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# THE WRITING CENTER —

*not just your grammatical “Doc in the Box”— now opening with convenient hours in a place near you.*

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**Robert Barrier**  
Acting Director of the  
Writing Center

*“I know what I want to say. I just don’t know how to say it” — your typical student writer.*

*“I don’t know what I want to say until I say it” — your other typical student writer.*

All of us, I imagine, have heard these claims from our students. And if we teach a course involving much writing at all, we’ve heard these statements rather often. What do we say in reply? If we have time or inclination, we might say, “Here, let me show you” or “Look at such and such model in this textbook.” Or to the second lament, we might counter: “Say it, anyway” (or perhaps “any way”). Most likely, if my own experience is standard, we do not react at all, judging such comments as only ritualistic preparation for writing or delaying writing (like sharpening pencils). Then when we receive the product of such delay and lamentation, we often have other, more vigorous reactions. We may say, “Get some help, somewhere.” This year I hope we say sooner than later, “Go to the Writing Center in Library 309.”

The above is my way of pointing out not only that a Writing Center exists on our campus but also that it is

a center for many aspects of composition for the entire campus population. Among these services are remediation, enrichment, enhancement, and encouragement.

Writing Centers, first called Writing Labs, have as their traditional aim the remediation of writing problems. The Center serves as a kind of first aid station (sometimes, unfortunately, a last resort) for students who need extra work in grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and mechanics. And traditionally it has been English and developmental classes who have sent their students to a lab for this help. But the Center — as a center — does not exist for English classes only: whether it is a paper in chemistry, a lab report in nursing, a senior thesis, an essay in a graduate seminar, the Center can help writers outside the core English program.

Traditionally also, students come to the Center with a finished product, needing help in revision or in avoiding subsequent weak essays. Individual tutoring, followed by exercises using cassettes and software, can remedy these errors in the product. Sometimes it is more important though for students to come to the Center (or to be sent) early in the process of their writing. Those “I don’t know what to say” or “I don’t know how to say it” students can discuss ways of inventing topics, conceptualizing and shaping, then organizing an assignment before they begin to write. The Center can enrich and enhance their writing by helping them discover their angle of discourse and their voice as they begin to write.

Finally, the Writing Center exists to

encourage good writing across the campus. It is a place where students can come for non-judgmental help. Working with CETL, other organizations, and individual faculty members, the Center promotes Writing Across the Curriculum. It is a place where those faculty who want to emphasize more writing in their disciplines can come for support, praise, and/or advice. And since today we are learning more and more about why and how people write, the Center encourages good writing by serving as a center for writing research on campus, collecting the most recent studies and materials in composition theory.

Who does the Center serve? Clearly it should serve all elements of the campus: those in English classes needing more specific tutoring, those in developmental classes helped through the joint efforts of the English-developmental liaison, students in other disciplines who need a short explanation of a principle or a CAI-drill on that principle, upper class or graduate students not clear about documentation practices for their research. SOTA students (Students Over the Traditional Age) with dim recollections of Eng. 101 specifics from another time and place, ESL students away from their native community needing further explanation of the writing in the English-speaking community, students about to take the Regents’ Test in Writing, faculty with questions about a procedure in composition or a dilemma over “correctness,” the general public who may call with a question of grammar (call 6380) — the list and potential goes on and on. ●

