

2 Selecting and Training Undergraduate and Graduate Staffs in a Writing Lab

Muriel Harris
Purdue University

To ensure as competent a staff as possible, the administrator has to select, train, and evaluate the staff, and do so within a variety of constraints that impinge on how the training is carried out. Funding may limit the size of the staff and may also limit the length of training—but with a dash of ingenuity, lack of funds isn't an unsolvable problem. The pool of candidates to select from may pose other questions that require some mental barrier leaping, and time constraints for training are always a problem. I propose to deal with these issues here in terms of the concerns that arise in the process of developing effective staffs in our Writing Lab at Purdue.

Institution Overview

The Purdue University Writing Lab exists as part of a large midwestern land-grant university (yes, Indiana really does have two public, land-grant institutions) with a population of 32,000 students and 1,600 faculty. About three-fourths of the undergraduates on our mainly residential campus come from rural and urban areas in Indiana, though we also have out-of-state and international students. Over two-thirds of the undergraduate population are traditional students, most coming from the upper half of their high school classes. About 1,000 are international students, mostly doing graduate work, and there are students of color, nontraditional students, and part-time students as well.

The university is a research institution which rewards research more than teaching, though the state legislature (which has been increasingly stingy with funding) has made known its interest in having teaching stressed more highly. Purdue excels in science, engineering, agriculture, and technology, and while the humanities do not dominate the campus, they are well represented, with the School of Liberal Arts being among the fastest growing. The English department has a large

graduate program in rhetoric and composition, which means that many of the graduate teaching assistants are particularly knowledgeable in the theories and pedagogies of teaching writing and are experienced teachers of basic writing, technical writing, business writing, English as a second language (ESL), etc. Among the four hundred undergraduate English majors are students in English education, professional writing, and creative writing, in addition to literature majors, so the potential pool of tutors to draw from in English is quite large. Other large pools include a huge communications department within the School of Liberal Arts as well as an expanding School of Education.

Writing Lab Overview

The Writing Lab exists within the English department and is funded by the department, though we serve the entire university. Being funded by the English department means having limitations on our budget and staffing while trying to meet the needs of a vast university population. No one has ever quite defined our mission in terms of whether we are an all-university service or whether we exist primarily to serve students in the many departmental writing programs (basic writing, first-year composition, advanced composition, English as a second language, business writing, technical writing, and creative writing as well as literature and linguistics courses). As the interest in writing skills expands on our campus, we find ourselves working with more students across campus, both undergraduate and graduate. In the absence of a formalized writing-across-the-curriculum program, we have—like many other writing centers—become the *de facto* center for writing on campus.

Staff, Space, and Computing

We have a secretary/assistant and a receptionist who are both clerical staff, but unlike at other writing centers of our size, the director, a faculty member, has no additional professional or faculty assistance to handle administrative work and is responsible for most staff training. (The staff of peer tutors who work with resumes and related business writing is coordinated by one of the graduate student tutors in the lab.) Our lab occupies two large rooms joined by a walk-through door, a space far too small to house our tutoring tables, computers, secretary's office, reception desk and waiting area, director's desk, instructional materials, and storage facilities. Space limitations are part of the constraints within which we operate, and one of the survival skills we have to acquire is the ability to squeeze between tutoring tables and step over old

couches to get from one side of the room to another. We work with about 3,500 students a semester in a face-to-face setting, which is about 11 percent of the student population. In addition, we have an OWL (Online Writing Lab), our newest set of services, which is growing rapidly. Data on usage from the most recent semester indicates 3,701 users at Purdue and 244,693 Internet users not at Purdue. The vast majority of these uses are by people accessing information available in our e-mail, Gopher, and World Wide Web sites.

The majority of the students we meet in tutorials are working on papers for various writing courses. We also work with students writing papers in a variety of courses in the university (communications, computer science, history, political science, biology, etc.), as well as students working on graduate papers, resumes, job applications, essays for graduate or professional schools, co-op reports, and a variety of other writing projects. Our tutorial theories and pedagogies are informed by current writing center theory and practice, and we have easy access to the *Writing Lab Newsletter* (which I edit). Our collaborative approach is integrated throughout the program so that every staff member is considered as part of a teaching team and has an equal voice in setting policies as well as selecting fellow staff members. This is done in recognition of our collaborative approach and our commitment to working as a community of peers. Our three staffs are as follows:

1. Graduate teaching assistants who work with the general population of undergraduate and graduate students writing papers for any course on campus
2. Peer tutors who work with the Developmental Writing Program
3. Peer tutors who work with resumes and business writing

The Graduate Teaching Assistants

The department funds eleven graduate teaching assistants each semester to tutor in the Writing Lab, and department policy requires that every new graduate teaching assistant teach at least one year in the first-year composition program before branching out to work in any other instructional program, such as tutoring in the Writing Lab or teaching business writing. During that first year in the department, all new teaching assistants must enroll in a credit-bearing training course in the teaching of first-year composition. Thus, when graduate students apply for a position in the lab, they have had at least a year of classroom experience, have been mentored in a course in the basics of teaching writing,

have been observed in their classrooms, and have had their syllabi, graded papers, and student evaluations closely scrutinized. This level of expertise and experience influences the type of training they will need when they begin working in the Writing Lab. The department has also instituted a credit-bearing training course for each new writing program the graduate students enter. Thus, when they begin working in the Writing Lab or begin teaching in any of the other writing programs, they enroll in a one-semester practicum during the first semester they begin in that program. The Writing Lab practicum is taught by the director. There is a high degree of competition to become a staff member in the Writing Lab because from the 150 graduate students in the department, there are normally about fifteen to twenty applicants for the two or three vacancies that occur each year (because current Writing Lab tutors normally tend to stay on for at least two years in the lab).

The Peer Tutors in the Developmental Writing Program (UTAs)

We have a group of about twelve to fourteen undergraduate tutors, referred to locally as UTAs (Undergraduate Teaching Assistants). They are funded by the English department and are closely integrated into the developmental composition program that is offered only in the fall semester each year. Each UTA is assigned to a particular teacher and attends that teacher's class one day a week to observe, assist, become familiar with the classwork, and get to know the students in their classroom setting. The UTAs also meet in tutorials with every student from that class every week, in the Writing Lab. Before being selected to be UTAs, students enroll in a credit-bearing course, a practicum in the tutoring of writing taught by the Writing Lab director; the training course is offered in both the fall and spring semesters.

The Resume and Business Writing Peer Tutors (Writing Consultants)

We have a second group of three or four peer tutors to assist with the heavy demand for tutorial help in writing resumes, job applications, and applications to professional or graduate schools. The English department's policy is that because this is not course-related writing instruction, the department is not responsible for funding this group, and so other funding has to be located. The size of the staff is determined by the ability to secure outside funds, and the graduate student tutor who coordinates the staff has several hours released time from tutoring to select and train the staff.

Problems and Issues to Consider

A. Staff Selection

1. General Staff Selection Issues

Although selecting each of our Writing Lab staffs presents its own unique issues and problems, there are general considerations for any staff selection: How do we identify the available pool of promising candidates? When we have a target group in mind, how do we let them know about the application process? What is an appropriate application process? What procedures will work well to select the best candidates among the applicants, and which skills will we be looking for?

2. Selection of Graduate Teaching Assistants

In our case, the pool is limited to teaching assistants in the English department, all of whom were required to spend a year teaching first-year composition and to take a training course in general composition instruction. Within this context, issues we have to consider include the following:

- With a small Writing Lab staff and only a few vacancies each year, how can we proceed in a way that ensures that the selection process is publicly perceived as fair and unbiased? (There have been some muted complaints that the current staff tends to select only its own friends, thereby discouraging some graduate students from applying.)
 - What application procedures should we use? Is a written application sufficient? If not, what else can be done to offer applicants adequate opportunities to indicate their skills?
 - What skills should we look for? How important is previous writing center experience elsewhere or classroom experience and/or evidence of good teaching? If we're looking for general tutoring skills, what are these skills? Should we give higher priority to applicants with a broad range of experiences or to applicants with very specialized skills for working with various segments of our student population? In our Writing Lab our tutors are called upon to help ESL students, business writing students, journalism students, etc., and we have an OWL (Online Writing Lab) which requires some degree of computer literacy to meet students online or incorporate OWL into tutorials. Should we try to fill holes in our staff's various types of expertise (for example, find someone with ESL experience when previous tutors with ESL expertise leave) or seek the people with the best general tutoring skills or broadest range of experience?
-

- Because we want to remain consistent with our philosophy of working collaboratively as a staff, what procedures will ensure that everyone on the staff collaborates in the selection process? Since present staff members are often personal friends of applicants, how does the selection process avoid being a sorority/fraternity blackball session? Should graduate students sit in judgment of their friends? What are the benefits and disadvantages of such collaborative efforts? Or should a director step in and make final decisions in order to relieve graduate students of potentially tension-producing situations?

3. Selection of UTAs (Undergraduate Teaching Assistants)

- In a university with thousands of undergraduates majoring in a wide variety of fields, what is the best pool of applicants? How important is it, for example, to have English majors or students majoring in various areas of teacher training? Or is it better to reach out across the university and try to find, for example, history majors or math majors? Should the pool be limited to more experienced, mature students who are farther along in their studies, perhaps those classified as juniors or higher? Or does that limit the length of time they'll spend on the staff? Are there advantages to including younger students, perhaps those at the sophomore level? Is that too early in their college career, or does that help to provide the kind of continuity that is beneficial for a staff? Are grade point averages good indicators? How important is diversity in the staff? Since few students of color apply and since most of the applicants are white females, to what extent should we weight the selection process to diversify the staff in terms of race, gender, nationality, and so on?
 - In a large university, how can we identify and reach the proposed pool of applicants? With limited budgets in terms of time and money, what procedures might help to locate applicants? Is teacher referral a potentially good source, or are teachers likely to recommend students for the wrong reasons? Might you insult teachers and/or create ill will toward the writing center if you reject their candidates? Would they be more likely to send students to the center knowing that their students are there as tutors? What are other useful resources to draw on to help publicize the search for applicants?
 - What application procedures should be used? Should applicants, for example, submit writing samples? Teacher recommendations? If interviews are included, what interview procedures help to identify potentially effective tutors?
 - What are the skills being sought? Is the ability to write well as important or more important than other skills such as the ability to listen closely?
-

- Who should make the selection decisions? Should the present UTA staff have a voice in the selection? If so, how do we ensure that their criteria for selection is similar to the director's? Or, to what degree do the criteria have to match?
- If the training program is a credit-bearing course, should anyone be allowed to enroll or should there be restrictions because of selection procedures and because of the nature of the class? Should class size be limited to ensure close contact with all the students? Should all students in the class expect to go on to become tutors after completing the course? If there is a selection process from the class for the tutoring staff, how will that be done? What role will the current staff play in the next step of the selection process?

4. Selection of Writing Consultants

- When a staff with specialized knowledge is needed (in this case, knowledge about writing resumes and job application letters), how can we identify the pool of qualified applicants?
- If the pool is small, how can we encourage more applicants?
- What skills should be sought? Is the specialized knowledge more important than general teaching/tutoring skills?
- What application procedures should be used when the pool of applicants is small and we don't want to discourage applicants who might not bother because they perceive the application process as difficult or time-consuming?

B. Staff Training

1. General Staff Training Issues

Among the general issues to consider for training any staff are the following: When will the training occur—before tutoring begins or during the semester while the tutor is already at work? Will training be in a credit-bearing course, in an orientation session, in weekly meetings, or in some other format? If training is mainly in sessions before the tutor starts working, will there also be ongoing training? How will this be accomplished? Given the difficulties of getting large or busy staffs together at the same time, what alternative methods, such as e-mail discussion lists, are there to keep in touch? How much of a tutor's time commitment can training involve? How much time can reasonably be spent on assignments in addition to attending training sessions?

In addition to the logistical concerns of training, various options for the content and goals of the training course have to be considered. What are the major issues the staff will have to be familiar with? How

much theory and background will they need to know? Which aspects of the local situation (procedures, policies, materials, etc.) will they need to know? What kinds of skills will they need? What are some of the common situations they will need to know how to handle? What are their present levels of knowledge, expertise, and skills before being introduced to the content of the training course? What types of activities will lead to the most effective learning? Reading about tutoring? Group discussions? Observations of tutoring in progress? For tutors-in-training who are not yet tutoring, how will they gain some hands-on experience? If writing is used to promote learning about tutoring, what should they write about? Are mock tutorials useful? What role does the current staff play in training? How will the tutors' progress in learning about tutoring be evaluated? What forms of feedback would be most useful, effective, and feasible?

2. Issues in Training Graduate Student Tutors

Graduate students who join our Writing Lab staff are required to take a credit-bearing course on tutoring in our Writing Lab. The person teaching such a course must keep in mind that these graduate students have very busy lives—teaching at least one classroom course in addition to tutoring in the Writing Lab, taking their own classes, doing research, writing conference proposals and preparing presentations, and so on. Preparing a long reading list for the training course or expecting them to write extended papers is unrealistic. In addition, since the course meets during the semester, they have to be at least minimally prepared to begin as competent tutors when classes start and the lab opens its doors. Some tutors come with prior experience in other writing centers, some are very new to the world of one-to-one tutoring, and others think that their classroom teaching skills will suffice. Some are very apprehensive about certain aspects of tutoring, such as working with an ESL student, and others wonder if they'll ever figure out how to find the various resources and handouts in the room or master the tutor's role (and accompanying technology) of online tutoring with our OWL. In short, any group of new tutors comes with a variety of skill levels and a huge tote bag of worries and concerns. But our time together is short, and I have to find ways to help each new tutor. Some questions and issues that arise in structuring a training program to meet their needs are as follows:

- The person in charge of the training has to do some diagnostic work to find out what each new tutor knows and needs to learn. How can this be accomplished, keeping in mind that this hap-
-

pens in the midst of the hectic pace of the beginning of the semester when the director/trainer also has to attend to a huge number of other tasks to start the lab off, and the new graduate students who will start tutoring in the lab will be involved in other courses they are teaching and taking.

- Since the new tutors have been chosen because they have displayed some level of competence already, and since some of them are taking graduate courses in composition theory, what approaches can the trainer use to introduce material without insulting them or implying that they need to review basics? What *do* new tutors need to know in addition to their knowledge of teaching writing in the classroom?
- How can the current staff help with the training? What use can be made of their skills and special areas of expertise?
- Since ongoing training is always helpful for any staff, how can some of the training be integrated into regular staff meetings?
- How can these new tutors be evaluated, and how can evaluation be done in ways that will permit them to have paper trails for the portfolios they will eventually be preparing when they begin their job searches?

3. Issues in Training Undergraduate Teaching Assistants

For our UTA program of peer tutors who work with the basic writers in our Developmental Composition Program, we have a credit-bearing training course taught every semester. Students take the course prior to the time in which they begin tutoring, and vacancies on the current staff are filled by students who have completed the course. This means that not everyone who takes the course is guaranteed a tutoring job, and there is a fairly high level of anxiety about being evaluated in terms of whether the student will “make the grade” and be chosen to become a UTA. The students in the class are also aware of our collaborative approach in that the UTAs have a crucial voice in the selection of who will join their staff. So, because our Writing Lab is also a place to hang out, as UTAs and class members often do, there is added pressure and anxiety about socializing together and the need for students in the training course (as some of them perceive it) to ingratiate themselves with the UTAs (despite my constant reminders that choices are made on the basis of competence, not friendship). Since I view the socializing time as a time also to build a sense of collaborative team effort, I particularly worry about how to remove or lessen the competitive undercurrent that is present. These tensions should not be overemphasized, but they do exist.

Another matter of concern is that the basic writing course is taught only in the fall semester even though the training course is taught in

both semesters (in order to ensure that there will be enough competent new tutors to fill the vacancies). This means that students in the training course in the fall can observe or sit in on actual tutoring sessions, while students in the spring semester have no such opportunity. In addition, in the fall the UTA staff is meeting regularly, tutoring, and hanging around the lab, but since there is no tutoring in the spring, the UTAs have no official responsibilities or official reasons to be in the lab. Thus, interaction between the class and the UTAs has to be planned. Tight funding means that most of the staff's funds have to be spent in the fall for actual tutoring, though some small amounts of money can be hoarded for spring use, if needed. Given all this, the following questions have to be considered:

- How can class time be most profitably spent? Should all the hours be spent in meeting as a group? What about other alternatives, such as individual time spent in the lab or in small-group work, either scheduled as part of the large-group meeting time or as a separate activity? How much time should be spent in non-class activities such as observing tutors, doing mock tutorials, and completing reading and writing assignments?
 - What are the most important concepts and skills the tutors-in-training have to learn about? How much do students need to know about topics such as the following: writing center theory and practice; writing processes; individual differences in writing processes; communication skills; tutoring strategies; paper diagnosis; ESL; learning disabilities; higher-order writing skills such as focus, clarity, and organization; grammar and mechanics; and so on? How can they best acquire such knowledge? If it is necessary to prioritize among these topics, which are more important and which less important? Is practice in a mock tutorial the best—or only—option to pick up such skills? Can recording such practice by means of videotaping or audio recording be effective? How will such recordings be used?
 - Since many of the students start the class with misconceptions about the role of the tutor in a writing center (likening it to editing and/or to error hunting and correction), how can such misconceptions best be rooted out?
 - Because tutoring involves learning both theory and practice, how can students in such a course best be graded? What assignments or tests would be useful in such evaluation?
 - If students learning to tutor are to learn collaborative, nonevaluative practices (basic tenets of writing center approaches), how can a class be structured and the students evaluated in ways consistent with these underlying concepts?
-

4. Issues in Training Writing Consultants

The students who are trained to work with resumes, job applications, and business writing are typically seniors (because almost all of these students are unable to take the required course on business and resume writing until their senior year). Therefore, because it's not practical to have a training course prior to the semester in which they begin tutoring, the course is offered during the semester in which they start tutoring. This means that there are a number of additional issues which are unique to training this group that do not arise in the training course for the UTAs discussed above:

- Because these writing consultants must have some time to learn local practices and policies as well as knowledge about tutoring, how much time can be devoted to introducing them to their jobs before they actually start tutoring? Should there be an orientation session before classes begin? Should they begin tutoring immediately, or can their tutoring be delayed for a period until they've acquired enough of the basics to dive in? For how long?
- Is there a way to ease these students from pure training to total tutoring? If there should be such an interim period, how would this be set up?
- With a focus on specialized tutoring, what do students need to know about general tutoring theory, practice, and strategies?

For all the questions raised here, there are a great number of possible answers, depending on the emphasis on various issues and on local conditions. In the Purdue Writing Lab we have tried to respond to these concerns with outcomes that, for the most part, work for us, but such outcomes are not necessarily appropriate for writing centers elsewhere. But such outcomes may be useful as starting points for you to bounce your thoughts against.

AUTHOR'S CASE COMMENTARY

A. Selection

1. Graduate Student Tutors

Each semester, graduate students in our English department receive a department memo listing all the available teaching options, and they indicate which they are interested in for the following semester. I contact those who select the Writing Lab by sending them a short questionnaire asking about prior tutoring experience and reasons for their in-

terest in tutoring, plus an open-ended question asking what else they would like us to know about them. Two graduate student lab tutors then meet with each applicant to answer the applicant's questions about the lab and to talk with the applicant about his or her teaching philosophies, methods, classroom work, etc. The lab staff then devotes one staff meeting to reviewing all the candidates, with the two interviewers reporting to the rest of us what they learned from talking with the candidate. While we have no definitive list of selection criteria, the conversation about each candidate concerns such issues as that person's student-centered approaches, communication skills, understanding of writing processes, ability to ask questions and to listen, special knowledge or prior experience, and so on. Factors relevant to our local situation are also likely to come up. While we have never successfully defined the list of characteristics that are important, we seem to come to group consensus about who the strongest candidates are. We then winnow the list down to these candidates and vote.

At these sessions each year, I am constantly impressed (deeply so) by the maturity and professionalism displayed by the staff during these discussions. They show strong concern for the lab and for the students who use it, and they display great insight into their fellow graduate students' skills, knowledge, sense of responsibility, and dedication to teaching writing. Our selection process is truly a group effort—and is one that is educational for the staff as well because these are people who in their future academic life will be doing such collegial selection. They also learn, for their own future job seeking, important insights into successful interviewing.

2. Undergraduate Teaching Assistants

The selection of future staff is a two-step process as students must first be selected to take the training class, and tutors are then selected from among the students in the class. The initial pool of candidates for the course is a collection drawn from several sources in various ways: (1) I ask the registrar's office for a list of all the students who fit a designated profile (are majors in English and some of the communications fields; are in semesters 3, 4, and 5; and have at least a B average) and send letters of invitation, with an enclosed application form, to all the students on this list; (2) we visit a required education course for all high school teaching majors and explain the course and the tutoring opportunities, distributing applications to anyone who wants one; and (3) I send a notice to English department faculty and teaching assistants, asking them to announce the course or to recommend students, and give ap-

plications to all interested students. The application form consists of one page of short-answer questions about the student's prior experience and goals and another page which has two tutoring scenarios for which the applicant is to describe what he or she would do in that tutorial. We usually get about fifty or more completed applications and winnow that number down to about thirty to thirty-five students to interview, for a class that I limit to ten to twelve students. (The class requires instructor consent in order to enroll.)

Students invited for interviews are asked to pick up a student paper prior to the interview. UTAs and I then interview candidates in groups of three or four, explaining the course, answering questions, and asking them to talk together for a while about tutoring the student whose paper they read before the interview. As the interviewees interact among themselves, we observe their communication skills, their ability to listen to each other, any undesirable tendencies (such as dominating the conversation, responding negatively to another person's comments, showing a strong tendency to confine their conversation to error hunting in the paper, etc.), their sympathy for difficulties in the writing process and awareness of the characteristics of good writing, their ability to think of strategies to help the writer, their awareness of writing processes (especially in terms of thinking about how the paper can be revised rather than denouncing its weaknesses), and so on. Again, we do not have a definitive list of the traits that are important in the selection process, and again, we still seem to come to consensus easily about the strongest candidates. We have made a few poor choices, and we learn from that, but such mistakes do happen. However, by the time the UTAs and I have interacted with the students in the class for the entire semester, those mistakes become very apparent. Final selection of future tutors from the class is done at a UTA staff meeting at the end of the semester, and the discussion is as mature and professional as that in the graduate staff meeting. Here, the UTAs and I have a deeper knowledge of each student, based on fifteen weeks of class performance and participation as well as the tutoring skills they have displayed in mock tutorials or other interactions with the UTAs.

3. Writing Consultants

The pool of available candidates is necessarily limited to students who have taken the requisite business writing course. Invitations are issued in these classes, and the instructors are invited to recommend students. Applicants submit a resume and letter of application, thereby displaying their command of the specialized knowledge they will need. Poten-

tial candidates are interviewed and selected by the graduate student coordinator based on the interview. When possible, writing consultants on the present staff sit in on interviews and take part in the selection process.

B. Training

1. Graduate Student Tutors

Before the semester begins, we meet in an orientation session in which I review some of the basics of tutoring principles and strategies, explain local policies, give them a tour of the lab's resources, and introduce them to some of the practical aspects of paperwork, record keeping, and other matters that they will need to know immediately when tutoring. A major emphasis in that meeting is to remind them that we eye with deep suspicion anyone who thinks he or she knows all the answers and that we expect they'll ask for help—frequently. Then, we meet every other week in a credit-bearing course offered on a pass/no pass basis, alternating our course meetings with staff meetings (which are also every other week). At our course meetings, the focus is on the topics covered in a packet of materials I've put together, though every meeting begins with questions they have. The discussion resulting from such questions often dominates the meeting, and new tutors say that they profit greatly from hearing that they are not alone in being confronted with concerns for which they had no ready answer. We also discuss readings in writing center theory and practice and how this differs from or overlaps with classroom practice, analyze tutorials they've been involved with since our last meeting, talk about individual differences in writing processes, try to come up with solutions to tutoring problems that I introduce, and draw on each other's expertise in learning about specialty areas such as ESL tutoring, learning disabilities, and so on.

In addition, since my desk is in the lab and close to the tutoring tables, I depend on "inservice training," that is, ongoing discussions during the times that the new tutors are in the lab. I ask questions, they ask me questions, and we use opportunities before and after their tutoring to talk about a great variety of writing center and tutoring concerns (mixed, of course, with some enjoyable socializing). I find this individual interaction to be far more helpful than our group discussion, as I have useful and frequent opportunities to get to know each new tutor and respond to questions they raise and to encourage special interests they are developing about tutorial instruction or about projects they might want to undertake in the lab. Often, by merely asking how

a tutorial went, I find we can get involved in a probing discussion that often expands my thinking about our work. When invited to do so, I also sit in on tutorials and write an evaluation of the tutor based on that observation. Such reviews are useful records for the tutor's portfolio, and I encourage tutors to acquire a paper trail about all their work as graduate students. However, after all the close contact, I already have a good sense of how effective they are as tutors and what their strengths are. If any problems connected to their tutoring have surfaced, we deal with them informally, in daily conversations.

2. Undergraduate Teaching Assistants

The training course is a two-credit course, with a pass/no pass system (rather than grades). We meet once a week as a group, and each student in the class signs up for two additional hours each week in the lab. During the time they are in the lab on their own, there are a number of options as to how they can use their time: observe tutorials, talk to me or other tutors about questions they have, familiarize themselves with our materials and resources, read books and articles on writing center practice, and explore some aspect of the lab in more depth. From time to time, there are also small-group assignments which they complete during this time. For example, early in the semester, to help them learn how to assess what a student may want to work on with a draft of a paper in hand, they are asked to work in small groups and read a paper in the manual I've prepared. The questionnaire the group fills out asks questions that I hope they are internalizing as questions they want to ask themselves when first reading a paper (e.g., what is the assignment, what is the paper's purpose, what is the main point, how well does the paper fulfill the assignment, what positive comments would they offer the writer, what revisions would make the paper stronger, what strategies would they use in a tutorial, and so on).

For our class meeting, there is a manual of weekly readings and writing assignments to help them learn about writing processes, individual differences in writing processes, writing center approaches, specific tutoring skills and strategies, tutoring problems, learning disabilities, ESL, and so on. In addition to the assignments designed to help them explore these topics, students keep a weekly journal focusing on how they spent their two hours in the lab and what they've learned from that. By mid-semester, students in the fall semester course choose one UTA as a mentor and start sitting in regularly in that tutor's tutorials, eventually taking over some of the tutoring under the UTA's guidance and thereby gaining some hands-on experience. In the spring semes-

ter, students in the class have a series of mock tutorials with the UTAs to compensate for not having any of the UTA's tutorials to observe. While informal evaluation goes on all the time as we observe the students' strengths improve, the final assignment in the course is a paper that asks them to assess their own strengths and weaknesses as tutors. During the semester, they have gotten a lot of informal feedback about their tutoring skills, and the students who are our best candidates for joining the staff are usually the ones who, in that last paper, are very aware of what their skills are and what they need to work on. The students who have not progressed sufficiently or who have not absorbed any of the feedback are more inclined to be blissfully unaware of their weaknesses or of what an effective tutor should be able to do.

3. Writing Consultants

The new writing consultants start the semester with an orientation session in the basics that will permit them to understand what they'll be observing for the next month or so. Then they spend one hour a week in a two-credit class (offered on a pass/no pass basis), completing readings from a manual and discussing aspects of resumes, job applications, and other business writing they will be working with. They also read and talk about tutoring strategies and practices. In addition, they spend additional time each week observing the tutorials of the writing consultants on the staff. By mid-semester, they begin to tutor on their own, and class time becomes more of a problem-solving situation in which they discuss the tutorials they've had during the week. There is an extended final project in which they either explore some topic related to their tutoring or develop some materials for future use in the lab. Because this group of students is small, usually no more than two or three students, evaluation is both informal and ongoing during the semester.
