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# A Proposal for a Writing Center and a Peer Tutor Training Course at Fayetteville High School

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A PROPOSAL FOR A WRITING CENTER AND A PEER TUTOR TRAINING COURSE AT  
FAYETTEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

A PROPOSAL FOR A WRITING CENTER AND A PEER TUTOR TRAINING COURSE AT  
FAYETTEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English

By

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Ouachita Baptist University  
Bachelor of Science in English Education, 2001

May 2012  
University of Arkansas

## **ABSTRACT**

The following thesis is a proposal to begin a writing center at Fayetteville High School. The first part of the thesis document describes the research supporting the implementation of a writing center. The rest of the thesis provides the syllabus for the peer tutor-training course.

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **1. Introduction**

This thesis is somewhat unusual because it has a dual purpose and a dual audience. One purpose of this thesis is to satisfy the requirements for a Master of Arts in English. As such, this document must first satisfy the research requirements for a thesis. The audience for this work is the university-level academic community. However, this thesis has also been written in anticipation of a wider audience. This audience would be upper-level administration at Fayetteville High School and Fayetteville School District in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I have taken into account this second audience by including information that is specific to our school as well as including the persuasive requirements of a proposal document. It is my hope that this paper would need only minor changes before being presented to school administration.

The research for this thesis is intended to persuade both audiences that Fayetteville High School needs a permanent writing center and that the benefit to students outweighs any additional costs to the school; also, if funding proves difficult to secure, this research could be used as part of a grant proposal to secure funding for the writing center. The first section of the thesis presents the school's need for a writing center as well as the proposal for the center. This section attempts to persuade school administration by presenting the writing problems in our school as well as explaining the ways that the writing center can help improve the overall effectiveness of our school. As Pamela B. Farrell says, "In order to get a writing center started, you have to make your administration realize that what you are going to do is going to make them look good, too" (12). The second portion of the thesis attempts to address some of the school's most pressing needs such as testing and a diverse population and to prove that the writing center could help the school address those needs. The third section explains the



administration of the writing center. This section is a practical one and attempts to synthesize the institutional concerns of Fayetteville High School with the best available research explaining how to effectively staff a writing center. Finally, the thesis outlines the peer-training course that all tutors would need to take and methods for compiling that syllabus. The syllabus instructions are given in a detailed manner in order to explain the research process to the academic community as well as to give detailed instructions for a first-year writing center director. The second and third sections are intended as tools for the writing center director to pilot the writing center and tutor training course.

## **2. A Proposal for a Writing Center at Fayetteville High School**

Most students and teachers would agree that improving student-writing skills is one of the most important jobs of the public school system. The College Board agreed when they explained why they developed the National Commission on Writing: their “motivation lay in the growing concern within the education, business, and policymaking communities that the level of writing in the United States is not what it should be” (qtd. in Addison and McGee 150). Beyond high school and college, students will be continually affected by their ability to write:

The National Commission on Writing sent a survey to the human resource directors of 120 major American corporations affiliated with Business Roundtable. Survey results revealed that two-thirds of salaried employees in large American companies have some writing responsibility, inadequate writing skills are a barrier to promotion, certain types of writing are commonly required, and an estimated \$3 billion is spent each year training employees to write. (Addison and McGee 151)

Obviously, students are not entering the workforce with sufficient skills in writing. According to a study done by the U.S. Department of Education, “only 24 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders perform at or above the proficient level of writing” (Turner 45). In an increasingly verbal society, one where so many of us are more connected than ever before through text, email, and social media, the fundamental skills of writing, obviously not being achieved by many students, are increasingly important. Students are entering college without the necessary skills to succeed.

Although Fayetteville High School does hold a spot as one of the highest performing schools in the state of Arkansas when it comes to test scores, there is always room for growth and improvement. In fact, under the No Child Left Behind program, the school is required to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in all areas on the state Literacy Exam. Students take this exam in their junior year; the exam tests students on their reading and writing abilities; the exam requires students to read and respond to several reading passages, write two essays, and answer multiple choice questions based on both reading and students’ prior knowledge of writing and grammar. In 2009/2010, the school was put on alert status for not meeting AYP for this exam. If this trend continues for more than one year, our school could be placed on a school improvement plan; this plan would place additional rules and regulations on our faculty. At this point, the school has not been put on an improvement plan, but because of the structure of NCLB, each year the goal becomes higher, making it more and more difficult to achieve. Federal guidelines require that all schools reach 100 percent proficiency by 2014. Each year, students who typically need more support to succeed, low income and minority students, score lower than their middle and upper class white counterparts. The school must improve, not just as a whole, but also in each subpopulation. A subpopulation is any at-risk group – students with free and reduced lunch, African-American students, special education students – that has sufficient numbers to

qualify as a subpopulation by the state's standards. As a combined population (our general population including all sub populations), our school is improving; in fact, each subpopulation, except for African-Americans, seem to be making some gains each year. Students must score proficient or advanced to pass the test and not be remediated in literacy the following year. In 2010, 22 percent of the combined population scored basic or below basic, and 22 percent of Caucasian students also scored basic or below basic. In contrast, the numbers are disturbingly high for other groups: 46 percent for African Americans, 40 percent for Hispanics, and 47.5 percent for the economically disadvantaged. These numbers demonstrate the need for more support services even for the highest scoring group. Having 22 percent of 11<sup>th</sup> graders unable to pass what most teachers consider a very basic literacy and writing exam is not acceptable and definitely reflects a lack of college readiness of this group. Also, students who fail the test put additional burdens on the school through a need for remediation. In order to meet the state's remediation requirements, the school has to pay staff additional money for these after school programs that students must complete during their senior year to graduate.

Low achievement in reading and writing is also affecting student success in college. In the 2009/2010 school year, students entering colleges from Fayetteville High School were remediated at the rate of 21.1 percent. This fact means that about two of every ten students graduating from our high school have to take courses – either in math, science, or English -- to help them get their skills to a college readiness level. These students waste time and money trying to reach a standard that should have been met in their time as high school students. The writing center, by allowing all students, to come in and meet with tutors numerous times throughout the year will help students improve their writing through in-depth conferences that simply aren't possible in the classroom. In addition, teachers across the curriculum will be able

to use the writing center to improve their own writing instruction. The writing center director will be an important ally for the teacher and will be available to teach writing workshops for all teachers.

### **Process-Driven Writing**

As a member of the English Department at Fayetteville High School, I am concerned that that all students be able to write well and in a variety of ways. Most teachers would agree that writing skills are important for both college and workplace readiness. However, teaching student writing at the high school level can be a challenge. In Arkansas, and many other states, teachers are teaching up to 150 students a day – the NCTE recommends 80 as a maximum for English teachers -- and are frequently teaching six out of seven sections during a typical school day. Considering such an intense workload, we can see that passing out an assignment, teaching a few lessons on various errors, and then grading and commenting on 150 papers is challenge enough. These time consuming comments and grading come after any real benefit can be achieved for the students. Researchers Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam contend that “formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and can raise student achievement” (81). In their analysis of available research, the two men reviewed more than twenty studies. According to their article “Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment,” the more than twenty studies they reviewed “[showed] that innovations that include the strengthening of formative assessment produce significant and often substantial learning gains. These studies range from over age groups from five-year-olds to university undergraduates, across several school subjects, and over several countries” (83). These formative assessments, done as the student progresses through the learning process, are more beneficial to student

learning than summative, or final, assessments. In fact, most studies show “that improved formative assessment helps low achievers more than other students and so reduces the range of achievement while raising achievement overall” (Black and William 83). For the student, the paper is over when he or she receives a grade on it. The comments no longer matter because that grade is finalized, and that particular writing assignment is over. Students will be moving on to a new writing assignment where many of those specific comments might not seem to apply.

The English Department at our school wants students to focus on writing as a process, but sometimes that is difficult to do when many students only want to write one draft and be finished. In my classroom, I encourage process driven writing by having students turn in an outline, rough draft, and a final draft. Still, many times I look back at a student’s rough draft and final draft and see only minor differences. Even with peer review, many students are hesitant to use the feedback they are given by fellow students because they see their peers as poorly qualified to give useful, informed suggestions. But as teachers and writers ourselves, we know that collaboration is an effective and necessary tool in the writing process. Many of us, as professionals and academics, have the skills to engage in a collaborative writing process. For instance, in the writing of this thesis, I have a thesis director who can read my writing and give me feedback. On a more informal level, I might ask a colleague or qualified friend to read over some or all of the draft. Comments from these individuals help me revise and consider my work from various angles. For high school students, especially those who are consumed with social activities and wary of seeming too interested in school, finding a peer partner might be a much more daunting task. Or students, concerned with the final grade, might not trust other students to make accurate comments. And often, these students are right. We haven’t given students enough

training and practice to be valuable critics of one another's work. Therefore, many of the comments made are either insubstantial or off the mark.

Another response to low achievement in writing would be teacher-led writing conferences. There has long been evidence that one-on-one writing tutorials are beneficial to students in a classroom setting. According to Muriel Harris' book *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*, "in a national survey of exemplary teachers at the elementary and secondary levels, conferences proved to be the only type of feedback that the teachers consistently agreed was helpful" (3). As Harris states, "responding as a grader to the finished product is far less valuable to the writer and comes at a less useful time" (8). In the past, I have tried to conference with students on at least one assignment, but because I am teaching high school and students have busy schedules and transportation issues before and after school, it is difficult to schedule conferences. Sometimes, I was able to schedule them during class time, but in order to do so, the rest of the class had to be busy working on an assignment, and I had to make sure that the conferences moved quickly. In the end, I realized these conferences weren't feasible considering the amount of time that each took. For instance, if I had a class of 25 and only spent ten minutes with each student, it still took at least a week do conferences. When I graded the papers, I realized that the students made some improvement, but they could have benefitted more from additional conferences. In the end, I could not justify the lost instructional time when weighed against the minor improvements made by students.

Many universities and some high schools are working to improve student writing by offering writing centers as part of the auxiliary resources available to help students succeed. Writing centers make tutors available who "meet individually with writers in the writing center either briefly (e.g., fifteen to twenty minutes) or for more extended periods of time (typically an

hour) to attend to that particular writer's concerns" (Harris "Writing Center Concept").

According to Melissa Turner's "Writing Centers: Being Proactive in the Education Crisis," a writing center is one way to address some of the pressing issues in education (45). Schools that have writing centers are also striving to eliminate some of the pressure put on teachers. These "centers provide opportunities...because they are 'more flexible than the classroom to anticipate the special requirements of individuals and help to diffuse the confusion and frustration students feel if they do not understand the act of writing'" (45). As early as 1988, the National Council of Teachers of English passed a resolution stating that "NCTE members recognized the important contribution writing centers have made to the success of many students at all levels of education" (Resolution). Then, they "resolved, that the National Council of Teachers of English endorse the principle that the establishment of a writing center should be a long-term commitment on the part of the institution, including stable budgeting and full academic status" (Resolution). Their formal support of writing centers followed a widespread use of these centers and a recognition that these centers did improve student writing.

Numerous high schools across the country have used writing centers, enough so that we can now see the benefits to these schools and have the appropriate distance to study their effectiveness. In fact, since the writing center movement began, there are "over one hundred high school writing centers that people are aware of" (Speiser and Farrell 13). According to Pamela B. Farrell, "they [students] come back and, whether they've gone to college, vocational school, or work, these kids return and talk to you about the importance of the writing center" (Farrell and Speiser 19). Other studies have been done to show the benefits of writing centers. The National Survey of Student Engagement was created in 1964, and "in 1964, and in 2007 it included a writing assessment and background questionnaire" (151). The NSSE developed "five scales that

describe the quality of undergraduate writing” (153). Of these, two – pre-writing activities and good instructor practices – identify skills that could be reinforced in the writing center (153). NSSE has determined that students need “feedback from faculty and others about their writing ideas and drafts” and need to “[collaborate] with classmates” (153). According to Casey Jones in “The Relationship Between Writing Centers and Improvement in Writing Ability: An Assessment of the Literature,” “the available research indicates that tutoring, and especially peer tutoring, possesses identifiable advantages as a writing instruction mode when compared with other means of composition teaching, e.g. ‘conventional’ classroom instruction” (Jones).

### **Benefits for the Writer**

According to Melissa Turner’s “Writing Centers: Being Proactive in the Education Crisis,” “the writing center encourages a collaborative rather than judgmental relationship, which Peter Elbow (1983) and Donald Murray (1985) both stress as being an important factor when working with student writing” (53). Muriel Harris, editor of the Writing Lab Newsletter, and former Director of the Writing Lab at Purdue University, also sees the relationship between the tutor and the writer as quite unique to that of the teacher and the writer: “tutorial instruction is very different from traditional classroom learning because it introduces into the educational setting a middle person, the tutor, who inhabits a world somewhere between student and teacher” (27-28). The tutor is someone that the writer feels more comfortable with and, as such, the tutor can enlighten the writer on subjects that would be more difficult to address in the classroom setting. Harris goes on to say that the tutor acts as an intermediary between the writer and the professor, and as such, the writer feels more open to explore new thoughts, ask questions, and clarify the language of the classroom.



For the teacher, the writing center is a place to refer students who need extra help or even to simply encourage reluctant revisers to take their papers through more than one draft. For students, the writing center is a non-threatening place to receive help and talk through their papers. Recently, I distributed a survey to all sixteen English teachers at Fayetteville High School. Of the sixteen surveys, I received thirteen responses. From these responses, all the participants said that they would encourage their students to use a writing center with well-trained peer tutors and that this access to tutoring would be beneficial to students. As further justification for the writing center, of the thirteen survey participants, seven said that one of the major factors determining the amount of writing assigned in their classroom is the amount of time it takes to grade the writing. Most of the teachers surveyed already attempt to use peer review, but most experienced the same problems with it. Participants stated that the peer reviewers frequently aren't strong writers themselves; therefore, they can't make good comments. One teacher said that "kids do not always provide constructive criticism – they either won't criticize at all or will be harsh without being helpful"; other teachers echoed this sentiment. Most of the concerns about peer review of papers could be addressed in a peer training course; in this case, students would be getting all the benefits of peer tutoring without the above drawbacks. Many of the teachers outside AP courses rarely see students outside the allotted class time because of a lack of student interest; therefore, the time the teacher is able to spend conferencing with students is limited. Normally, the student would have to find the teacher's room during the teacher's preparatory period, but a writing center would make this type of intervention more available to students since the center would be in a high profile area, and the center would be open for extensive hours.

It is not impossible, however, to address the problem of low writing scores, low achievement on standardized tests, and the lack of one-on-one writing instruction. The answer to these problems could be found in an addition to our school's writing instruction. I propose a full-service writing center be opened at Fayetteville High School to address these needs. A writing center director, peer tutors, and parent and college volunteers will staff our writing center.

### **3. Organization and Administration of the Writing Center**

The administration of a high school writing center has some difficulties that are not present in a college center. In "The High School Writing Lab/Center: A Dialogue," writers William A. Speiser and Pamela B. Farrell address some of these difficulties. According to Speiser, "the structure of the traditional American high school causes more difficulty than anything else. It makes the separation between a college writing center and a high school one obvious. Colleges provide more flexibility for their students" (Speiser and Farrell 13). Fayetteville High School, as a traditional public high school, requires constant supervision of students and rigid scheduling. Unlike a college, students do not come and go as they please with more independent work time during their day than structured class time. This creates the difficulty of finding a time for tutors to work and time for students to receive help in the center. Speiser goes on to say the following: "All of the paperwork that's involved in a high school that is not involved in a college makes it more difficult to make a high school writing center work" (13). The following information on the administration of our writing center attempts to address

some of the difficulties explained by Speiser and Farrell, specifically scheduling difficulties and the issue of supervision.

### **Funding of the Writing Center and the Writing Center Director**

The Fayetteville High School Writing Center can be staffed in a number of ways. There will need to be adult supervision at all times, so ideally a writing center director would be hired. This person would be a certified English teacher with a degree or teaching experience that focuses on composition. State certification will be required because the center director will be supervising students and will be teaching the tutor training course. Ideally, this candidate would have some high school teaching experience, but if a newly graduated candidate with some writing center experience applied, this experience would be acceptable in lieu of teaching experience. This position would be posted on our school website. As such, the position would be open to existing faculty as well as the wider community. In the past, any opening at our school has received numerous applications, so I do not anticipate a problem attracting qualified candidates. However, if finding someone did prove difficult, teachers and administration at our school could also rely on University of Arkansas contacts through the English Department and Quality Writing Center to put the school in contact with good candidates.

According to the existing certified teacher salary schedule, this position could range from \$41,310 per year for a candidate with a Bachelor's degree and no teaching experience to \$70,176 per year for a candidate with a doctorate and thirty years of experience. It is most likely that this candidate will fall somewhere on this spectrum rather than at either extreme, but in budgeting for the position, administration should be prepared for the largest amount. This position would be the biggest cost and the most difficult to find funding for. Also, this will be a yearly, recurring

cost. The tutors themselves would be free because they would be high school students working as part of a course. This cost, while the highest, is the most important that the center will require. The center will not be able to work without this central person to run it.

The center director will sometimes have to be away from the center: for lunch, the occasional meeting, training sessions with tutors, and tutoring sessions. Ideally, the center would have an additional adult such as a receptionist present. However, this is unlikely to be an affordable option. Instead, parent volunteers could be used to staff the center for one hour per day. The library at our school successfully uses parent volunteers, and the school does have an active parent teacher organization that could be utilized.

Technology in the center is another cost issue. The center will, of course, have one district issued computer for the director, but there is room for other computers in the room. Our school faces a huge economic divide where computers are concerned. Some affluent students have personal laptops as well as personal computers and printers at home; other, lower-income students are hard-pressed to find computer access at school. The computers available through the school are frequently full, and I believe that the addition of some computers for students to use would be an enticement for bringing students into the center. If the students know that they can come in to use the computers for word processing, tutoring appointments can naturally occur, especially during the early days of the center. According to our school's technology integration specialist, Jyllian Martini, the writing center could purchase personal computers for \$700-\$1000 each and a printer for \$300-\$400. If we purchased five computers and one printer, our cost would be about \$4400.

The last cost would be for the class texts for the peer tutor-training course. The text used will be *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. This book costs approximately twelve

dollars per copy. The center will need at least twenty copies for the center tutors and will probably want to purchase twenty-five copies in case of loss or additional numbers in the tutor-training program. Those twenty-five copies would cost \$300 dollars, and at ten percent for tax and an added twenty dollars for shipping, \$350.00 is a fair estimate of the cost. This amount could come out of district textbook money. Other than that text, the center will need to provide a few dictionaries, thesauri, and copies of the *MLA Handbook* as well as the *APA Handbook*. If the center had three copies of each book listed, the cost would be at least \$200.00. Costs for these texts would be a one-time cost. Unless the items are damaged, stolen, or lost, the cost should not recur each year.

The Fayetteville High School writing center would follow the guidelines set forth by Muriel Harris in her “SLATE Statement: The Concept of a Writing Center.” These guidelines are the following:

1. Tutorials are offered in a one-to-one setting.
2. Tutors are coaches and collaborators, not teachers.
3. Each student’s individual needs are the focus of the tutorial.
4. Experimentation and practice are encouraged.
5. Writers work on writing from a variety of courses.
6. Writing centers are available for students at all levels of writing proficiency.

As is obvious from these guidelines, the writing center would be student focused and inclusive. Every student at the high school, from the Advanced Placement student to the student with special needs, should feel comfortable in the center and believe that the center plays an important role in his or her development as a writer.

The Fayetteville High School Writing Center, after an initial pilot year, will be open from 8 am to 4 pm daily in a classroom-sized room attached to the school library. Since our school day starts at 8:20, this opening time will allow a few extra minutes for student appointments before school. Our day ends at 3:45, so it will also allow students to come in after the last bell to schedule appointments or ask quick questions. The center will remain open through the school's fifty-minute lunch period as well. This period is more than long enough to accommodate appointments and will be another available time for student writers to receive help; lunch appointments will be especially helpful for writers who have no time during the typical course schedule. This schedule will not be the one the center abides by during the pilot year. During this year, the center will have more limited hours to accommodate the limitations of tutors who are undergoing a peer training course and a center director who is publicizing the center and educating the faculty concerning the center. At the end of the peer tutor-training course, the center might only be open a few hours each day. After the initial year, returning tutors will not be required to participate in the training course; therefore, the tutors could be scheduled throughout the day to allow the center to be open more hours.

Another option for tutoring staff would be the University of Arkansas. Pre-service teachers must complete observations in local schools. One of the observation classes these students must complete requires twenty to forty hours of observation; during this observation time, the students are allowed to assist students and even teach lessons. With some on-the-spot training, these observing students could be used as potential tutors and even as receptionists in the center.

The library location was chosen because of the high traffic by students and teachers. Our library is in a central location, near the cafeteria, and students walk through this area throughout

the day to get to their classes. Also, this space is close to the study hall classes; students working on assignments in these sections would have easy access to the center to make appointments and receive assistance. Richard Allen and Pamela B. Farrell conducted a survey of writing center directors across the United States. According to the survey results, “the most desirable or functional location is within or adjacent to the library or media center. Responses indicate that the reasons seem to be visibility, access, and necessity: public schools, by law, must provide supervision for every area within the school where students are permitted” (Allen and Farrell 31). If the writing center director had to step out for a minute, the librarians will still be close by and could fulfill the legal requirements of supervision.

This center will be furnished with three to four small tables, eight to ten chairs, four to five computers, and at least one bookshelf that could be used for reference materials as well as displaying writing center handouts. Outside the writing center, the hours for the center will be posted. These hours will also be posted throughout the high school including all English classrooms. Upon entering the center, students will first see a desk where either a supervising teacher or a student tutor will be stationed. This station will be where writers will make appointments and receive information about the center. There will be at least two tables with two chairs that will be made private by using room dividers. At least two private study carrels will be available for students wishing to work on their writing; two computer work stations will be available on a first come first served basis as well. A writing center director will run the center. This person should be a certified English teacher and have some experience in the classroom. This person should have the ability to work well with colleagues as well as students. This person should be willing to offer help and suggestions to colleagues.

Having a writing center housed in the library, while beneficial because of its accessibility, could also create some challenges. In “Scheduling” by Barbara Brooks and Carol Lefelt, Lefelt says she must deal with having her center housed in the library, and she expresses some of the difficulties inherent in sharing a space. Because the librarians at her school are so close to the writing center, they must answer questions about the center and sometimes monitor tutors. Lefelt explains that “maintaining friendly relations is crucial – but difficult – when the librarians see the writing center encroaching on their territory or creating new problems and more work” (53). I think that the librarians in our school are amazingly accommodating and helpful, but they, like the rest of us, are busy, and the director must consider the difficulties of their jobs when he or she asks them for any help. The director can best do this by making it very clear what is required from the librarians. Writing center staff will ask that the librarians answer questions from students who are looking for the center. The center will not require that the librarians do any tutoring or any lengthy monitoring of students. Our school does have an instructional facilitator, whose office is in the library, and she is required to give feedback to teachers concerning classroom strategies. She’s also a building resource for all current research on literacy strategies. As such, she will be a resource for the writing center director when it comes to providing advice about literacy strategies and a liaison for the center director when assisting the faculty. Collaborating with the faculty, while at times challenging, will, I think, be beneficial. According to Casey Jones, “the existing research suggests that the effectiveness of writing centers in producing better student writings could be increased by closer collaboration between writing center personnel and faculty members and by rectifying the misconceptions of the latter about the mission of the writing center” (Jones). I believe that the more faculty feel invested in the writing center, the better understanding the faculty will have.



## **Recruitment of Tutors**

Some high school writing centers staff their centers with teachers as the tutors; this center will have a director who will sometimes work as a tutor, but the bulk of the tutoring will be done by peer tutors. On a practical level, we simply do not have the staff to use teachers as tutors. But philosophically, I think that the peer tutor is important. According to Harriet Marcus and Pamela B. Farrell in “Staffing the Writing Center,” the peer tutor is a powerful ally and can assist in ways that the teacher cannot. Farrell and Marcus go on to say that, “When a teacher says, ‘You know, I’m not sure what you’re saying in this part of your essay,’ often students attribute this lack of understanding to a generation gap; but when a respected fellow student gives similar feedback, the client really concentrates” (39-40). Students will be able to build relationships with each other, thereby hopefully adding to the bond between students.

The recruitment of tutors will be an important and continuous job for the writing center director. As suggested by Paula Gillespie and Harvey Kail, tutors will be chosen “who enjoy the collaborative process in their classes, who are good listeners and good communicators” rather than simply students who have high grades in English (325). This expectation will be made clear to teachers who will then be asked to provide the director with a list of potential tutors. In “Training Peer Tutor for the Secondary School Writing Center,” Elizabeth Ackley explains that the qualifications for the tutor are as follows:

“Writing center tutors must first be writers themselves, not necessarily the E.B. Whites of tomorrow, but students who share a concern for writing as the process of thinking. In addition, they must be listeners who care about the tutees and their writing problems. The tutors must be immersed in the writing process as theory and practicum; they should

know strategies to help at every stage of the writing process and they should continue to write as they tutor” (65).

Once we've identified the appropriate students who embody the above qualities, these students will be contacted by letter by the center director to apply for this program. Although Fayetteville High School is a fairly large school and, as such, would seem to have a large number of potential tutors, these students also have a wide array of classes and activities that demand their time. The writing center director will need to make the job of tutoring competitive with these numerous activities. In addition to soliciting recommendations from teachers, the director will also publicize the job of tutoring by visiting all English classes to present the potential benefits to classes. A potential tutor will likely be a highly motivated college bound student so the advantages of tutoring should be tailored to entice that type of student. First of all, students will be participating in an activity that will be viewed as community service by college admissions officers, but unlike many other community service opportunities, this one will allow students to earn credit toward graduation. For students who already have many after school commitments, this class will allow them to serve fellow students without much after school time. Many colleges view writing skills as an important part of a student's skill set, and seeing that the student is able to write so well that he or she is able to guide others in this process would be an attractive draw. Also, most universities have writing centers on campus, and undergraduate students are able to participate as tutors to fulfill work study requirements. At the University of Arkansas, for example, this is an attractive position because the pay is higher than many other work-study jobs. Having previous experience as a tutor will give students an advantage when applying for these positions. Most importantly, the writing center director will be responsible to create a fun and welcoming environment in the writing center. It is important that the writing center director has a

warm personality and is able to develop rapport with the students utilizing the center as well as the tutors. Building relationships with the tutors will increase word of mouth publicity and help students see the writing center as a fun place to work. This will not only help recruitment but retention. Recruitment would be continuous because tutors will be leaving due to either new scheduling commitments or graduation.

### **Staffing of the Writing Center**

Peer tutors will be scheduled in the center to tutor student writers. These tutors will be selected through teacher referral and will receive a letter from the center director requesting their participation in the program. The writing center director will ask that the teachers only refer students who have strong writing and social skills. After receiving an initial invitation letter, the potential tutor will be interviewed by the center director and a panel of participating teachers. The tutor will bring in a sample of his or her writing and will be asked pertinent questions about his or her experiences as a writer. In addition to teacher referrals, these students will be required to provide peer recommendation forms as well. From these documents and the interview, the writing center director and other supervising teachers will make a selection of twenty tutors who will be able to staff the writing center for at least a full year. Students will be made aware early on that this commitment is both curricular and extra curricular. Not only will these students be required to be scheduled for an elective credit that will be devoted to tutor training and work in the writing center, but they will also be required to attend meetings after school and sometimes convene with other tutors to work on writing center research. At our high school, each year-length course is awarded one credit. Students must have twenty-four credits to graduate. Most of these credits are for core classes and other requirements, but students must have nine elective

credits. In the English Department, there are currently only two elective courses offered: literary magazine and creative writing. The peer-tutoring course would give students interested in writing an additional option for fulfilling the elective requirements. After the first year of the tutor's participation, the tutoring period will not be awarded any additional credits. Students will participate in tutoring in the same way that a student might participate in study hall. Most of these second-year tutors are seniors; having fulfilled all requirements for graduation, many seniors are looking for a way to fill a seven period class day. Volunteering in the writing center will help these students do that in a productive way. During the first semester of the first year, the students would participate in a peer tutor-training course. During the pilot year of the program, this course will be offered during separate periods of the day so that the tutors will then be able to tutor during the day. For instance, if twenty tutors are recruited, the class will be offered three or four different periods. Each class will have five to seven tutors.

### **Use of the Writing Center**

Student writers can come into the center on their own or can be referred by a teacher who wants the student to receive more individual help than can be offered in the classroom. Student writers will benefit from the center in several ways. They will be able to talk through their draft at many points of the process: topic selection, first draft, and final draft. Unlike a classroom setting, the writing center will allow students to get extended help from qualified peer tutors. Students will be able to get one-on-one help on any type of writing assignment at any point during the writing process. Students will be able to book thirty-minute appointments on a sign-in sheet posted just inside the center. At Pattonville High School in suburban St. Louis, Missouri, the writing center requires that students coming to the writing center, either by appointment or

not, “report to the teacher whose class they will be missing and ask for permission to attend the center” (Brooks and Lefelt 47). The center at Pattonville High has created passes for this purpose, and our center will create such passes as well. The writing center should not become a place for any students to skip class or to miss class. However, we do have opportunities for students to come during the day when classes will not be missed. For instance, many students are scheduled in study hall class or as teacher aides. Some students might be in a class where they are drafting a writing assignment, and they might want to come to the writing center to get extra help. The writing center staff at Pattonville High also asks the writers to bring their documents with them along with any prewriting (Brooks and Lefelt 47), and this will be the expectation of our center as well. From 8 to 4, there will be at least sixteen thirty-minute appointment periods. If at least two peer-tutors are present each hour, the center will be able to accommodate thirty-two appointments per day, and 160 appointments per week. In a forty-week school year, the writing center will have the capacity to have 6,400 appointments. With a campus of 1800 students, each student on campus will be able to use the center at least three time during the school year

Students will be expected to come promptly during appointment times. At Highland Park High School in New Jersey, the tutor will wait for five to eight minutes for the writing to come to the appointment before assisting any drop-in clients (Brooks and Lefelt 51). This will be an important stipulation for our center because tutors should be available for drop-in appointments rather than waiting for students who are not going to show up.

### **Behavior Management in the Writing Center**

Because of the writing center's welcoming atmosphere, it is possible that there would be some disciplinary issues. For example, some students might use the writing center as a place to hang out and distract other students who need help. Friends of the peer tutors might drop by to chat. It will be the responsibility of the center director to manage the behavior of center visitors. All school rules will apply, and the center director will make it clear to the writers, tutors, and other teachers what the consequences to those behaviors would be. It will also be important for the writing center director to maintain a positive and open relationship with the school librarians and aides. The rules of the writing center will need to conform to the library rules since the writing center would be housed in the library. For example, the library is a quiet work place for many students. Obviously, writing center appointments will require talking, but this talking should be at an appropriate level and should not disturb students working in the library.

### **Publicizing of the Writing Center**

Another responsibility of the writing center director will be to publicize the center to the broader school community such as administrators and other teachers. Some of the school officials, unfamiliar with writing center practice, might be confused about the role of the writing center. It will be important that these teachers understand what the writing center is not. During teacher in-service and meetings with school administrators, the writing center director will go over the basic concepts of the writing center as outlined by Muriel Harris, possibly even demonstrating a mock tutorial. In his essay, "The Idea of a Writing Center," Stephen North explains what some of these misconceptions might be. He explains that many might see the writing center as a place only for students whose writing has many errors, for students, as he says

who have “special problems” (434). Another common, and even more troubling, misconception is that the writing center is a “fix-it shop” (435). Students might think that the writing center is a place for tutors to proofread; writers might even think that they can drop off papers and pick them up later with corrections. It will be the job of the center director, tutors, and English faculty to educate both the faculty and the staff. North sums up by saying, “our job is to produce better writers, not better writing” (438). This is a central tenet of writing centers and one that must be understood by the faculty.

### **Benefits for Peer Tutors**

The benefits to the school and to the writer are numerous, but what about the peer tutor? The peer tutors will also benefit by improving their own writing skills and by improving their research skills. All peer tutors will be required to take a tutor training course. This course will, of course, teach writing essentials such as the writing process, global and local concerns. However, these topics will be taught in new ways with the emphasis not on the tutors’ ability to apply these concepts – that should already be in place – but in their ability to guide student writers to apply these concepts. As any teacher would say, this level of understanding is much more in-depth than the simple ability to apply on one’s own. Peer tutors must go that one step further and guide and instruct others through this complicated process.

Studies show that the tutor benefits from the experience as much as the tutee. For instance, in New York City in the 1960s “Robert Cloward, who undertook the Mobilization for Youth Study, hired underachieving adolescents to tutor elementary students in remedial reading. The surprising result: In just six months, the reading scores of the tutors jumped by an equivalent of two years – far more than did the scores of those they tutored” (Gartner and Riessman 58).

Other studies have been done with reciprocal tutoring and have been shown to have similarly positive results (Gartner and Riessman 58).

According to Paula Gillespie and Harvey Kail, the potential pitfalls of using peer tutors are far outweighed by the benefits. For instance, it “allows both the tutor and the writer to learn from one another rather to compete, and allows students to play a reciprocal role in each other’s educational experience” as well as allowing tutors to “become more aware of their own process of thinking and writing in increasingly engaged, discourse knowledgeable ways” (322). By analyzing their own thinking and writing, the tutor will be doing the most analytical of critical thinking, and by collaborating over real assignments that matter to the writer, tutors will be more invested in collaboration. This is collaboration that matters: the student writer is invested in his or her success in the course, and therefore, the tutor must be as well. Unlike so many other collaborative exercises in the classroom, this collaboration has real world consequences. If the tutor is unsuccessful in the tutoring session, the writer’s success in the class is at stake as well as the writer’s continued use of the writing center. According to one tutor interviewed by Harriet Marcus and Pamela B. Farrell, the benefits are numerous: “I have tutored mainly seventh and eighth grade students this trimester...I’ve gotten to know a lot of girls through tutoring, but perhaps more importantly I have strengthened many of my skills. For example, when I discovered I had trouble explaining some of the punctuation errors students made, I decided to look the topics up in texts to clarify the rules in my mind” (41). Another student discusses the impact of responsibility: “I love having such a big commitment and responsibility and having to stick to it whether my life that day started off on the wrong foot or whether I came from an amazing party the night before. I feel so strongly about having the chance to help others while



having fun and I hope I can continue to do so for more prospective Writing Center tutors in the years to come” (41).

Three researchers at Purdue University looked at how tutoring is beneficial to future English teachers. After doing research, they concluded that “peer tutoring in a writing center [is] a useful addition to the field repertoire of pre-service teachers” (Alsup et. al. 328). Through their experiences as writing tutors, these future teachers must “create their own relationships with tutees, make independent decisions about how to approach a tutoring session, and must deal with the outcome of the session, whether positive or negative” (Alsup et. al. 328). This is a helpful complement to the student’s other experiences as an intern or as an observer because he or she must be completely independent when working with the tutee. Of course, in our center, we won’t expect that all of our tutors will go on to become English teachers, but surely, with interests in writing and tutoring, it is likely that at least some of them will. High school is an important time of exploration for students, and if these students are considering such a career, tutoring could be a valuable experience. The experience that was helpful for these future teachers in the university setting would have to be similarly helpful as early as high school. And what if none of these students go on to become teachers? Surely, the problem solving and decision-making skills that they have learned will help them in many fields. And possibly even more importantly, the writing center can become “a true center for the revival of community and of civic engagement”; therefore, the writing center will not only create better students but also better citizens (Murphy 278). In an age when as Murphy states, so many people are “bowling alone,” the building of community that is possible in a writing center is more vital than ever (271).

In addition, the tutor is learning an important lesson in responsibility. In the *Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, the writers sum up what they see as the important ethics of the

writing center. They list the responsibilities of the tutor. According to them, the tutors are “responsible to [themselves], the writers with whom [they] work, to [their] tutor colleagues, to [their] writing center director or equivalent, to the writing center itself, to [their] school, and even to the writing center field” (44). This will be emphasized to students in our program. They must not spend time talking to friends when they should be tutoring; they must continue ongoing study into the writing field when they are not busy tutoring; and they are responsible for being professional at all times. Writing tutors should never make jokes about the writing that they see in the center or participate in any other type of mean-spirited talk about tutees or writers. They must exercise control to be polite and helpful. All of these skills would be important for tutors in their future time in college and in the workforce.

### **Justification for Peer Tutoring Course**

One of the concerns addressed in the surveys that I conducted was that the tutors would be appropriately trained in the center. This is a predictable and justifiable concern. Most of the teachers have dealt with varying degrees of success with peer tutoring in their own classrooms, probably because of inexperienced and untrained tutors. Obviously, if our school would be investing resources into a writing center, we will want the interactions between the tutor and writer to be much more consistently positive than the ones seen in these classrooms. The first step to more positive peer tutoring experiences will be the appropriate recruitment and selection of tutors. But after recruitment and selection, we must have a quality training course that will ensure students are prepared to hold writing conferences that are beneficial for each writer and tutor. Since each writer will be unique, with unique problems and concerns, this course must

address a varied number of concerns, but because our time will be limited, the course must train quickly.

Some universities and high schools do not offer credit for peer tutor training courses; they train students either on the job or in a crash course to tutoring, simply taking a few days or evenings to train tutors. The lack of a peer tutor training course is generally driven by institutional or funding constraints. However, because of the age of our tutors and our desire to create a quality program, our goal is to guarantee that each tutor has all the skills necessary to tutor other students; a credit-bearing training course is most likely to meet our goal. Also, since as a high school, we will be tutoring a diverse population of learners, tutors will need to be trained to help everyone from an AP student to an ESL student. Tutors might be good writers intuitively, but most have had little reason to reflect on their own practice as writers. As part of the training course, these students will be forced to analyze their writing process and consider how to help students who are very different from them. By teaching students to engage with a variety of writing problems, we will be encouraging students not simply to edit for writers or to do the work for them. We aren't interested in creating writers who are exactly like the tutor; instead, we want each writer to progress in his or her own style.

#### **4. Training Course for Peer Tutors**

When I started compiling the syllabus for this course, I started by creating the major writing assignments that the tutors would be completing. As I thought about the assignments, I decided that I needed to know what the students should be able to do after this course. First of all, I wanted the students to think about their own writing process, not just to be more self aware, but to develop the ability to share insights about the writing process with other students and to

consider how each of us has unique writing processes and strategies. Students can also be more aware that the process some teachers require might be more formalized than what they are using. Although each writer might have a unique writing process, the common denominator is that each writer should and does, perhaps without knowing it, have a writing process with a repertoire of developing strategies.

### **Major Assignment 1**

One of the first tutoring texts that I encountered was the *Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*. In this guide, the first chapter includes numerous tutor stories about the tutors' experiences with tutoring. The guide goes on to give stories from students coming to the writing center; these students reflected on their writing process. I found these tutor stories to be both interesting and helpful and knew that if I found them to be so, students probably would as well. The two stories from the first chapter reflect what the authors call the "idiosyncratic nature of writing." Being a beginning writing center, we will not have any such stories to draw from; instead, the student tutors will write about their own writing process and experience as writers.

This first assignment became the starting point for the first unit of study: the writing process. In this unit, students should receive the broadest sense of what the writing process could be. Since our school services 1800 students and has an English faculty of sixteen teachers, writers will be coming to the center with many different conceptions of the writing process. Therefore, our tutors must not be locked into a single method of tutoring. Some teachers might require steps be adhered to, and certain types of assignment might be more conducive to particular types of writing than others, but as a writing center, our central position will always be that of Peter Elbow: "in writing, your words must go through stages. There are no shortcuts" (44).

As part of the peer training course, students will administer a brief survey to the faculty asking various questions about what they require from student writers regarding the writing process (Appendix D). Information from this survey will be important to talking about the writing process with students. Students gather as much information as possible because students will need to know some basic information about how students will be expected to write. Students must understand some essential writing terminology; for instance, in my classes I use some terms from Jane Schaffer's basic model of writing. In this model, Schaffer explains the essay with a focus on concrete details and commentary, and I expect students to understand the difference between a concrete detail and commentary and how to use both effectively. In pre-writing my students are required to list their concrete details. If a tutor were helping them do that, I would want the tutor to understand what a concrete detail is.

After students have written about and discussed their own writing process and have learned the various types required by teachers, students will begin to study what good writers and thinkers say about the writing process. As a starting point, the work of Peter Elbow would be used. Many of the senior writing tutors will be familiar with Elbow through his book *Writing with Power*, a book we use as part of our Advanced Placement English Language and Composition program. In this book, Elbow discusses many of his most important ideas including freewriting. The writing center director will begin there with students by using freewriting as an opening exercise in some of our class discussions. Freewriting is less a prewriting strategy according to Elbow than a method for getting started. He says that too many students spend time when they should be writing not actually writing. In freewriting, a student would set aside an amount of time to write; during this time, students must write without stopping. If the student can't think of anything to write, he or she must write something, anything, over and over. This

strategy can help students in a few ways: increase fluency, clear the student's mind before writing, and decrease the fear of writing. Students can use this strategy when tutees come in the writing center afraid to generate text or unable to put any ideas down. As my base text for this unit, I chose information from another book by Elbow called *Writing Without Teachers*. In this book, Elbow espouses the developmental approach to writing rather than a more traditional approach. Elbow contends that this traditional idea of "writing is backwards... Instead of a two-step transaction of meaning-into-language, think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning – before you know your meaning at all – and encourage your words to gradually change and evolve" (15). He continues to contrast his method with the traditional one by suggesting that the more typical writing process would expect students to plan, draft, and then correct. According to him, this encourages students to "essentially [write] it once" (19). He goes on to say the following:

The old two-step model – the meaning-into-words model – is not really wrong, it's simply not complete. For in almost any piece of writing, the last stage of the growth process – the mopping up or editorial stage – is just what the old model describes: get your meaning straight and find the best words. Of all the steps in the growth cycle, this one is the most obvious because it is the most conscious and manipulative. Thus people easily mistake it for the writing process itself. (Elbow 70)

I like the idea of starting with Elbow's ideas because they are much less restrictive than more traditional ones and because some of the struggling writers who come into the writing center would not have any idea how to get started on their writing. This does not mean that all Elbow's ideas would work for all assignments, but that sometimes writers just need to start writing and do a lot of it. The director would also discuss with students how to use Elbow's open-ended writing

process. To engage in this type of process, he suggests that students write for given amount of time. Then, at the end of this period, students should look back over what they wrote, consider what the main point of this material is and write this down. Using this statement as a starting point, students should continue to freewrite (19-21).

Elbow also has an interesting position on editing, one that might be helpful for some students. By editing, Elbow really means what I will discuss with students as both local and global revisions. But his main focus is on the global revision because he believes we should all “make writing a global task, not a piecemeal one” (72). He starts by saying that he personally does not create an outline until he already has a draft. Then, he creates the following:

A list of full assertions – one for each paragraph. Each must assert something definite, not just point in a general direction. Then the progression of assertions must make sense and say something so you can finally force that list of assertions into a single assertion that really says something. And now, having worked your way up, you can work your way down again to clean and tighten things up: with this single assertion, you can now reorder your list of paragraph assertions into a tighter order (probably leaving something out); and only now can you finally rewrite your actual paragraphs so they all reflect in their texture – at the cellular level – the single coherence of the whole piece. (39)

The director will then ask the writing tutors to bring in a paper that they have written for a class; it can either be graded or in the draft stage. The tutors will then use this strategy with these papers to revise; this will be an in-class exercise. Before starting this exercise, the director will share with the students Elbow’s ideas about revision: “Editing must be cut-throat. You must wade in with teeth gritted. Cut away flesh and leave only bone” (41). With these statements, Elbow reinforces what most writers are very reluctant to do, cutting away writing. High school

writers, in particular, are fearful of this because they are writing with their teachers in mind, and their teachers have given them length requirements. They wonder how they will meet these requirements while taking out words instead of adding them. Tutors must be ready for these objections, and nothing will help prepare them more than learning from personal experience. As they get ready to cut their own words and realize that it is at once painful and necessary, they will be able to share that experience with tutees and explain the benefits. Also, tutors will have to understand how to build content into their papers after a revision. By doing so, they will be all the more ready and able to share with tutees. At the end of this unit of study, students will be expected to reflect on what they learned. What changes will they make to this draft based on what they learned? Will any paragraphs be rewritten? Will any paragraphs be taken out? This exercise is beneficial because it isn't one that students use frequently and because they can use it to work with students who come in with a draft that lacks focus. Sometimes, students, especially inexperienced writers, are so fearful of the composing process that they do not want to let go of any of their writing. They come to a place like the writing center wanting only help with proofreading. This process will allow tutors to show students the reasoning behind letting go of some writing, changing the order of some writing, and revising paragraphs for internal focus. As the next step in this process, the director will give students a sample paper, one that could benefit from some revision and ask them to go over this with a partner. With their partner, they should be able to write the assertions for each paragraph and a single assertion for the paper as a whole. Then, they should go over the paper together discussing what its main problems and the suggestions they would give its writer. The director will put the writing on the document camera and as a class, they will workshop through its assertions and most needed changes.



In Elbow's book, he advocates for the teacher-less writing class, essentially a type of writing workshop. While the writing center does not fit this model exactly because it's not a class, and the students won't be meeting in the exact same grouping over and over, the basic idea remains the same: students can help other students improve their writing. In his chapter introducing this class, he gives suggestions for ways to respond to the writing of others in your class. Because students need more and more ways to respond to each other, the teacher would then go over his discussion on pointing – essentially pointing out good, bad, or not so good spots (85-86). Then, students would review his discussion of summarizing – essentially the reader telling the writer what he or she felt were the main points of the piece (86-87). Finally, the class would discuss telling where the reader “tell[s] the writer everything that happened to you as you tried to read his words carefully” (87). This gives the reader an opportunity to point to spots of confusion, parts that felt exciting or vivid, parts where the reader was expecting and/or wanting something else, etc. This basic template for response to a piece of writing is one that the class would practice together and one that they would start using as they respond to each other's writing. This should become second nature for the readers so that nothing about it feels unnatural as they begin tutoring in real sessions.

### **Major Assignment 2**

At this point, students would begin to transition into Major Assignment #2. This assignment will focus on students giving written feedback to the papers that they read. The majority of the feedback students give will be verbal, but at this point of the process that the written feedback will help them process their thoughts more effectively. This process will give students more time to think through the comments that they are making. As they get more and more practice, students will have more confidence to give feedback orally.

### **Major Assignment 3**

After completing this assignment and reading about how to give good feedback and how to conduct a tutoring session, students will begin to conduct tutoring sessions. To begin this process, students must bring in at least one assignment that he or she is working on for a class. Then, the tutors will tutor each other. They will additionally write reflections of the experience and give each other feedback.

In addition, each student will complete mock tutorial scenarios. Students would do at least four of these: one at the beginning of the writing process, one after a first draft, one for a personal essay, and one for a research based essay. In Kirsten Komora's article "Mock Tutorials: A dramatic method for training tutors," she says the "mock tutorial is a role-playing session in which the senior consultant visits the Writing Center in the guise of a freshman with a poorly written paper and requests help from a consultant...After each mock tutorial session, the consultants were to write up a conference summary form and to send it directly to [her]" (12). She selected essays for the senior consultants to use (12). She then met with consultants about their performance in these mock tutorials and addressed issues; at the end, she discussed the mock tutorials with the group (14-15). I like this basic format. Obviously, for the first year of the program, our center will not have any senior consultants. At first, we can use junior and senior English students and even students from our school's literary magazine course.

At the end of the mock tutorial process students would begin to conduct real tutorials. These tutorials would be the basis for analysis. Just as the good teachers sometimes videotape themselves to improve their performance in the classroom, we would be doing these for students to analyze.

### **Major Assignment 4**

The students would have a final assignment that will continue during the course of their time in the writing center. Students would be asked to complete a case study on a student who comes to the writing center. The purpose of this assignment would be two-fold. As a center, the writing center director and tutors need to collect information in order to improve writing center practice. Also, the information used in this case study can be used as part of future writing center literature and publicity. This assignment will also allow students to continue their course work even after the initial days of the writing center class are over.

### **Purpose of Writing Center Program and Course Syllabus**

The purpose of this brief training program is to teach students how to tutor student writers in a high school writing center and how to pilot a beginning writing center. These peer tutors will be trained over the course of a semester in a variety of areas, which will help them be better tutors. They will also be encouraged to take a leadership role in the school to start the center by promoting the center and develop materials for the center. Our study over the semester will include the following units:

- The Writing Process
  - A. Prewriting
  - B. Drafting
  - C. Revising for Global Concerns
  - D. Editing for Local Concerns
- Tutoring Process

- A. Format of the tutoring session
- B. Tutoring observation: The Quality Writing Center at the University of Arkansas
- C. Types of tutoring sessions
- D. Mock tutorials
- Tutoring in the writing center

Peer tutors will also be required to do a great deal of writing on their own in the form of reflective writing assignments and to maintain a writing portfolio.

Grading: Students will be graded based on a point system. Each major assignment will be worth 100 points. Daily assignments will be worth 10-20 points. Students should be prepared for reading quizzes each time a reading assignment is given. These quizzes will be worth 20-30 points each depending on the length of the reading assignment. Student grades will be calculated according to school policy: 90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 60-69 = D, and 0-59 = F.

Semester Test: The semester test for the first semester will be the completion of the writing portfolio. For the second semester, students who have completed the case study, all client reports, and have attended all but one of the tutor meetings will be exempt. For all others, the semester exam will be comprised of several potential writing tutor scenarios. Students will have to respond to these.

Credit for the Course: Students will receive one elective English credit for this course.

Course Text: *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*

References Available in the Writing Center: *Webster's Dictionary, Roget's Thesaurus, MLA Handbook, APA Handbook*

### **Major Course Assignments:**

#### **Writing Portfolio**

Students will be required to maintain a writing portfolio for this class. The contents of this portfolio should include the following:

- Students should prepare a list of goals for themselves as both writers and as tutors. These goals can be added to throughout the year as the students come up with new goals for themselves.
- Students will keep each writing assignment that we complete throughout the year, including a reflection on the assignment. The reflection should be a brief paragraph discussing the student's weaknesses and strengths and what the student learned from the assignment.
- Students will maintain a peer tutoring reflection sheet for each tutoring session that they observe or participate in.
- At the end of the year, students will write a short composition reflecting on their learning experience in the course and their progress towards their original goals.
- Students will write a new list of goals for themselves as writers and tutors that will be maintained throughout their time as a tutor in the writing center.

### **Major Writing Assignment 1 – A Reflection on Writing Process**

For your first assignment, you will be exploring your experiences as a writer because if you better understand your own writing and writing process, you will be better equipped to aid student writers and more empathetic to the problems that these writers experience. In this assignment, you will be writing about your background as a writer and your process as a writer. Think back to your earliest experiences as a writer to your most recent. Your paper's thesis should include a summary statement about your writing process. The paper should be a narrative

that reflects on your writing process complete with examples from your former writing experiences and should be at least three to four typed pages in order to allow for the type of detail necessary.

As you pre-write, please keep the following questions in mind. These topics will guide the structure and content of your writing:

1. What are some of the struggles that you have experienced as a writer? What helped you to overcome these struggles?
2. What are some of your strengths as a writer?
3. What types of feedback have served you best as a writer? Peer feedback? Written comments from your teacher? Spoken comments from your teacher?
4. What types of feedback have served you least as a writer?
5. How do you complete a writing assignment? How do you pre-write and revise?
6. Consider how you approach the writing process differently for each of the following types of assignments: research paper, personal memoir, and an analysis of a piece of literature.
7. Do you find peer review helpful? If not, why? If so, in what ways is it helpful?

As you write this essay, keep in mind that we will share these responses with the rest of the class in order to understand a broader sampling of the different techniques that student writers might use. As a follow-up to this assignment on your own writing, you will be required to take notes on the papers of the other tutors. Then, in three to four paragraphs, you will explain how these papers have broadened your understanding of the writing process. What additional methods have you learned from these papers that might help you as a tutor? In what types of

situations would you suggest these methods? In general, what have you learned by hearing these responses to the writing process? This response to your peers will be stapled to the back of your reflection paper.

## **Major Writing Assignment 2**

For your second major reflection assignment, you will be examining two student papers along with the assignment and writing comments for those papers. Each of these student papers will contain problem areas that encompass many of the areas we have already discussed as a class and those that we will discuss later. The papers will be from students of different abilities responding to different assignments. After reading paper #1, you will write a paragraph length response to the issues in the paper, being careful to tutor not edit. In this comment, remember to pay attention to your tone and to refer to specific parts of the paper. Then, in a group of three, you will read two other reviews of the same paper and answer the following questions in detail for each:

1. How did your review of the paper differ from the one you just read?
2. Do you disagree in any way with the comments made? Why?
3. What could be improved in this response to writing? Tone? Specificity?

After you have completed this activity, you and the other group members will take time to discuss the differences in your responses and the issues that you saw in the first paper. Then, you will be given a second paper to respond to. After you complete your paragraph length comment to this paper, you will write your reflection essay. In this reflection, you should include the following:

1. Explain what you learned from your peer groups.
2. What changed from your first comment to your second?

3. What made this challenging?
4. What questions do you wish that you could have asked the writers of the student papers?  
How would the answers to these questions have been helpful?
5. How did the ability level of the writers affect your ability to comment on the papers?
6. Did the assignment affect your ability to comment in any way?

Your first two comments should be typed and stapled to your reflection essay in the following order: reflection essay, comment #1, comment #2, and peer review sheet.

### **Major Writing Assignment 3**

Over the course of the semester, you have completed several mock tutorials and real tutorials. As part of this process, you have also completed reflective questions following each tutorial. Also, you have analyzed the experiences of other tutors in our class, our writing center, and at the University of Arkansas Quality Writing Center. As a culminating assignment, you will be asked to write a summarizing reflection of a single tutoring session. This will differ from the short questions that you normally answer in that you will have more time for analysis and reflection. The session will be taped, so you won't just be relying on your own memory to recreate the session. Having the session on tape will probably alert you to some of your tutoring practices that you might not otherwise have noticed.

Videotape at least three tutoring sessions. Pick one of the tapes to write your reflection. Choose a session that you believe will be fruitful for analysis. Watch the tape, taking notes that address the content needed for your reflection. In your reflection, summarize the session including the decisions that you made as a tutor and the reasoning behind each decision. At the end of this reflection, write about what you would change about this session and why. You should include the following information in the summary portion of your reflection: length of the



session, the type of assignment, student's major concerns, the student writer's history in the writing center, apparent comfort level, types of questions, potential problems during the tutorial, and ratio of tutor talk to student talk. After writing these papers, we will share these experiences as a class. Also, you will have the opportunity to read feedback from the writers about your helpfulness as a tutor.

### **Major Writing Assignment 4**

For a continuing research assignment, we will begin to track and record the impact that the center is having on the writers in the center. Once the center is up and running, we will begin tracking students who use the center and compiling this data. Each peer tutor will be responsible for the listed assignments on a rotating basis.

**Writer surveys:** Each student who uses the center will be asked to complete a survey about their experience. The tutors who staff the center will collect these surveys. During staff meetings, student tutors will take turns summarizing the survey results. If there are any issues raised by the surveys, the tutors will lead a brainstorming session to address these issues. Positive comments will be compiled to create brochures to promote the center.

### **Survey Questions:**

1. How did you learn about the writing center?

Circle one of the following: Posters          Teacher          Classmate          Other:

\_\_\_\_\_

2. For what reason did you come to the center?

3. Circle any of the following resources you've used from the writing center:

Handouts          Tutors          Computer stations

4. How one you rate your experience on a 1-10 scale (with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest)? Explain your answer.
5. Do you plan to use the services of the writing center again? If not, please explain your answer.
6. Do you have any suggestions for the writing center staff to improve your experience in the future?

**Case study:** Early on, a frequent visitor will be identified to be the subject of a case study. The following attributes about the visitor will be ascertained in order to track any possible variables that could inform the writer's experience in the writing center: sex, age, first language, family background, educational background, writing background, etc. Then, this visitor will be asked to participate in a video taped interview about his or her experience in the writing center. Then, the writer will be video taped during their subsequent writing sessions. The center staff will watch these videos, hear feedback from the tutor, and then begin to compile a research paper that will introduce the student as a writer and their experience in the writing center. The focus of the paper will be the ways that the student's writing and concerns have changed throughout the time they have been tutored. In what ways has the writer's background been influential in the tutoring process? What particular things have been helpful about the tutoring experience? How could the tutoring experience have been improved? How do different tutors deal differently with the writer? How does the writer react differently to different writers? Did the student's writing improve? How and in what ways has it improved? Subsequent interviews will be done with the writer to add to the case study. Each tutor who works with this student will be asked to write a reflection on the tutoring session. All of these materials will be compiled to form this research paper. The commentary around these materials will be co-written by the peer tutors. We will go over the results of this writing during our staff meetings.

This case study will be one of the first that the center will do. This study will be part of the staff meetings that the tutors will complete. Each member of the staff will have various tasks to complete over the course of the semester. Over the years as students, writers, and tutors come and go, we'll complete case studies of other students. As we complete these case studies, as a center, we will be able to compare the various writers who come into the center. What causes their reactions to tutoring to be different? Is it the student's own background? The approach that the tutor takes to the session? Being able to compare these studies will inform changes made in the center and allow for more complete research.

### **Introduction to the Course and the Writing Process**

#### Day One

On the first day of class, students will discuss the goals of the course and the course syllabus.

The bulk of this time will be spent completing introductions. Students and the director will discuss their writing and tutoring experiences. Since our course will be largely collaborative, this early interaction will be important.

Homework: Read chapter one of *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, "The Writing Center as a Workplace." This chapter is important for students to read carefully. It details professionalism in three ways: "Professionalism toward the writer," "Professionalism toward other Tutors," and "Professionalism toward Teachers." These guidelines are very important for students to understand because without this sense of professionalism the tutors could easily be the reason for bad publicity for the center.

As part of tonight's assignment, students will start a journal according to the assignment given on page 4. Per assignment instructions, students will write about their tutoring experiences in this journal at least once per week. After the daily lessons in the writing center are over, students will

be expected to continue writing in these journals. Sharing from the journals will comprise part of our bi-monthly tutoring meetings.

#### Day Two

Students will discuss the definition of tutoring as outlined in chapter 1. The writing center director will go over his or her expectations for tutoring in our course. Then, the director will discuss with students the basic format of the tutoring session so that everyone will understand the goals of our course.

Read chapter two of *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, “The Writing Process” for day four.

#### Day Three

Students will start their writing portfolios by writing down their goals for themselves as both writers and as tutors. We will add to these goals periodically throughout the course. I will then go over Writing Assignment One. This assignment is due one week from this day.

#### Day Four

Students will begin a study of the writing process. They will brainstorm different parts of the process and complete readings that will enable us to see different aspects of this. The lesson will begin with prewriting methods. In class today, students will complete exercise 2A on p. 11.

Students will be provided with a set of handbooks for this exercise.

Read chapter 4 “Helping Writers throughout the Writing Process”

#### Day Five

Prewriting methods continued: free writing, outlining, brainstorming, etc.

#### Day Six

Revision strategies: global concerns

#### Day Seven

Revision strategies: global concerns

Day Eight

Writing Assignment 1 is due. Today will be a day for students to read these assignments aloud and discuss the various ways that we write. As each student shares, other students will be writing down examples of the writing processes of their classmates. When they finish the sharing, students will reflect on the process by answering the following questions:

Did the writing process of other students surprise you? How?

What are some of the steps that others use that you do not?

Will you attempt to incorporate any of these new steps into your own writing?

How will you use your knowledge of these new strategies in your tutoring sessions?

HW: Write a paragraph summarizing the answers to the reflection questions.

Day Nine

In order to more completely review the most common local concerns that student writers will have, the tutors will receive assignments to generate handouts for the writing center. Students will be placed in pairs to develop handouts on the following topics: run-on sentences and comma splices, sentence fragments, dangling and misplaced modifiers, pronoun-antecedent agreement, and subject-verb agreement. Students will be provided with grammar handbooks and website resources to use.

Day Ten

Students will continue to work on their handouts. The grade for this will be based on the following criteria: clarity, correctness, and formatting.

Day Eleven

Students will present their handouts to the rest of class and explain the information on the handouts. As a class, they will revise and edit these handouts and discuss a basic formatting style. If necessary, students will take a vote on the best layout for the information. Students will then polish these handouts so that they will be acceptable for use in the writing center.

Homework: Read chapter 3, “Inside the Tutoring Session”

### **The Tutoring Process**

#### Day Twelve

Students will review the information that they have learned about the basic tutorial format and the writing process. Then, as a class, the students and director will walk through the tutorial process looking at an example paper.

#### Day Thirteen

The students will begin looking at sample assignments from various disciplines and discuss how we would guide students through these assignments. The writing center director will have gathered these assignments by conferencing with department heads to get this information. They will also discuss how various assignments have different expectations. This will be a good time to focus on questioning techniques. As a class, students will brainstorm various questions that might come after reading each assignment.

#### Day Fourteen

We will review the basic tutoring session. Students will watch a taped session between the director and another student. Students will have a copy of the paper that is being gone over as they watch the session. They will critique this session using the “Peer Session Reflective Questions “ for the course. These will be answered after each session that students complete and

will be put in their portfolio. After answering these questions, students will share their responses to the session with one another.

#### Day Fifteen

This day marks the beginning of the mock tutorials that students will be participating in. Our first mock tutorial will be with a student who only has an assignment available, but does not have anything written yet. It will be the tutor's job to guide this student through the prewriting and brainstorming process. This mock tutorial will take place between the teacher and a volunteer. All students in the class will have a copy of the paper and will be taking notes along with the volunteer as the tutorial is taking place. After the tutorial is over, each student will complete the reflective questions for this assignment. As a class, we will debrief after this session.

#### Day Sixteen

Today, each student will participate in a mock tutorial. Each student will be given a writing assignment. Students will pair up and take turns leading the other through a tutorial. After the tutorial, the students will reflect. Then, the students will discuss with each other how this could have been improved.

#### Day Seventeen

Today, the class will go on a field trip to the University of Arkansas Quality Writing Center. All students taking the peer tutor-training course will be excused from classes during 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> hour. Students will hear a presentation about the purpose of the center and will be able to observe several tutorials. Students will also have an opportunity to talk to the peer tutors working at the University of Arkansas.

#### Day Eighteen

This class day will be spent discussing what the students learned from observing the Quality Writing Center. Students will take time to revisit our portfolios and add to or revise their goals as writing tutors.

Homework: Read chapter 7 “Helping Writers Across the Curriculum”

#### Day Nineteen

Students will begin to think about basic writing expectations. The director will provide an example of a basic six trait writing rubric, and the class will look at the domains and discuss what those mean in a piece of writing.

#### Day Twenty

Students will look at a variety of rubrics from several disciplines that the writing director has gathered from the faculty. They will analyze these for differences and similarities. As a class, they will generate a list of basic writing expectations. This list of writing expectations will be recorded and added to the class documents.

Homework: Read chapter 5, “The Writers You Tutor”

#### Day Twenty-one

Today, the class will take some time to look at the various resources of the center such as dictionaries, the computers, grammar handbooks, and the MLA handbook.

#### Day Twenty-two

Today, the class will continue to discuss the resources of the writing center and how these resources might be used. Students will look specifically at the different format techniques: MLA and APA. Students will develop handouts for these popular formatting techniques. Students will spend more time discussing and learning MLA. According to the school’s librarians, only two or



three teachers in the school's 150 person faculty require APA formatting, so students will not need as much time mastering this documentation style.

#### Day Twenty-three

Today, students will discuss appropriate ways to respond to assignments and students. As a class, they will complete Appendix D of our textbook. This assignment gives students an opportunity to examine statements made by tutors. Then, students will be given two sample essays and begin to draft Major Writing Assignment Two. Student comments will be due three days from now.

#### Day Twenty-four

Students will begin to use the various types of writers from chapter 5 as a framework to guide a series of mock tutorials over the next few days. Students will use copies of page 34 in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*. This observation sheet will be our center's client report sheet. On the sheet, there is a place for students to write down the student's name and assignment as well as other reflections on the session. On this day, the lesson will focus on the learning styles that are discussed in this book. The class will brainstorm various strategies to help students learn and share our own learning styles with one another.

#### Day Twenty-five

Mock tutorials: "Writer with Basic Writing Skills"

#### Day Twenty-six

Students will break into pairs to trade their comments from Writing Assignment Two. In class, they will complete the second part of this assignment.

#### Day Twenty-seven

Today, the class will discuss English as Second Language writers and will have a special guest from our ESL department to help students understand some strategies for working with these

students. ESL students will comprise some of the most challenging tutoring sessions for the tutors. In her article, “Reassessing the ‘Proofreading Trap’”: ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction,” Sharon A. Myers explains why tutoring ESL students require a much different tutoring appointment than the typical one. She says that although many tutors have been cautioned to stay away from the mechanical errors in student papers, ESL students need the most help with sentence level errors (52). Myers believes that the writing center tutor could be an effective language instructor for the ESL student because the student must communicate with the tutor (64). Myers also gives many concrete suggestions for resources for ESL students such as the learner dictionaries and collocation dictionaries (69). The writing center director will be able to work with the ESL department to purchase and learn to use some of these resources.

Day Twenty-eight

Mock tutorials: ESL Students

Homework: Read chapter 8, “Coping with Different Tutoring Situations”

Day Twenty-nine

Today, we will discuss the ways that the tutoring session could go wrong and complete several scenarios that will allow the tutors to practice their problem solving techniques. We will also use the discussion questions on page 115 of our book to discuss some potential problems. According to the book, the “questions were posed by tutors.” Each question poses a real-life situation from a working tutor such as the following: “What can I do to make writers do more of the work in a tutoring session? How can I help them discover more of the answers themselves” (111)? These questions will become more and more pertinent to students as the students begin to do tutoring sessions.

Day Thirty

We will continue to answer the questions on page 111.

### Day Thirty through Forty

Students will begin to produce handouts to promote the writing center and begin to visit classrooms to promote the writing center. In these visits, students will cover the following topics: writing center hours, making appointments, and the purpose of the writing center. Students will be encouraged to present the information to teachers and students in creative ways and will be evaluated by the teacher in whose classroom they are visiting and the writing center director.

### **Tutoring Practice**

At this point, all students should feel comfortable to begin tutoring in the writing center. While participating as writing tutors, they will complete Major Assignment 3 and 4. We will share the results of these assignments during our bi-monthly staff meetings.

Format of the bi-monthly staff meeting:

- A. All students will be given an agenda prior to the meeting. This agenda will vary somewhat from month to month based on the problems and concerns the writing center director deems most important. Tutors will always be required to bring their tutoring journals as well as at least one concern from a tutoring session.
- B. The writing center director will discuss any issues that have arisen in the center such as lack of professionalism, tardiness, etc.
- C. The director will then share some tips and information concerning difficult tutoring appointments. The director might call on students to share their concerns.
- D. These meeting will become more important in the second semester of the course. The tutors will have schedules that are more spread out and will usually only have one other tutor in the center at the same time.

## 5. Conclusion

It is my hope that a writing center on campus will increase the visibility of writing and will contribute to creating a sense of a community of writers working towards a common goal. I want the writing center to increase the conversation among various disciplines about writing. In the future, I hope that the writing center will be a place where teachers can come to ask questions and get support about the drafting of assignments from the writing center director. Aside from such hard to measure goals as these, I hope that we see an increase in test scores and increased participation in the writing center from some of our school's most needy groups – our minority and low-income populations. The writing center will be a welcoming place where these groups of people will feel good about coming to share in the conversation of becoming more clear writers. One goal would be that each student of the high school, at some point in his or her high school career, would have been in the writing center to receive assistance. So many students believe that writing is something they are either good at or not good at, a characteristic as unchangeable as being right-handed or left-handed. Hopefully, the writing center will show students a community of writers at work. This work is something that all students need to be doing in order to improve writing. Additionally, this will help ease the way of high school students into college. When they see the writing center at their university of choice, they will be well versed in the purpose of such a place and will be able to get additional help in this new environment while feeling comfortable in the familiar environs of the writing center.

In addition, I hope that the writing center will encourage writing across the curriculum. Students should be writing papers, specifically argumentative and research based papers, in more and more of their classes to prepare them for college. A couple of years ago, the Junior English

teachers and chemistry teachers at our school decided to collaborate on an argumentative research paper. We met together to talk about the assignment sheet and how students would be turning in the paper. English teachers were in charge of teaching students about most of the writing requirements: MLA formatting, thesis statements, organization, etc. Chemistry teachers worked with students to teach how to find and read science related research sources. The assignment had positive effects as well as some frustrations for us. On a positive note, the students did seem to place more importance on the writing assignment because they were talking about it in two of their classes. They received grades for different elements of the paper in each class, so the impact on their grade was higher than if the paper were only required in one class. However, the Chemistry teachers relied heavily on the English teachers for the content of the assignment as well as information on how to grade it. They felt unprepared to teach writing or even to assess it. With limited time to collaborate at lunch and after school, the onus for work and preparation seemed to fall heavily on the English department. After a couple of years of doing the assignment, it became too difficult to do the assignment, and both English and Chemistry went back to working separately when it came to writing assignments. It is my suspicion that this meant that Chemistry, for the most part, stopped doing a research paper.

I would hope that a writing center might allow for more writing across the curriculum without these types of problems. It is completely understandable that teachers of other disciplines – history, science, and math – would have trouble teaching and assessing writing. As an English teacher, this has been difficult enough for me to learn. The writing center, along with the writing center director, would make this process easier. According to Joan A. Mullin and Pamela B. Childers in “The Natural Connection: The WAC Program and the High School Writing Center,” “school writing centers are an excellent place for writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs

to be located.” Mullin and Childers see this as a natural connection because “in the writing center, the director and tutors see syllabi and writing assignments – from those that are questionable to those of high quality – from across the disciplines; they see faculty comments – or the lack thereof – on papers; they hear students’ interpretations of classroom environments and teaching practices; and they collaborate with teachers on ways to improve student learning through writing.” Childers and Mullin both understand the potential problems with this type of program especially if “educators [are] still operating in a conflictual rather than collaborative mode.” The writing center director should be very careful to be a source of help for the faculty rather than a critic. Through tutor reports and informal observations, the writing center director will be able to see patterns in the way that classes are taught, but the faculty should be made to feel comfortable in coming to the writing center. For instance, if a history teacher has assigned a report, that teacher should be able to come to the writing center director for help in developing the assignment and rubric. In this situation, the writing center director would workshop through the writing assignment and rubric with the teacher in much the same the tutors would if a client were to come into the center. I think that following the general guidelines of this tutor/client relationship would set up a clear understanding of how these relationships might work. If this same teacher, after seeing rough drafts, begins to realize that there are problems in a particular area such as strong thesis statements, he or she should be able to go to the center director and get suggestions for teaching and help. Also, all teachers should receive a copy of the tutor’s comments after one of their students has gone to the writing center. This should help the teachers to reflect on any patterns seen in the comments made. Also, “the writing center [can act] as a locus for the history teacher’s writing requirements, for the objectives of a biology lab report, or for the format of a sociology case study.” Then, “the writing center staff [can determine] whether

the information gathered represents how students need to meet assignment and course objectives, and it incorporates the teacher's disciplinary perspectives into the tutors' interactions with students." Mullin and Childers cite examples of this model working in various schools: at one school, "the writing center director annually gives a workshop to faculty on writing to learn, increasing yearly the number of teachers who participate in small, focused sessions to create applications for their disciplines." Other schools have offered training on a variety of other topics such as technology, research, journals, etc. These same workshops could be offered to parents and the community. I know that the course that I primarily teach, Advanced Placement English Language and Composition, requires a lot of writing. At parent teacher conferences, parents are primarily concerned with students' ability to write well, and they understand to what degree students will need to be doing this in the future. I know several parents who would reinforce the goals of the writing center by encouraging their children to take advantage of the extra help.

Michael Eodice outlines another benefit of all this collaboration in "Breathing Lessons". He quotes Virginia Perdue and Deborah James: "Because the teaching that occurs in writing centers is often informal, collaborative, and egalitarian, it is invisible. And this invisibility makes writing centers vulnerable to uncertain budgets, staffing, and locations, but most importantly vulnerable to the misunderstanding that marginalizes writing centers...within our home institutions" (qtd. in Eodice 116). If the funding for this center is secured, this writing center along with the salary for the director will always be precarious and one of the first options analyzed when budgets must be cut. According to Eodice, even when collaboration becomes difficult, as it surely will, because of conflicting personalities and territorial faculty members, the writing center director and tutors must continue to collaborate. He cites his work to collaborate with others at his own institution. He has done so through having a location in the library as well

as work he has done with technology to communicate with his campus. Our writing center will also be in the library, and as a result, we will be using the librarians as an essential resource in helping students with formatting and research. We will also be in a relatively visible location. Teachers take their classes to the library so frequently in our school that if you want to schedule time in the library, one has to do so in the summer. While these teachers are there, they will be able to see the writing center director and the tutors. If students are working on writing assignments with their classes, students could drop in for informal appointments with writing center staff. Some of our classes are very large, particularly our sophomore classes, so tutors and the director could help teachers to trouble shoot and answer student questions. I think that the more the writing center can become a resource for teachers the better. The writing center should be viewed as a place to remove some of the burden from teachers, lessening their workload, rather than one more program that places additional demands on them. The more visible the program is the more likely teachers will be to support the writing center, even lobbying to protect the center from potential budget cuts.

I hope that the writing center can become a safe haven for students to come who need help with their writing. As one of our teachers said in her survey, "Students really benefit from individual conferences. They get the chance to ask all of their questions...students are very insecure about their writing, so one-on-one conferencing feels safer for them." Students who do not have time to receive sufficient help in class or who need the non-threatening presence of the peer tutor will be able to come numerous times to receive help and grow as writers. These students will be more successful on college admissions exams as well as State Literacy exams, and as a result, they will not waste valuable time on remediation. These improvements will increase student achievement in high school and hopefully college retention rates. I believe that



the writing center is a necessary addition to our school and one that will help us as educator reach one of our central goals: to meet the learning needs of every student.

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Appendix A: Letter to Teachers  
Dear teachers:

First of all, let me thank you for allowing me to come to your classrooms to talk about the writing center with your students. One purpose of those presentations was to begin to garner interest in our exciting new tutoring program. As the year draws to a close, we are looking for tutors for our school's new writing center which will be opening its doors next school year. Students have been asked to pick up applications for these tutoring positions in the office. Please continue to encourage your students to do so if interested. Part of this application asks students to get a teacher recommendation from an English teacher. I know that we are all busy this time of year, but I would really appreciate your recommendations and information so we can make informed decisions about these students.

We ask that applicants have an overall grade point average of 3.5 as well and no disciplinary referrals. Their grades in English should not be below an A in regular English or an 85 in pre-AP or AP English. Keep in mind that these students don't have to be perfect writers themselves or know as much as you do about writing. They do need to be responsible, hard working, and willing to learn. I'm confident that together we can assure that the writing tutors who are accepted into the program will be capable and effective.

Thank you so much for being supportive of this program and continuing to focus on writing that prepares students for college. I'm excited about this new direction and believe that this program will help us serve more students in more individualized ways.

Sincerely,

Writing Center Director

## Appendix B: Peer Tutor Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Grade entering next fall \_\_\_\_\_

Please type or print your answers in blue or black ink.

1. Why are you interested in becoming a peer-writing tutor?
2. What strengths do you believe that you can bring to the writing center?
3. What type of writing do you like to do? Explain.
4. What is the best piece of advice that you have ever received about writing? Explain how it helped you.
5. Do you have any previous experience with peer review? Please describe your experiences in detail.
6. Do you like helping others learn? Why?

Please attach a typed sample of your best writing. This can be in any genre. Please limit this sample to 1500 words or less.

You must turn in one English teacher recommendation. Keep in mind that all of the writing tutor applicants will be asked to do this, so you should ask this teacher as soon as possible to give him or her plenty of time to complete the recommendation.

## Appendix C: Teacher Recommendation

Teacher Name \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you known this student? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please rate the student on the following qualities with one being the lowest and five the highest:

Ability to work with others: 1      2      3      4      5

Writing ability:                    1      2      3      4      5

Responsibility:                    1      2      3      4      5

Leadership:                        1      2      3      4      5

Empathy:                            1      2      3      4      5

2. Do you believe this student will be a good candidate for this program? Why or why not?



## Appendix D: Teacher Writing Survey

1. Place a check next to any of the prewriting methods that you teach and/or require from your students:

Clustering

Outlining

Brainstorming

Freewriting

Listing

2. Do you read students' first drafts?

3. Do you require prewriting as well as a draft to be turned in with a final copy?

4. Do you give students time in class to work on these steps?

5. Do you have any methods you use to teach students to revise?

6. Place a check mark next to any of the terms you use when discussing the writing process with students.

Thesis

Plan Statement

Commentary

Elaboration

Specific detail

Concrete detail

Examples

Evidence

Other terms (please list):