.

As we pursue OWL research, we want to remember to consider the ethical questions involved in researching online environments. Does the OWL maintain records on its users? Who has access to those records? How long are papers or questions sent to the OWL maintained? Do OWL users know what may be done with those papers or questions? If the material generated by the OWL is used in published research, has the



director sought permission from an institutional review board for such research? Many ethical issues have not yet been resolved for online research, though such work is currently underway. We can point you towards several helpful sources, such as the special issue of *The Information Society* devoted to ethics in cyberspace.

We hope these ideas might prove useful to readers as a beginning, and we welcome the chance to talk more with anyone who's interested in researching OWLs. Our email addresses are dsewell@valdosta.edu and james.inman@furman.edu.

Works Cited

- Blythe, Stuart. "Wiring a Usable Center: Usability Research and Writing Center Practice." *Wiring the Writing Center*. Ed. Eric Hobson. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998. 102-13.
- Thomas, Jim, ed. *The Ethics of Fair Practices for Collecting Social Sciences Data in Cyberspace*. Special issue of *The Information Society* 12.2 (1996).

National Conference - continued from page 9 -

Please send proposals to:

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(484) 664-3316
<http://www.chss.iup.edu/wc/NCPTW/muhlenb.html>

Proposal Deadline: April 16, 2001
Notification: June 2001



Lessons from the CCLC Castle - continued from page 5 -

Lesson Four: Keep a Journal.

Computer technology is always changing and becoming more advanced. A problem inherent today in many OWLs is that no reasonable means has been created to track the development of service options. Imagine, for instance, if ten CCLC consultants, Lynley, and James all have permission to build in the CCLC Castle realm. In any week, a number of these individuals could login to Connections and make changes to the space. As the CCLC Castle grows larger and larger, builders may have no way of knowing what additions have been made by other builders; they may not even see the same rooms in the Castle. The different designers may be duplicating each other's efforts. If students in the sciences grow tired of "The Mad Scientist's Laboratory" and request a new environment, then several consultants may try to create something new. In some respects, such a result is not bad, as diversity of these environments may result. But, it is possible that builders may instead create four versions of a chemistry lab, all similar, a result that would instead hinder diversity. If these consultants knew what everyone on the design team was doing, then they could choose different options

One of the best ways to track the development and activity of OWLs, and thus generally avoid problems like those described above, is to use some type of journal, whether on paper or online. This documentation might include media-specific categories of information, as well as space for consultants to describe the rationale for their building choices.

Because some resistance to keeping this journal may emerge, we want to suggest that the journal not be used for evaluation but instead simply be a record of activity, for better or worse. This approach will help ensure the journal is better received by its prospective users.

Conclusion

In this article, we have offered lessons we believe will be useful to writing center professionals interested in OWL development. At the same time, however, we want to suggest that the best way for knowledge of computer options to advance is for more people to become involved. We will be at our best as a writing center community when this path becomes more and more busy and when new paths are created by future pioneers. We invite you to join us in this walk to the future.

The Imposter Syndrome
- continued from page 11-

understand their spoken words, we must resist the temptation to shape their written voices into our own image and likeness.

Such resistance is difficult when the student would be satisfied simply if he or she could write as well as the tutor.

Donna referred to herself as "the grammar imposter," and no one was able to talk her into coming back.

Today in our training sessions, we are sure to cover the topic of the impostor syndrome. Tutors routinely encourage students not to rely on the same tutor for help every time. The Gail Williams cartoon that accompanies this article depicts my most difficult bout with the syndrome. I don't remember exactly how long I agonized over the six-page paper the cadet presented to me for tutoring. When I could find nothing more than one misplaced modifier, I apologized and implied that she needed better help than I could provide. I said to her, "You need to show this paper to another English tutor."

Tutors routinely encourage students not to rely on the same tutor for help every time.

Her answer was, "Every other tutor has already looked it over. I'm a very smart girl."

She was indeed a very smart girl. No other student has ever sought the help of every English tutor in our writing center for the same project. I felt very inadequate when I was able to find only one error in a six-page paper. I was relieved and vindicated when she informed me that everyone else had already taken a turn at the project. As I pondered the fact that I had gone from disaster to triumph while reading her paper, I was reminded of where I had seen those words used in the same sentence before. Among the wonderful advice Rudyard Kipling gives us in his poem "If" are the lines "If you can meet with triumph and disaster / . . . treat those two imposters just the same. . . ."

The 2002 Southeastern Writing
Center Association
Achievement Award

The Southeastern Writing Center Association Achievement Award is presented annually on a competitive basis to a member of the association in honor of his or her outstanding contribution to the writing center community.

Eligibility

Any member of the SWCA is eligible to receive the award.

Process

To nominate an eligible candidate, send a short letter of nomination to the address below. The nominator is also responsible for informing the candidate that he or she has been nominated.

The candidate should submit supporting documents, which may include letters of support from students, tutors, faculty, administrators, or colleagues from other institutions; syllabi; publications; local writing center materials, etc. to the address below by December 1st.

Nominations and supporting material should be sent to

Karl Fornes, SWCA Treasurer
The Writing Room
University of South Carolina Aiken
471 University Parkway
Aiken, SC
karlf@aiken.sc.edu

A committee of SWCA members will review the nominations.

Deadline for Nominations: December 1, 2001

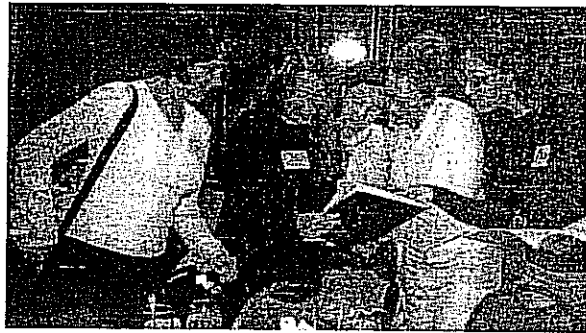
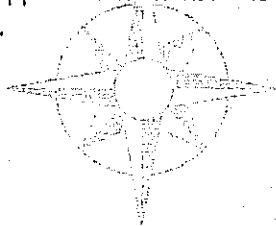
The winner will be announced and presented with the award (a nifty plaque and a check for \$250) during the 2002 SWCA Conference.

Award Committee

If you are interested in serving on the committee that reviews the nominations, please contact Karl Fornes at the above address.

Announcing...
the 2002 NWCA/SWCA
Joint Conference
April 12 -14, 2002

The 2002 NWCA/SWCA joint conference will be held at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia. Traci Augustosky is the on-site conference coordinator. Committees are currently being formed for other aspects of conference planning, including proposals and registration. More information on the conference will appear in the next issue of *Southern Discourse*.



Agnes Scott College tutors at the 2001 SWCA Conference in Auburn, Alabama.

Anyone interested in helping with the conference should contact Marcy Trianosky, President of the SWCA, at the following address:

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AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE
THE WORLD FOR WOMEN

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