Director’s Corner

Here at the Writers Workshop this spring semester, we’ve been looking to both our past and our future.

At April’s staff meeting, former director Steve Lamos spoke about his experience at Illinois, and throughout the semester, consultants have been rethinking the long-time practice of writing tutor notes. Researchers have presented new findings at regional and national conferences and continue to examine writing habits close to home.

We’ve been very busy, with many events outside our walls and thousands of sessions within. Read on to learn about these exciting projects, get a glimpse of the Workshop in its pen-and-paper days, and see the smiles at Illinois’s International Achievement Awards Banquet, where Assistant Director Yu-Kyung Kang won the Graduate Achievement Award.

We’re moving onwards and upwards, without forgetting where we came from.

—Libbie Morley

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Who we are:
The Writers Workshop, part of the Center for Writing Studies, provides free writing assistance for University of Illinois students, faculty, and staff from all disciplines and at all stages of the writing process. Writers are able to discuss their writing with consultants who are experienced writers and teachers of writing.

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Workshop staff:
Elizabeth Morley, Director
Kathy Schnepper, Office Manager
Yu-Kyung Kang, Assistant Director

Cecily Garber, Newsletter Editor
Rethinking Tutor Notes at the ECWCA Conference

Graduate-student consultants Yu-Kyung Kang, Tiffany Harris, and Lisa Ortiz presented their research on tutor notes at the East Central Writing Center Association Conference, held in March at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Their panel addressed questions raised in consultant orientation this past fall about the function of tutor notes and best practices in writing them.

The presenters posed the following questions: “What are the consequences of writing notes about those who visit the writing center? As the student population at Illinois includes speakers of various Englishes, what are our responsibilities in representing students? Do current note-taking practices maintain the student-centered philosophy we hope to follow?”

The panel presented data on consultants’ understandings of tutor notes that was collected in two surveys, one given before and one after a vigorous group discussion at this spring’s first staff meeting. Panelists learned about practices in other writing centers, where notes are sometimes shared with writers and instructors.

Ongoing Qualitative Study on Tutor Notes

Tiffany Harris, a graduate student in the Department of Education Policy Organization and Leadership, is conducting an IRB-approved study this spring that investigates consultants’ practices of writing notes about tutoring sessions.

The study examines how consultants’ notes function as records not only of particular consulting sessions, but also of the Workshop’s activities and history more generally as well as writers’ participation in sessions. Ms. Harris aims for the study to spark dialogue about the notes among new and seasoned consultants alike so that all might reflect on what is included and excluded from the record.

Ms. Harris says she is proud to have received an “overwhelming response” to her call for participants in the study. Conducting interviews to gather qualitative data, she is analyzing consultants’ thoughts about tutor notes in light of the Workshop’s philosophy and consultants’ understandings of and approaches to consulting. “It’s not just about the notes,” Ms. Harris said. She will present her findings at the staff meeting in September.

Considering International Students’ Needs at CCCCs

Director Libbie Morley presented the paper “Opening Our Doors to the World” at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCCs), which was held in Indianapolis this past March. Dr. Morley discussed how the Workshop has responsively responded to changes in demographics, by offering writing groups that help international students to familiarize themselves with American academic writing styles. She further explained one goal of the Workshop is to provide an effective way to respond proactively, by facilitating integration of international and domestic students and continuing to conduct research that helps staff and faculty better understand writers on campus.
Undergraduate Research

Susana Luna’s research examines university students’ writing processes. She asked four students from non-English majors to draw their writing processes and found that they all suffered from some type of writers’ block.

Lea Potter spent this last semester working on the project “Technology in the Writing Center.” This study looked at the pros and cons of using different types of technology in a tutoring session, including: paper copies, personal laptops, desktop computers, and tablets/phones.

Gwen Quigley has been studying online collaborative writing, particularly its effects on writers and possible implications for English classes. She focused on a creative writing group that she has been part of for a little over a year and directed at one point. She interviewed four members of the group.

Spring 2014 Workshop Activities

- Presentation to the Graduate Academy for College Teaching on responding to student writing, Libbie Morley
- Presentation to the Writing Across the Curriculum TA Seminar on the Writers Workshop and ESL students, Libbie Morley
- Visit with Paul Matsuda, Professor of English and Director of Second Language Writing at Arizona State University
- Training for writing tutors at the Irwin Academic Services Center for intercollegiate athletes, Libbie Morley
- Meeting with Ethnography of the University TAs about support for undergraduate editors, Libbie Morley
- Presentation to the African-American Studies Senior Thesis Class on thesis statements and writing, Yu-Kyung Kang and Libbie Morley
- Presentation on cover letters and email etiquette for MA students in the College of Business, Yu-Kyung Kang
- Working with International Students: A Workshop for Staff, Libbie Morley and Yu-Kyung Kang
- “Writing Across Borders”: Short Film Viewing of Working with Multilingual/ESL Students in our Classrooms and Roundtable Discussion, Yu-Kyung Kang
- Personal Statement Workshops, Laura Stengrim, Katrina Kennett, and Alaina Pincus.
PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORKSHOP’S PAST

Former Workshop director Steve Lamos, long-time consultant Karoliina Engstrom, and returning consultant Rashid Robinson offered insights into past Workshop practices. Though tutor notes have changed from paper-based productions to electronic records, the mission has remained the same.

Steve Lamos

Steve Lamos, Associate Professor of English at the University of Colorado, Boulder, spoke to consultants in April at the end-of-year staff meeting. While a graduate student in writing studies, Prof. Lamos worked as a consultant at the Writers Workshop and then directed it from 1999-2004. Mid-way through his doctoral degree, he took a couple years off from studying and directed the Workshop full-time, and then continued directing while finishing his degree.

When Prof. Lamos was director, the Workshop did yet not have undergraduate peer tutors. Consultants were graduate students who came mostly from writing studies, though a few earning degrees in the sciences worked in the bioscience satellite each semester. With 20 consultants, the Workshop had about 4,400 appointments a year in the early 2000s.

Although Prof. Lamos’s first book, *In the Interests of Opportunity: Race, Racism, and University Writing Instruction in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, stemmed largely from his experience teaching courses within the Academic Writing Program, he said his experience at the Workshop “amplified” his interest in different linguistic standards and how they are set.

Prof. Lamos says he has drawn from his experience at Illinois in one of his roles at Colorado, director of the Writing Center, by instituting consultant orientation and training sessions that include mock tutorials.

Rashid Robinson

Rashid Robinson, a doctoral candidate in educational policy studies, consulted at the Workshop from 2003-2004, before leaving to work in university administration, first at Lansing Community College and then at the Illinois Board of Higher Education. He returned to UIUC this past fall to finish his doctorate.

He recalls how the pen-and-paper notes that consultants took in his first years weren’t always easy to read, nor did consultants have much time to read them. Handwriting was sometimes illegible, and even when legible, notes were only very quickly skimmed through, as consultants would receive them in a manila folder just a minute or so before a consulting session.

Assignments in first-year composition have also changed, he notes. He explains that they’ve taken an “ethnographic and cultural studies turn,” asking students to reflect on their own place in the world rather than discussing polarizing, hot-button issues. He believes that this higher-level work requires more support than ever from the Workshop.

Throughout changes in technology and the student body, the Workshop’s mission has remained the same, he says.
Karoliina Engstrom, a doctoral candidate in English literature, has the most Workshop experience of any current consultant. She started consulting in the fall of 2005, a year before current director Libbie Morley arrived. Ms. Engstrom remembers initially hearing about the Workshop during her first week on campus, when she was still jetlagged from her flight from Finland and attending orientation to teach rhetoric classes. “I could never be a writing consultant,” she thought at the time. Just a few years later, she would be the Workshop’s assistant director, helping Dr. Morley plan new consultants’ orientation and events like the African American Read-In and activities to celebrate the National Day of Writing.

Ms. Engstrom remembers that the first year she was a consultant was also the year the Workshop switched over from paper notes to electronic TutorTrac notes. The notes show some “great moments, quiet moments,” she said. “They create a community among consultants.” Ms. Engstrom explained that although consultants may work independently with writers, sitting in separate cubicles, consultants can see and respond to their colleagues’ efforts through the notes and together help writers develop over time.

Her experience at the Workshop has helped her push through her own dissertation, she said. When she gets stuck, she asks herself, “What would Karo the consultant do?” She reminds herself, like she reminds her writers, that writing is not a talent, but a practice, and that she just needs to keep putting words on the page.
Assistant Director Wins Illinois International Graduate Achievement Award

Yu-Kyung Kang, assistant director of the Workshop and a doctoral candidate in English with a specialization in writing studies, won the Illinois International Graduate Achievement Award this academic year. The annual award goes to the graduate student whose international research or service has generated the biggest impact on the university or larger community.

Ms. Kang’s dissertation is an ethnographic study of Korean undergraduates and the practices they undertake to integrate with others at the University of Illinois. Her work through the Writers Workshop as well as the Korean Student Association was also recognized as contributing “both to the local mission and national conversation about international students.”

In her acceptance speech at the International Achievement Awards Banquet, which was co-hosted by the Offices of the Chancellor and Provost, the Alumni Association, and International Programs and Studies, Ms. Kang said that the 6,000-mile journey to study at the University of Illinois has surprisingly brought her closer to home. An outstanding alum, faculty member, and undergraduate were acknowledged as well.
Graduating Consultants’ post-Workshop plans

Katy DiGiulio will begin a master’s degree in higher education administration and policy at Northwestern University.

Karoliina Engstrom is planning to work in public service.

Cecily Garber is searching for opportunities in communications, specifically writing, editing, and/or multimedia production in higher education and non-profits. She will continue to freelance write and contribute to the Ultimate History Project, a public history web magazine.

Khaleel Gheba is in the process of applying to the Graduate School of Library and Information Science here at UIUC, so he will most likely be floating around nearby—maybe even at the Writers Workshop.

Sarah Mahoney is moving to Chicago and looking for positions in the editing and publishing field, such as magazine copyeditor.

Clara Mount will spend the summer working as a peer advisor for incoming freshmen in the Division of General Studies. Beyond that, she is searching for research opportunities in the digital humanities and/or freelance proofreading for the coming year. She plans to return to school for a PhD in game studies, and her ultimate goal is to become a professor.

Lea Potter is searching for opportunities in publishing—she is currently an intern at Common Ground Publishing on campus—as well as business—project management, office management, and the like. She plans to return to graduate school in the future.

Reagan Roberts may well be traveling the world soon, though he is currently weighing different options.

Grace Rosean is looking to get into sports writing or editing, or really anything that will keep her in contact with Chicago sports teams. Over the summer and coming fall, she will be preparing to run the Chicago marathon, which is held in October.