

Northern California Writing Centers Association Conference

March 3, 2007, CSU Sacramento

Report by Meryl Brooks to AWE Committee

Synopsis:

The conference title “Creativity and the Writing Center” underscored not only the myriad creative techniques and strategies that writing center tutors employ in serving the needs of students who come to the writing center for assistance, but the creative efforts of coordinators to find resources to support writing centers, to integrate their services into the network of campus services, to promote their services to faculty and students, to involve faculty in delivery of tutorial services or in collaboration with tutors. According to Cheryl Smith, incoming president of the NCWCA, writing centers are places of creativity, but they are invisible, “no one knows what we are doing.”



Keynote Speaker: Sondra Perl shared her experienced as a teacher of teachers in Austria, reading from her memoir *On Austrian Soil: Teaching Those I was Taught to Hate*. Her message was focused on the power of writing to transform relationships, to create new possibilities for dialogue, even between those who have held limiting beliefs about the “other.” She stressed the importance of asking for and listening to the stories of our students, the importance of providing them opportunities to do writing that matters to them. She believes that writing teachers have a critical role to play in shaping a just world, in “creating a pedagogy of hope.” Her presentation included a video, “digital” accompaniment, and she expressed excitement about digital storytelling, embracing it as an exciting “new literacy” that challenges us to consider new ways of thinking about composing. She suggested a new tutor, the digital tutor.

Sessions: There were four sessions and multiple offerings during each session. The sessions I attended were as follows: Reaching Across Disciplines for Collaborative Tutoring Strategies, WAC/Writing Center Outreach Through Creative Promotion, Collaborativity: A Creative Approach to Developing Self-Reliant Writers Through Collaboration, Training and Tutoring Online: Understanding and Managing Technology.



Session I: Reaching Across Disciplines for Collaborative Tutoring Strategies.

Paula Barrington Schmidt, Writing Center Director at CSU Stanislaus, and three tutors provided examples of how they work with tutees who have papers originating in various target courses. Tutors work with three students at a time, and use various methods to put students at ease, lower affective filters, foster confidence, and invite active participation. Early establishment of rules, frequent check in's, discussion of strategies of writing development and error identification, multiple modality learning activities, and collaborative techniques were discussed. The program included tutor mentoring of other tutors, tutor socials, tutor collaboration with faculty.



Session II: WAC/Writing Center Outreach through Creative Promotion. Jason Schilling and Andrew Williamson of American River College presented their process of promotion

for their Writing Across the Curriculum center which included logo development, brochures, website, and posters to develop an increased visibility among faculty and students. For ten years their center was housed in a 6x10 foot room, but has now found a home in a new building that houses the Learning Center (which has a 100 computer bank), a Reading Center, a separate Writing Center, and an ESL Center. It was unclear why or exactly how, but the WAC and Writing Center are distinctly separate centers. This was not addressed in the presentation. Their presentation focus was primarily on the step by step process they employed to execute a promotional campaign for their services.

Key points:

- Online Writing Center services (fully integrated into the college website) allow students easy access to problem solving resources immediately, to schedule tutorial appointments, or to register for writing center lab instruction (.3 courses which begin at any point in the semester). Faculty can find information on writing center services and how they can use them and other resources, like our GIFTS idea.
- Coordination between interested stake holders is essential
- Consistency in promotional materials makes it easier for students and faculty to identify the WAC, and since their materials include a picture of the building they are in, they are also able to more easily identify where it is.
- Promotional material features students photos (What does success look like?) and quotes: "I have always struggled with writing assignments, but since I started using the WAC program, I have received "A's" in all of my writing classes. WAC is fantastic, a real life saver!"
- Use every channel to promote: faculty email, student bulletin, student newspaper, faculty bulletin.

*What does success
look like?*



WAC WRITING
ACROSS the
CURRICULUM
Write Better, Right Now.

Learning Resource Center
AMERICAN RIVER COLLEGE
(916) 484-8802

Session III: Collaborativity: A Creative Approach to Developing Self-Reliant Writers through Collaboration. This presentation was offered by four tutors from UC Berkley: Valine Moreno , Jennifer St. Clair, Sarah Thrasher, and Beth Williams. Their presentation was offered in skit format, and provided a fast moving enactment of various forms of collaboration one would encounter at the UC Berkeley's Student Learning Center, where group tutoring is the prevalent form of tutor assistance (the Collaborative model), tutors work closely with faculty to determine objectives, and new tutors are tutored by seasoned tutors.

Session IV: Training and Tutoring Online: Understanding and Managing Technology.

This presentation was divided into three smaller presentations.

The first presenter, Josh Fleming of Western Nevada Community College, offered a brief visual cruise through his WebCT course shell for tutor training, which featured quizzes on tutoring strategies, discussions, training modules, different forms from instructors, and a tutee evaluation segment.

The second presenter, Bridget Kominek of CSU Fullerton, discussed a qualitative study that she did comparing face-to-face tutoring sessions to on-line tutorials looking at friendliness of tone, use of questions, pronoun choice, and mini-lessons which reveals significant qualitative similarities.

The third presenter, Julianne Chisolm of the California Maritime Academy presented her experience managing a computer writing lab. She emphasized the importance of controlling the technology that we use, warning that if we don't someone else will. Her philosophy is that cutting edge technology may be sexy, but it may not be necessary. She spoke about the smog effect of splintered technology services (not knowing who does what), and how important it is for everyone to know who is responsible for what regarding technology on each campus.

Summary:

I noticed in each presentation that writing centers have been treated rather like an institutional afterthought on many campuses, but there seems to be a current effort to integrate and mainstream their services. New spaces are being found, and in some cases, more funding. Best practices include collaboration between faculty and center directors and tutors. Promotion to faculty and students draws students into the centers. A useable website can provide a first contact point that either provides essential

immediate assistance, or provides a point of outreach drawing students into the center. Technology in the writing center can be useful, but does not have to be the most cutting edge, since the writing center will usually not be a place where video editing will occur.