

Curriculum-Based Peer Tutors and WAC

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At the dawn of the new millennium, writing across the curriculum (WAC) is undergoing a transformation. The faculty workshop that used to be the mainstay of WAC no longer exists at many institutions with established programs or even at schools about to start WAC programs. In the first group of schools, faculty have already attended at least one workshop and perhaps also participated in follow-up meetings. These instructors are familiar with the basic principles of WAC, such as using writing as a teaching tool and encouraging students to engage in all phases of the writing process, but they often need additional support to implement these ideas. And schools with new WAC programs that are trying to introduce WAC concepts and strategies often lack the funding for faculty workshops.

Enter peer tutoring as the new mainstay of many WAC programs. In the early days of WAC, peer tutoring was often regarded as a support service and was confined to the writing center. As a consultant evaluator for the Council of Writing Program Administrators, when invited by a school to evaluate its WAC program I would routinely ask, “Do you have a writing center?” I wanted to be sure that students who could not get sufficient help from their instructors—because their instructors lacked either the expertise to deal with common writing problems, especially at the sentence level, or the time to meet with students after class—had a place to go. In those days, it was the peer tutor’s job to supplement classroom instruction in writing and to meet with weak writers who required a great deal of assistance.

But times have changed, as Joan Mullin points out in Chapter 8, "Writing Centers and WAC." The writing center plays an increasingly important role in the WAC program. The peer tutors who often staff writing centers not only help students with generic writing problems, but they also help them learn the rhetorical and stylistic features of writing in different disciplines. Increasingly, faculty come to the writing center for workshops and informal conversations about writing.

But the most dramatic change in the role of the peer tutor vis-à-vis WAC is the emergence of curriculum-based peer tutoring programs. Joan Mullin describes the courses in these programs as "tutor-linked courses." In this chapter, I demonstrate how the development of these programs coincided with the evolution of the WAC movement. I point out how the role of the course-linked peer tutor differs from the role of the writing center peer tutor, and how ongoing controversies related to peer tutoring also affect curriculum-based peer tutoring programs, from here on referred to as CBPT programs. The chapter concludes with some practical information about choosing, training, rewarding, and supervising peer tutors in CBPT programs and a brief discussion about evaluating such programs.

Many CBPT programs are the descendants of the Brown University Writing Fellows Program, although Brown was not the first school to assign undergraduate writing tutors to courses. Harriet Sheridan pioneered the idea of linking peer tutoring to WAC programs at Carleton College and then helped to establish a similar program at Brown. The credit, however, goes to Tori Haring-Smith of the English department at Brown University for popularizing curriculum-based peer tutoring. Once Haring-Smith got the Brown program started in the early 1980s, with Sheridan's assistance, she invited faculty and tutors from other schools to peer tutoring workshops and conferences at Brown. Those of us who participated marveled at the enthusiasm of both Brown faculty and students for this new program. Although Haring-Smith had initiated CBPT to develop a WAC program at a research university where faculty did not relish the idea of attending WAC workshops, other schools (such as La Salle University) that already had WAC programs saw the potential of CBPT as an invigorating agent in existing WAC programs.

The eight objectives of the Writing Fellows Program at Brown University are similar to the principles and practices endorsed by most WAC programs:

To demonstrate that all faculty and students share responsibility for writing.

To explore ways in which writing and learning are connected.

To change both student and faculty attitudes towards writing.

To make writing an integral part of the curriculum, not a feature of isolated courses.

To encourage students to practice good writing habits, including revision.

To involve all students, not just weak writers.

To reward faculty for their attention to student writing.

To provide students with feedback for revision before their writing is judged and graded. (Haring-Smith 177).

It was clear to those of us who directed WAC programs that by placing peer tutors in the classroom we could give faculty members a "WAC buddy." Tutors would become our emissaries, our intermediaries, with the special strengths that only peer tutors can bring to the table. Those of us who started CBPT programs have not been disappointed. Karen Vaught-Alexander at the University of Portland, in her response to an e-mail survey I conducted in 1997, calls her course-linked tutors "'gentle subversives' who have created more change in the departments than any faculty workshop on clear writing assignments." Barbara Sylvester at Western Washington University says, "My Dean of General Education/Honors mentioned the other day that when he visits other departments they are often holding discussions about writing. He said that ten years ago writing was not a topic of conversation on campus." Deidre Paulsen describes writing fellows as "unintimidating catalysts for discussion about writing at all levels because they are a safe sounding board for professors; they clarify writing for students entering majors through their workshops; they help students clarify their thinking through

their mentoring, and in the process of translating for everyone else, their own writing improves." She goes on to say,

They have caused whole departments (from engineering to religion) to sit down to ponder appropriate assignments and sometimes ask help drafting them. Whereas once we brought in WAC consultants (and I wish we still could), today we recognize that over the long haul, Writing Fellows are there for the entire semester or longer to support a faculty member as she experiments with various kinds of write to learn as well as transactional assignments. (Soven, "Writing")

It is interesting to note that as early as 1904 there are accounts of the success of one-on-one classroom writing instruction, at that time called the "laboratory approach." Teachers, not peer tutors, were working one on one with students, but from the beginning they were advised to behave like peers. In an essay by an instructor on the subject of the lab approach, he reports with obvious satisfaction that one of his students said, "You aren't the dignified teacher I used to think you were. You seemed like one of the boys, and I have learned to like English in laboratory work." The value of an approach to CBPT in which the teacher was less authoritarian was beginning to be recognized (Carino 104)

One-on-one classroom instruction had more in common with CBPT than with writing center tutoring programs. Most important, its goal was not remedial. All students had the opportunity for lab instruction when teachers reviewed their papers at different stages during the writing process. Writing centers began with a similar agenda, but rapidly became places for remediation in order to accommodate the needs of underprepared students, especially during the influx of college students after World War II and during open enrollment in the 1960s (see Mullin, Chapter 8, this volume).

In "The Politics of Peer Tutoring," one of the first essays to appear on CBPT, Kail and Trimbur point out that originally CBPT programs were attached to the first-year composition program, the curriculum-based model providing a required lab component in writing courses. Students worked one on one with a peer tutor

as part of their course work. Some schools still reserve classroom tutors for courses in the writing program. At the City College of New York, for example, tutors from the campus writing center are each attached to a section of composition (Soliday). In the last fifteen years, however, CBPT programs not only expanded to other disciplines as WAC programs grew, but some also incorporated activities beyond reading drafts and conferencing. For example, peer tutors often coordinate with the course instructor to provide in-class tutoring. At La Salle University, course-linked tutors, called writing fellows, are occasionally asked to conduct discussions about or give classroom presentations on common errors. In any case, in the curriculum-based model, peer tutors are written into the plan of instruction. They are part of the course, which gives them a distinctly different role than that of the writing center tutor.

The Brown University workshops led to the establishment of CBPT at a diverse group of schools. Large state institutions (e.g., Western Washington State University, Illinois State University), Ivy League institutions (e.g., the University of Pennsylvania, Barnard University), and liberal arts colleges (e.g., Swarthmore College, Lafayette College) began to recruit faculty and students for their own CBPT programs.

In a survey I conducted in 1993, I found that the largest number of responding curriculum-based peer tutoring programs conform to the Brown model (Soven, "Curriculum-Based"). At these schools, tutors are selected from all fields. They receive training and are assigned to courses in a variety of disciplines where they read the drafts of all the students in the course, the theory being that all students, not just the weak writers, can benefit from draft review. This is also a major tenet of WAC programs, strongly endorsed by modern composition theory and research. In many programs, tutors give both written and oral feedback, usually meeting with their students after having read the drafts. The tutee is free to accept or reject the tutor's comments. Some schools assign peer tutors to special projects rather than to courses. At Seattle University, for example, course-linked tutors work with students in the School of Engineering on special projects. At La Salle University, the Biology department assigns tutors to the senior writing project. In all cases, whether they are assigned to

courses or department projects, course-linked tutors reinforce the idea that revision is an integral part of writing in all courses.

CBPT and the Peer Tutoring Controversy

As CBPT becomes more popular, old controversies about peer tutoring have resurfaced, along with new questions specific to CBPT programs and the role of the peer tutor in the context of WAC. Perhaps because in CBPT programs the tutor is built into the plan of instruction, these questions have assumed even greater importance than in the past, when most peer tutors were assigned to writing centers. Both instructors and students can ignore the peer tutor in the writing center, an impossibility with the course-linked tutor. Typically she has been assigned to a course for the semester at the request of the instructor. It is understood that the tutor will work with *all of the students* in the course that semester. Karen Vaught-Alexander at the University of Portland tells her course-linked tutors to think of themselves as part of a team involving the client, the tutor, and the faculty. The coordinator of the CBPT program is also a part of that team. At the beginning of the academic year, I tell the writing fellows at La Salle University and their sponsoring instructors, "We are all in this together. Therefore, only by working together can we make this program a success."

The close working relationship between the teacher, the student, and the peer tutor forces us to revisit the questions underlying all controversies about peer tutoring: What is the appropriate role of the peer tutor in relation to the teacher and the students? How does the tutor's role differ from the instructor's role? What kind of help and how much help should tutors provide for students? Mary Soliday, in her essay "Shifting Roles in Classroom Tutoring," notes that in the early stages of an experimental program involving course-linked tutors, "students, teachers, and tutors alike had trouble 'placing' the tutor within a classroom's hierarchy and defining the tutor's role" (59). Theorists and researchers who study peer tutoring, and instructors who work closely with peer tutors, continue to grapple with this issue. Many peer tutoring theorists (e.g., Bruffee; Goodlad and Hirst) believe

that the tutor's strength resides in his special peer relationship with the students. In their view, to maintain that relationship the peer tutor must disassociate himself from the instructor and be "non-judgmental and non-directive" as opposed to the teacher who is "directive and evaluative" (see Raines). Raines argues, however, that this is a false dichotomy and recommends that conversation about this issue be conducted as a dialectical exchange between the two positions. Raines says that during the last fifteen years we have learned that both the tutor and the instructor learn from one another. Sometimes the tutor may need to be more directive and judgmental, depending on the student, and frequently the instructor may need to assimilate into her teaching style the less directive and less judgmental strategies of the peer tutor.

Some teachers, however, cannot see the role identification issue in any but dualistic terms. They are apprehensive about sharing their authority with peer tutors and experience difficulty working with a tutor who is more directive. In the CUNY program described by Soliday, in which tutors were present in the classroom, teachers found it difficult to share their authority with another person and were concerned about the tutor's criticism of their performance. At La Salle University, instructors who find it impossible to relinquish authority to peer tutors usually withdraw from the program after a semester. This happens rarely because most of the instructors who request a writing fellow have been participants in our Writing-Across-the-Curriculum workshop and they have, or have "converted" to, theories about teaching revision that emphasize the value of peer review.

Some instructors would like the peer tutor to behave as a faculty clone, an understudy who fills in for the absentee teacher when writing comments on student drafts and conducting conferences. For these instructors, the most effective tutor is the tutor who is a good reporter—that is, he reports the instructor's messages to the students. In this case, the tutor's authority to respond to the student's paper as a peer is seriously undermined.

These issues of authority are symptomatic of how many instructors think about learning. Teachers who believe that learning is based on instructional delivery have a hard time relinquishing

authority. But those teachers who have been exposed to social constructivist theories of learning, which emphasize the importance of collaborative learning and conversation, are more apt to view the tutor as a valuable link in the learning process. These teachers often use some form of collaborative learning, such as small-group discussion, in their classrooms.

The main question when evaluating the success of any peer tutoring program is, Which tutoring approach “better delivers the knowledge it takes to learn to write well?” (Kail and Trimbur 7). When we ask that question in the context of the goals of writing across the curriculum, we use as criteria for the program’s success more than the quality of the completed paper. We are also interested in knowing whether the students being tutored have increased their competency in several areas: their understanding of the writing process, the ability to use writing as a learning tool, knowledge of the rhetorical conventions of academic discourse in a variety of disciplines, and the acquisition of a vocabulary for talking about writing. We continue to debate which role is most effective for the tutor to adopt to help students acquire these competencies and how to help tutors develop this role.

When WAC and CBPT are related, the issue that receives the most attention is the effectiveness of the generalist versus the specialist peer tutor. In “Look Back and Say ‘So What’: The Limitations of the Generalist Tutor,” Kiedaisch and Dinitz argue for the benefits of tutors who know the subject matter of the discipline in which they are tutoring writing. After videotaping twelve tutoring sessions, they concluded that only those tutors familiar with the discipline in which the student was writing could ask questions that would improve the quality of the analysis in a paper, though knowledge of the discipline did not always guarantee that the tutor could help a student achieve this goal. The tutors’ general knowledge about academic writing did not help students writing literature papers move beyond plot summary. The students who were being tutored never arrived at a “controlling insight” for their papers, and their ideas seemed randomly ordered, although each idea was well developed. Furthermore, some tutors had difficulty applying the general tutoring strate-

gies they had learned when working with unfamiliar discipline-specific assignments. Despite these drawbacks, however, students who worked with generalist tutors still rated their sessions with the tutor very positively. Kiedaisch and Dinitz say,

We know we can't reach conclusions based on this small number of cases, but in the sessions we looked at, the tutor's knowledge of how to think and write in a discipline did seem important. Good tutoring strategies were not enough. All these tutors were trained to address global before local concerns, to use questioning to draw out students' ideas, and to refrain from appropriating the student's paper. All of them had had numerous tutoring sessions with students in introductory writing courses in which they had successfully demonstrated these strategies. But David, Michelle, and Jill [peer tutors in the study] seemed unable to apply [these strategies] when working with students on assignments other than [those in] their own [major]. (72)

Not at all discouraged by their findings, Kiedaisch and Dinitz draw three conclusions, which directors of CBPT programs should take to heart:

1. We feel if students are satisfied and motivated they have benefited. A session that is less than it can be is not a bad session
2. In many cases assignments do not require a knowledgeable tutor, especially assignments in introductory courses.
3. Even when tutors cannot help students master the thinking patterns or rhetorical patterns of writing in a discipline, they can help instructors teach them these skills by explaining to the faculty what they have learned about student difficulties (73).

Kiedaisch and Dinitz discovered that tutors who are not familiar with disciplinary conventions might still help students learn about the writing process; although these tutors do not always ask all the right questions, they demonstrate that asking questions helps the tutees build audience awareness. Kiedaisch and Dinitz's third finding suggests that in addition to being accepted as peers by their tutees, tutors were also accepted as "authorities" by their sponsoring instructors, especially on matters related to understanding the problems students faced when writing.

The discussion about the effectiveness of the generalist versus the expert peer tutor is further complicated by another consideration—namely, does competency in one area of knowledge hinder the tutor’s performance in another area? For example, in Susan Hubbuch’s essay “A Tutor Needs to Know the Subject Matter to Help a Student with a Paper: ___Agree ___Disagree ___Not Sure,” she argues that a tutor who is knowledgeable about the subject matter being written about is apt to treat writing as a product rather than a process and therefore proceed to try to “fix” the paper. The peer tutor may ask the right questions to help the student improve the content, but in doing so may give the student too much direction, thereby encouraging the kind of passivity which will draw attention away from the process of writing. Hubbuch goes on to say that these expert tutors may persuade students that all rhetorical decisions are either right or wrong rather than explaining to them that some rhetorical decisions are simply better than others in any given communication situation.

While Hubbuch acknowledges some of the benefits associated with tutoring in the major, she believes that the negative effects far outweigh them. Because she believes that passivity is the greatest obstacle to effective writing, Hubbuch argues that the tutor’s ability to motivate the tutee to take charge of her own writing is more apt to be compromised by the knowledgeable tutor.

Haring-Smith is one of the strongest supporters of the generalist tutor model. She argues that “only with courses relying heavily on technical vocabulary or foreign language courses must the writing fellows have a particular expertise; the writing fellow in most courses acts as an educated lay reader, who can honestly report when she is confused by what a student is trying unsuccessfully to say” (179). For Haring-Smith, the expert tutor can subvert the goals of peer tutoring. Assigning peer tutors to courses outside their majors became an important part of the Brown credo. Haring-Smith’s discussions about peer tutoring emphasize the mission of the peer tutor to promote one of the major objectives of WAC—to use writing as a tool for clarifying what students want to say about the course content, thereby reinforcing the idea that writing is a tool for learning the course content.

Kenneth Bruffee, one of the earliest proponents of collaborative learning in writing instruction, places more emphasis than Haring-Smith on the ability of the peer tutor to teach the conventions of thinking and writing in the disciplines. For Bruffee, however, disciplinary knowledge does not detract from the peer tutor's role as a peer, nor does it interfere with imparting knowledge about writing. The two issues are not connected for Bruffee; he defines a tutor's knowledge of the content and the rhetoric of a discipline in process-oriented terms. When speaking to a group of peer tutors at Brown University in 1993, Bruffee said,

What you do as a tutor, as I understand it, is to help a tutee cross the boundary between one knowledge community and another. You do that by helping the tutee learn the language of the new community. Knowledge communities, or if you prefer, discourse communities, are groups of people who talk the same way. The boundaries between knowledge communities are defined by the words, turns of phrases, and styles of speaking and writing that communities agree on as they construct the knowledge that is their common property. (3)

Bruffee considers this to be a constructive process. The tutor does not *tell* or *show* the tutee this language but, through conversation, helps the tutee understand these new languages and use them. He says, "My premise here, then, is that the most important expertise you gain in learning to be a peer tutor is the linguistic flexibility required for helping students translate from one language to another—from the languages you and your tutees speak to languages that the faculty speak" (3). In Bruffee's view, conversation is an integral part of the process of learning how to write, and therefore discipline-specific knowledge facilitates learning how to write by increasing the effectiveness of the conversation between tutors and their tutees.

Bruffee's theories about peer tutoring mesh well with WAC theory, which emphasizes the connections between form and content in writing. Many WAC theorists believe language is not separate from content, but *is* content. This is where there is a "disconnect" between WAC theory and the guidelines adopted by many peer tutoring programs, based on the Brown program

and WAC theory. In the program at La Salle (described in a later section), I no longer worry about peer tutors commenting on content, but I stress the fine line between enabling students to revise their work and revising their work for them.

Curriculum-Based Programs: Progress and Change

In the early years of curriculum-based peer tutoring programs, most programs followed Brown's approach of assigning tutors to courses outside their major. My 1997 e-mail follow-up survey of some of these programs indicates, however, that these programs have either become more flexible or they have completely abandoned this practice. The program directors I surveyed agree that knowledge in the discipline is an important factor when assigning tutors, but they take into account other variables as well. Western Washington University, Brigham Young University, and La Salle University's approaches are representative of the departure from the Brown model.

Western Washington University

At Western Washington University, writing fellows work with the required 300-level writing proficiency courses. Knowledgeable tutors are assigned to their majors only in science courses. First-year tutors are assigned to courses that best match their particular strengths, which might include knowledge in a discipline but can also mean their writing ability or their interpersonal skills. Experienced writing fellows choose courses that interest them. Barbara Sylvester, the director of this program, reports that "these Fellows have demonstrated for some ten years now effective but different ways to comment on student papers, certainly one factor in the present groundswell to create more systematic and comprehensive approaches to writing for students approaching their major" (Soven, "Writing"). She believes that knowledgeable peer tutors do not necessarily sacrifice the traditional role of the peer tutor. Once they understand their role, the temptation to be overly directive is not as strong.

Brigham Young University

Brigham Young University assigns students to courses in their major. Deidre Paulsen, the director of that program, says,

I started out following Brown University's dictum—something written well should be clear to any educated lay audience. I'm sure that guide can work at a liberal arts college (except perhaps in philosophy) but we have too many professional programs at BYU for it to work well. After having my WF's become quite intimidated by following in a philosophy 400 course, and in an engineering course, I now ask specialized departments to recommend students in their fields for me to train, so they can be trained to work in that field.

Paulsen, while recognizing the pitfalls in assigning knowledgeable peer tutors to advanced courses, believes that the benefits outweigh the limitations. Although she agrees with Haring-Smith's concern about commenting on course content, she uses Bruffee's terminology to discuss the role of her tutors. According to Paulsen, "my Writing Fellows serve as visiting archeologists to translate various cultures to the students who are confounded by the cultural differences in disciplines" (Soven, "Writing"). Like many coordinators of peer tutoring programs, Paulsen finds some theoretical statements more useful than others for describing her program.

La Salle University

La Salle University assigns tutors to advanced courses in their own field of study, but we often do the same for introductory courses. After thirteen years directing a curriculum-based peer tutoring program, during which time I have trained and supervised more than 250 tutors, I have come to believe that the knowledgeable tutor—that is, the tutor who is familiar with the subject matter of the course—more effectively communicates the various understandings about writing promoted by WAC than the generalist tutor, the tutor who is unacquainted with the course content. In all these years, we have had only one tutor whose knowledge of the subject matter clearly jeopardized his role as a

peer tutor. This writing fellow was viewed by the students he tutored as impatient and arrogant. Instead of falling into the typical trap of knowledgeable peer tutors—i.e., giving his students too much help because he saw them as “hopeless”—he tended to be abrupt and condescending. Fortunately, his was an isolated case.

More studies similar to the one by Kiedaisch and Dinitz are needed. Until more systematic research on the effectiveness of the knowledgeable tutor is conducted, however, we must rely on surveys and reports of instructors, students, and the peer tutors themselves. Thirteen years of these internal evaluations at La Salle University indicate that most teachers, tutors, and students believe that the program is more successful with knowledgeable tutors, though they praise the efforts of generalist tutors as well.

The knowledgeable tutor is more necessary in advanced courses than introductory courses, in which the papers assigned are sometimes (but not always) of a more general nature. At La Salle, I usually assign new tutors to introductory courses because assignments are often not discipline specific and the expectations of instructors in different disciplines are similar. For example, the book review is a common assignment in history, philosophy, and religion classes. Most instructors want a brief summary of the text, followed by a critique based on general criteria, such as personal interest and clarity of presentation. Even in these introductory courses, however, the tutor who is tutoring in her major usually outperforms her generalist counterpart.

Sometimes I purposely assign new tutors to introductory courses in their major because they seem apprehensive about their first tutoring assignment. Tutors, like all students learning a new field, go through developmental stages. They often start out with “high hopes and nagging doubts” (Kail and Trimbur 21). Kail and Trimbur note that new tutors are often “insecure about their mastery of rhetoric, style, grammar and usage” (11). To add to these insecurities by assigning some of these tutors to a course in an unfamiliar discipline is not wise, as the following remarks by April White, one of the La Salle University tutors, suggest. In her Semester Review Report, she wrote,

During the fall semester I worked with Brother Fagan's introductory English course. As an English major, I found myself chal-

lenged by my new responsibilities as a Writing Fellow, not the subject I was tutoring. This semester, now more comfortable with the role of Writing Fellow, I was confronted with a new discipline, education. Although the writing process is similar in both fields, the assignments and therefore my tutoring approach in conferences was very different. Bro. Butler, in his Education 101: The Role of the Teacher course, gave three assignments. In the first, an educational biography, I concentrated mainly on focus and structure issues, because many students wrote a straightforward unanalytical story about their lives from nursery school until now. I also stressed specific grammatical problems that Bro. Butler highlighted for me.

The second assignment was a review of selected journal entries. These journals, often handwritten, detailed students' experiences while observing in classrooms around the city. This assignment, while easier for the students than the first, was a challenge for me. Its style did not lend itself to the Writing Fellows forms I have become accustomed to using. Instead in conferences I focused on grammar errors and discussed observation skills. By asking students about their observations in the classroom, I attempted to improve their ability to translate their experiences into writing.

April's comments indicate that she appreciated being assigned to a course in her major during her first semester as a peer tutor, although she found her placement in a course in education during the second semester more challenging. In both cases, she felt she was helping students improve their writing. She cites what she believes to be an advantage of tutoring in an unfamiliar discipline when she says, "my unfamiliarity with the discipline led to a closer interaction with the professor and a better understanding of the criteria he uses to evaluate papers."

Interestingly, April's comment weakens one of the major arguments of those who favor generalist tutors. They assume that the generalist tutor will be better able to assume the role of an "intelligent peer" than the knowledgeable tutor, who may start playing teacher. But if what April says is true for other tutors—that tutors will seek more guidance from the teacher when they are tutoring outside their discipline—it is possible that generalist tutors will behave more like miniteachers than peer tutors. Her comment also reminds us that for tutoring situations to be posi-

tive learning experiences, the tutor as well as the tutee must find the experience satisfying.

After having said I favor assigning tutors to courses in their discipline, however, my experience also demonstrates that tutors with no previous expertise in a field often do convey many of the understandings about writing advocated by WAC without relinquishing their role as a peer. Perhaps we have exaggerated the influence of knowledge in the major as the factor most responsible for shaping the role of the peer tutor and determining his success. Most CBPT programs provide rigorous training that introduces peer tutors to strategies for commenting on students' papers, conducting conferences, and following the conventions of academic discourse in a variety of disciplines. CBPT peer tutors are encouraged to learn "peer tutor talk": to ask questions, to be nonjudgmental, and to be nondirective. They are taught to be sensitive to students' special needs and to give advice about disciplinary conventions only when they are familiar with them. The La Salle University training program also includes a segment on the development of writing ability in college-age students. Training programs remind students of their role as peer tutors and may prevent them from losing sight of this role when they are tutoring students in their discipline or working with faculty who would prefer them to behave as mini-instructors.

Implementing Curriculum-Based Peer Tutoring Programs

Training peer tutors is only one component of implementing a CBPT program. Implementation begins with recruiting both faculty and students for the program. At La Salle, we start both processes simultaneously. Faculty in all disciplines receive an invitation to apply for a writing fellow for the coming semester. In the same letter, I ask them to send me the names of students who have demonstrated good writing skills in their classes. I then write to all of the students who have received a faculty recommendation, urging them to apply to the program. This procedure is effective in motivating students to consider submitting an appli-

cation. Many students, especially those who are not English majors, assume they do not write sufficiently well to become writing fellows. Knowing that their writing has impressed Prof. X often helps them overcome worries about their qualifications. (See the appendix to this chapter for the faculty and student letters and application form.)

Students who nominate themselves for the program must include the name of a faculty member who will serve as a reference. All applicants then submit to a selection committee two academic papers they have written at La Salle. They also agree to attend an interview during which the selection committee learns the nominee's purpose in wanting to become a writing fellow and attempts to evaluate his interpersonal skills. Brown University involves the current writing fellows in the interview process, and Swarthmore requires the nominee to evaluate a student paper. Other schools with writing fellows programs (e.g., Seattle University, Wesleyan College, and Beaver College) employ some version of this selection process. At La Salle we require that students achieve sophomore standing before they apply to become writing fellows. At some schools, however, such as the University of Pennsylvania, all students are eligible to become writing fellows.

At virtually all schools with CBPT programs, once selected, tutors must participate in some form of training, usually in the form of an academic course, although some schools such as Williams College limit the training to a weeklong workshop. Perhaps because many of these courses are modeled on the course developed at Brown University, they include similar topics such as

how to write effective comments on student papers and conduct successful conferences, the specific demands of academic writing, and the reasons students have difficulty in meeting these requirements. On the theoretical side, courses emphasize the literature on process approaches to writing, collaborative learning, and the development of writing ability on the college level. (Soven, "Curriculum-Based" 65)

Increasingly, training programs for tutors include a unit of study on diverse student populations such as students with learning

disabilities, ESL students, and “thirty something” reentry students.

All training programs give students the opportunity to role-play conferences and evaluate sample papers. At La Salle University, the Writing Fellows course is conducted as a seminar, where, in addition to readings and assignments, students discuss their peer tutoring experiences and faculty give presentations on academic writing in their disciplines. Tutors receive their first tutoring assignment while taking the course, as they do at Brown University and other schools. At some schools such as Swarthmore College, the tutors practice tutoring strategies with one or two students before being assigned to a specific course, which occurs the semester after they have completed their training. Although the amount varies, in most programs the peer tutors receive a stipend for their work as peer tutors in addition to receiving course credit. At La Salle, students are paid \$300 a semester for working approximately sixty hours.

During the semester students are taking the course, supervision is relatively easy. At La Salle, our tutoring staff is limited to twenty-five tutors each semester. The new tutors who are taking the course in the fall semester are required to meet with me during each round of tutoring. Together we look at their written comments on several papers and often discuss appropriate tutoring strategies for the writers of these drafts. Those writing fellows who elect to tutor during the year after they complete their training course continue to meet with me each time they receive a new set of papers. In addition, the tutors meet regularly with their sponsoring instructors. At the end of the semester, I encourage the tutors to set up an “exit interview” with their sponsors to review the semester and discuss possible ways to collaborate more effectively in the future. Many tutors work with the same instructor for several semesters. At schools with a large number of tutors, such as Brown and Swarthmore, professional and student assistants help to supervise the tutors.

CBPT programs are communication intensive. Especially since the advent of e-mail, CBPT program coordinators are in constant touch with sponsoring instructors, peer tutors, and the students in writing fellows–assisted courses. (See Reiss and Young,

Chapter 3 in this volume, for more information on WAC and the use of computer technology.) Peer tutors know they can reach me at any time, regardless of the nature of the problem. They may be in a quandary about how to respond to a student paper and need some help. Over the years, I have received several frantic weekend calls from tutors with difficult drafts. Sometimes I am visited by students who cannot find their writing fellows because they forget where to meet them. Often, a faculty sponsor calls because he has lost the peer tutor's e-mail address and phone number! The problems can range from simple to more serious issues, such as the instructor who has postponed deadlines for papers until final exam week, when the peer tutor should not be reading papers.

In addition to on-the-spot supervision, most programs require evaluations from all of the principals in the program—the peer tutors, the faculty sponsors, and the students in peer-assisted courses. I also require the writing fellows to submit a brief report after each round of tutoring, and at midsemester ask faculty to drop me a short note about how things are going. (See the last section of this chapter for more information on evaluation.)

Pitfalls

All programs are subject to pitfalls and CBPT programs are no exception. Tori Haring-Smith lists several problems that may emerge in CBPT programs:

Elitism: Haring-Smith says, “although you want your program to carry a certain amount of prestige, it is important not to let the Writing Fellows become campus celebrities and lose the ability to relate to peers” (184). Tutors need to be constantly reminded of the possible ways their role as peer tutors can be undermined.

Tutor Burnout: Tutors may receive more work than anticipated. At La Salle, faculty send me descriptions of their writing assignments as part of their application for a writing fellow. However, sometimes they change their assignments

or deadlines. The coordinator's first responsibility is tutor protection. I intervene either before or after the fact, but because the tutors know that I am on their side, they rarely become discouraged, even when things do not go as planned.

Program Stagnation: I agree with Haring-Smith that the training program must change to accommodate other changes taking place on campus and in response to new ideas for training. A prerequisite for supervising a CBPT program is flexibility and an adventurous spirit. I rarely say no when asked if the program can be used in a new context, although I never commit the program to a new context on a long-term basis until we have done a pilot. When the faculty in La Salle's graduate program in psychology approached me about assigning tutors to their courses, I responded, "We'll give it a try." The idea of undergraduates tutoring graduate students was a new one for me, but we assigned experienced tutors who were psychology majors to the instructors in the graduate program who had requested the help. Most of the graduate students in their courses, especially the reentry students, were grateful for the assistance.

Our training program has changed in response to recommendations from the peer tutors, what has worked well in the past, my contact with coordinators of other CBPT programs, and new initiatives at the university. When the course was first offered, for example, it included more theoretical readings than it does at present. But students said they wanted more practice and more opportunities to discuss their tutoring experiences in class. They also wanted more discussion on the nature of academic writing. In its newest version, the course requires that students examine academic writing in their major through library research and interviews, in addition to reading articles about academic writing.

Other pitfalls, such as poorly written student drafts or poorly designed assignments by the faculty, come with the territory. Enthusiastic faculty sponsors who understand and support the program can help keep these problems in check. However, the coordinator of a CBPT program must be tolerant of the "less than perfect." Despite the coordinator's best efforts to guide faculty

and tutors, many components of these programs are difficult to control. Informal conversations with faculty and peer tutors, rather than drastic action, can go a long way to setting matters straight (Soven, "Curriculum-Based").

Evaluating Curriculum-Based Peer Tutoring Programs

Many CBPT programs rely on written surveys from the student in the classes participating in the program, their instructors, and the peer tutors. At La Salle, I use surveys for the students and faculty but rely on open-ended reports from the tutors. I meet individually with the writing fellows and review the instructors' and tutee's evaluations as well as the writing fellows' own reports. Most coordinators of CBPT programs also compile statistics regarding the number of students served by the program and the number of tutoring sessions, and then write an annual report for the administration. These reports are often crucial for continued funding. At Brigham Young University, good evaluations were responsible for continuing the program. Deidre Paulsen says,

Although I was certain of my mission (largely defined by Brown University) now others at the university share that vision and that's nice. Whew! It was a lot of proving myself, the program, my kids . . . a pioneering effort . . . but hard work and strong evaluations triumphed, and we are now considered a part of the General Education/Honors program at BYU. (Soven, "Writing")

Many programs also conduct midsemester evaluations. The writing fellows at La Salle submit a midterm report. At the University of Portland, the peer tutor and the tutee write a brief collaborative report about what was covered at the first conference and include plans for future conferences; they then send a copy to the instructor. Portland's approach to evaluation reflects the collaborative approach emphasized in CBPT programs.

Evaluations of CBPT programs tend to rely on self-report rather than an assessment of the writing competencies of students in tutored classes, most likely because of the difficulties involved in attributing improvement in writing performance to a single variable. Furthermore, few coordinators of peer tutoring

programs receive compensation for conducting lengthy evaluations of their programs. At most schools with CBPT programs, both students and instructors are asked through written surveys if they believe the program has improved students' understanding of the writing process and has had some effect on the quality of papers. (See the appendix to this chapter for the La Salle University survey forms). At La Salle, most instructors and students report that the program has been effective in both areas. Many instructors at La Salle also report that the writing fellows program has influenced the nature of their assignments.

There are few studies comparing the relative effectiveness of CBPT programs versus writing center peer tutoring programs and few studies comparing the writing of students in tutored versus nontutored classes. Song and Richter, however, compared the writing competency of students in a remedial program who received both writing center and in-class tutoring to a group of students who received only writing center assistance. They found that the students in the first group had a higher pass rate on the CUNY writing assessment test than the students who received assistance only from the writing center tutors. In another study comparing the writing in tutored and nontutored classes, the instructor found that the greatest effect of tutoring came in the area of "on time performance," though she also observed that the papers in the tutored class were better written than the papers in the class that did not receive classroom-based tutoring (Levine 58).

Conclusion

Writing across the curriculum has had incredible staying power despite the many curriculum revisions and technological innovations that preoccupy institutions of higher education today. Curriculum-based peer tutoring is one of the reasons we can be optimistic about the future of WAC. Besides the educational benefits, CBPT may be a "must" in today's political climate. As Song and Richter point out, "Considering the size of today's classes, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve the instructional goals of WAC without the help of course linked tutors"

(55). Although most evaluations of these programs are qualitative, the results are promising. Those of us who believe in these programs must continue to experiment with various approaches to curriculum-based peer tutoring and continue to deliberate on the issues that affect them.

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Chapter 9 Appendix

Program Documents

- ◆ **WRITING FELLOWS PROGRAM FACT SHEET**
- ◆ **WRITING FELLOWS PROGRAM FACULTY NOMINATIONS**
- ◆ **THE WRITING FELLOWS PROGRAM, FALL SEMESTER**
- ◆ **LETTER TO POTENTIAL WRITING FELLOW**
- ◆ **EVALUATION OF THE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY WRITING FELLOWS PROGRAM**
- ◆ **WRITING FELLOWS PROGRAM FACULTY REPORT ON AFFILIATED COURSES**

Writing Fellows Program Fact Sheet

What is a Writing Fellow?

A Writing Fellow is a good student writer who is assigned to a specific course to help students in the course revise drafts of their assigned papers. Fellows do not grade papers, but through written comments on the drafts and direct interaction in conferences, help students during the revision process.

Fellows will work approximately 60 hours per semester and receive a \$300 stipend.

Who is eligible?

Undergraduate day students who have achieved at least sophomore standing in the Fall semester, in the School of Arts and Sciences, School of Business Administration and the School of Nursing.

Application procedure

Students must submit two papers (two copies of each), preferably 4 to 15 pages, though we will consider longer papers if they represent your best writing (no fiction). A brief interview will also be required and an expressed willingness to enroll in English 360, Writing Instruction: Theory and Practice (cross-listed as Honors 360) in Fall.

What are the benefits of being a Writing Fellow?

Fellows will have a chance to improve their own writing as a result of taking the course and tutoring other students. Most professions and graduate schools often seek out good writers, and the title "undergraduate Writing Fellow" should help convince future employers and educators of the Fellow's special strength in writing.

WRITING FELLOWS PROGRAM FACULTY NOMINATIONS

You may nominate more than one student.

Your name

Ext.

Student

Major

Course:

Phone # & Address

Student

Major

Course:

Phone # & Address

Would you be interested in the assistance of a Writing Fellow for one of your courses in the Fall?

Please return to Margot Sovén, English Department

The Writing Fellows Program, Fall Semester

Are you interested in the assistance of a Writing Fellow for the fall semester?

- Writing Fellows will read the drafts of the papers you assign in one of your courses and give students one-on-one assistance with their writing.
- To obtain the assistance of a Writing Fellow, your course must include at least two papers written for a grade.
- Faculty in all schools and departments may request Writing Fellows. Undergraduate courses at all levels are eligible for the program. Senior Writing Fellows are assigned to advanced courses.
- See the reverse side of the page for a list of the Writing Fellows. You may indicate on the tear-off if you prefer one of these students to be assigned to your course.
- Please contact me for more information about the program.

Name

Phone (campus)

Email

Department

Home Address:

Phone (home)

Title and Number of Course

Approximate Enrollment

Number of Papers

Writing Fellow Request

Letter to Potential Writing Fellow

Dear Student:

You have been identified as a good writer by one of your instructors. I urge you to apply to the Writing Fellows Program. Many excellent Writing Fellows have been Honors Program students.

You do not have to be an English major to be a Writing Fellow. Some of our best Writing Fellows have been majors in *Chemistry, Biology, Psychology, Foreign Languages, etc.* The program has special benefits whether you are planning to attend graduate school, law school, or you are interested in pursuing a career in teaching or the business world.

Writing Fellows are assigned to one section of a course to help students in that class improve their writing. Students often ask, "How much time will it take?" While the workload varies, most Writing Fellows are busy for about four weeks out of the semester when they are reading drafts of the two papers assigned.

Fellows receive a \$300.00 stipend each semester they are in the program, including the first semester when they take the course.

To apply submit two previously written papers. They do not need to be retyped. (See attached sheet for additional information.)

Please feel free to call me at school (x1148) or at home (610-664-0491) if you have any questions, or stop in during office hours (Olney 140), or e-mail me (soven@lasalle.edu).

Sincerely,

EVALUATION OF THE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY WRITING FELLOWS PROGRAM

Dear Student:

To help us shape the future of the Fellows Program, we need to know your views of the program and how it worked for you in this course. Please complete this evaluation form. Thanks very much.

Number and name of course:

Instructor

Your class (FR,SO,JR,SR)

Writing Fellow

1. Generally what did you think about the Fellow's comments?

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| a) mostly encouraging | mostly discouraging | mostly neutral |
| b) just right in number | too few | too many |
| c) mostly helpful | mostly unhelpful | |

In what ways could written comments have been more useful to you?

2. Did you follow the Fellow's suggestions?

always frequently sometimes never

3. How many conferences did you have with your Fellow?

(Circle the number)

0 1 2 3 more than 3

a) If you had no conferences, why?

b) How many conferences would you like to have had?

c) Which was more helpful:

conferences comments on papers
comments and conferences equally valuable

d) The Fellow's comments in conference were:

mostly clear

mostly unclear

In what ways could conferences have been more useful to you?

4. How did the Writing Fellows Program affect your papers in this course?

improved

stayed the same

If you checked "improved":

a) In what ways do you feel working with a Writing Fellow helped you to improve?

b) Are there other areas of writing in which you would like to have had more assistance?

5. How much effort did you give to your draft (check one)?

wrote the draft carefully

wrote the draft with some effort

wrote the draft quickly, with little effort

6. Please circle your overall rating of the program.

very effective

somewhat useful

unsatisfactory

1

2

3

4

7. Please add any further comments or suggestions you would like to make. Thank you for your help.

**Writing Fellows Program
Faculty Report on Affiliated Courses**

Name: _____ Dept. _____ Date _____

Course Title and Number: _____

Writing Fellow: _____

Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire. Your responses will help us to evaluate the success of the program and make decisions about future policies.

1. How did the program affect student writing?
2. How did the program affect the structure of your assignments, assignment deadlines, etc.?
3. Were conferences with the Writing Fellow required? If so, did most of your students comply with the requirement?
4. Did most of your students submit drafts on time? If not, how did you respond?
5. Did you require students to submit their drafts along with their final papers?
6. How often did you meet with the Writing Fellow? Were you able to contact the Writing Fellow without difficulty?
7. How can we improve the program? What can we do to make the program more useful to you?
8. Are you interested in being assigned a Writing Fellow during the next academic year?
9. Are you aware of colleagues who might be interested in learning about the program? If so, please let me know and I will contact them.

Dear Writing Fellows:

Please tell me about the semester. I need to know the following information. Please give me as close an estimate as possible for questions which require responses in numbers. This information influences how I assign Writing Fellows in the fall and in no way affects your stipend. Pick up your last check when you bring in the survey. Thanks again for your conscientiousness and expertise.

Please type your responses to these questions and attach them to this sheet.

Name:

Sponsor:

Course to which you were assigned:

Number of assigned papers:

Answer these questions on the pages attached:

1. How many papers did you respond to in writing?
2. How long were most of the papers?
3. How many students did you see in conference? Where did you hold conferences?
4. How many times did you meet with the instructor?
5. What did you learn from this tutoring experience?
6. Were there any problems? If so, how did you handle them?
7. Are you interested in tutoring next year (if you are not graduating!)?
8. Other comments: