

**CCE 473, “Methods for Writing Assistants”
Fall 2007, 3 credits, T/R 4-5:20, CH 133**

Conceptual Framework

Preparing thoughtful, knowledgeable, and effective writing assistants for a diverse community of writers.

Instructor Info

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Student Coordinators (TAs)

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Course Description

Prereq: Selection as a Writing Center Assistant. Study and practice in theories and strategies for guiding writers, one-to-one or in groups, face-to-face or online.

Standards and Expectations

Because absence and tardiness have serious consequences for colleagues and clients, we consider reliable, engaged attendance a fundamental for good practice. Consider the seminar an extension of your employment, subject to the same attendance expectations as any scheduled shift. We expect prompt and engaged attendance to every seminar (and practicum hours, of course) and immediate notification in case of sudden illness or emergency. Note that for the duration of your tenure in the Center, your performance in both the seminar and practicum each quarter will determine your eligibility for rehire in subsequent quarters. Trust us to communicate with you forthrightly if any aspect of your performance, either in the seminar or the practicum, doesn't meet our standards.

Course Objectives

- ◆ Develop strategies and habits of mind for inquiry and lifelong learning.
- ◆ Acquire and apply theories for guiding writers, one-on-one or in groups, face-to-face or online.
- ◆ Identify and use a repertoire of effective conferencing strategies.
- ◆ Strengthen writing skills, including rhetorical knowledge, critical reasoning, composing process, and conventions.

Texts and Assigned Readings

Except for selected readings on electronic reserve in the Library, we own several copies of each required text, many of which may be checked out for up to three days through the Library. If you prefer your own, you may purchase the two core texts online or through the Bookstore. In addition, you will select readings in your areas of interest from among our resources in the Center (or beyond). Note the abbreviations will appear on your Course Outline.

Assigned: *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring (ABG)*, by Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner.
 Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferences (TW), by Donald McAndrew & Thomas Reigstad.

Readings available on electronic course reserve.

Getting Centered: The Writing Center Policy Manual (provided on CD)

Your choice: *Best Practices Handbook, Divine Musings, L.A. Confidential, and Writing Centered*, anthologies written by Writing Center staff and published on CD (available on the staff resource shelf).
Other resources of your choice, including Writing Lab Newsletter, Writing Center Journal, and anything from our library of books on writing and guiding writing.

Required: Purchase Hacker *Pocket Style Manual* from the Bookstore's general books section.

Assignments

In addition to readings we assign and ones that you choose, you will be assigned three main writing assignments: fortnightly reflections, your philosophy of guiding writers, and a legacy project artifact (the latter to be developed over three quarters). Also, you will be conducting action research by transcribing one of your writing conferences and analyzing and assessing your own practice. All of your work will be collected in a portfolio. You will receive

assignment sheets detailing the purposes and expectations of each assignment, but here is a nutshell description of each assignment:

Reflections—Pose an inquiry question and explore an answer.

Praxis Project—Assert a personal theory of guiding writing and connect it with your practice.

Legacy Project—Address a pressing issue in writing center scholarship, present strategies for dealing with this issue in conferencing, provide an opportunity for colleagues to practice suggested strategies, collect a bibliography of sources for further reading.

Closing Assessments (Action Research)—Identify language and rhetorical moves in one’s own conference transcript; reflect on them in the Praxis Project, and use as the basis for self-assessment.

Assessment/Grading

After much deliberation, we decided the seminar would be graded S/U. We want to facilitate your best work, so we will provide detailed assignments, expectations, and models, and we will all be available for conferences throughout the quarter. Students must attend each class session (or make up the work in the event of emergency or illness). In addition, students must turn in (on time unless previously arranged) all written assignments. Written work need not be perfect; it must simply meet the assignment criteria outlined above and be submitted. In sum, if you attend each class and turn in each assignment as described in the section above, you are guaranteed a Satisfactory grade.

Academic Dishonesty Policy

Western Washington University students are responsible for reading, understanding, and following the policy and procedures regarding academic dishonesty as set forth in the *WWU Academic Dishonesty Policy and Procedure* (see Appendix D of the University Bulletin).

Reasonable Accommodation Policy

It is the policy of Western Washington University to provide reasonable accommodation to the known physical, sensory, or mental limitations of qualified individuals except where such accommodation would impose undue hardship on the institution. To request accommodation, students must contact WWU disability Resources for Students at 360-650-3844 or www.drs.wwu.edu.

Reference List

I am informed by a wide range of writing center scholarship, but I refer regularly to publications of the International Writing Centers Association, the *Writing Center Journal* and *Writing Lab Newsletter*. In addition, I have been informed by the following volumes:

Boquet, Elizabeth H. *Noise from the Writing Center*. Logan, UT: Utah State P., 2001.

Harris, Muriel. *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*. Urbana, IL: NCTE Press, 1986.

Inman, James A., and Donna M. Sewell. *Taking Flight with OWLs: Examining Electronic Writing Center Work*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000.

Kinthead, Joyce A. and Jeanette C. Harris. *Writing Centers in Context: Twelve Case Studies*. Urbana, IL: NCTE Press, 1993.

Mullin, Joan A. and Ray Wallace. *Intersections: Theory-Practice in the Writing Center*, NCTE, 1994.

Nelson, Jane, and Kathy Evertz, eds. *The Politics of Writing Centers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Boynton/Cook, 2001.

Silk, Bobbie B., ed. *The Writing Center Resource Manual*. Emmitsburg, MA: IWCA Press, 1998.

Spigelman, Candace, and Laurie Grobman, eds. *On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2005.

Stay, Byron, and Christina Murphy, eds. *The Writing Center Director’s Resource Book*, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2005.

CCE 473: Methods for Writing Assistants

Course Design Philosophy Statement

Fall 2007, Roberta Kjesrud, Instructor

THE GRAND IDEAL: MY OVERARCHING PHILOSOPHY

Before I explain my vision for the course, I want to say how I feel about teaching it. I love this course. I would say that I love teaching, period, but I’m aware that by even using the word “teaching,” I may be

miscommunicating. Know that I view myself more like a mountain guide. I may have climbed Everest a few times more than you, but all I can really contribute to a fresh ascent is my past experience. Since mountain conditions are always changing—new equipment, variable weather, different teammates—we can't rely on just my experience to make the summit this year. Yes, it's my responsibility to see that nobody gets hurt, but I need you to guide me, too. That's why I love teaching; at heart, teaching is learning. And learning is fun! Which is why it's important to me that we have fun together this year!

My overall vision for this course goes beyond the course itself to encompass the whole Writing Center internship experience. Through both the classroom and practicum experiences, I hope you will realize significant growth as scholars, as employees, and as humans. Since that sounds a little grandiose, I'll focus on how the course design reflects my main goals: taking responsibility for learning, valuing an inquiry-based, collaborative approach to teaching and learning, and practicing reflexivity.

Responsibility for Own Learning—While I have always been a too-obedient student, now as a teacher, I object to learning what others impose on me. I want to learn what I want when and how I want. To practice good habits for lifelong learning, I ask you to make increasingly responsible decisions about what you will learn and how you will display the learning. In Fall Quarter, you will have some choices in readings and writings. By Spring Quarter, you'll write your own syllabus, choosing not only the topics you'll pursue but also designing your own assignments.

Inquiry-based Collaborations—The longer I do this work, the more I realize that there's a lot I don't understand about teaching and learning. Here's one thing I think I know: teaching and learning works better with questions than answers. That's why I encourage measured risk-taking in this work. You have permission in your writing and conferencing to try stuff and fail. To this end, I require shitty first drafts of writing assignments, and I encourage you to experiment with new strategies in conferencing with writers. Additionally, the bulk of your course work, both in and out of class, will be completed in community. Since I think knowledge is socially constructed, the more minds we put to an inquiry, the richer will be the outcomes. Also, I think the most pleasant learning environment occurs in the context of trust-filled relationships.

Reflexivity—Even before my life's big moments are over, I'm busy analyzing my experience. Sadly, I often find myself haunted by a vague sense that I could have performed better, especially if I've just failed at something. My life is healthier when I deliberately articulate what I'm doing and why before the fact, and when I analyze (in measured doses) what I've done after. It's because I value reflexivity that I wrote this course philosophy. Because what we do in the Writing Center is intricate work, I deliberately pursue a course design that poses a lot of complexity and requires a lot of thoughtful reflection. For instance, quick writes and journaling take precedence over formal writing in the course. And I promote self-assessment of both scholarship and praxis in the course and beyond.

Now, you may wonder why I haven't mentioned anything in *The Dream* about you becoming better writers, readers, responders, tutors, or teachers. Shouldn't better performance in these roles be my goal? No. I believe that your performance as a Writing Assistant emerges directly from the culture of responsibility, inquiry, and reflection. If you adopt these goals, you just can't help but be a good Assistant. Really!

THE NUTS AND BOLTS: HOW THE GRAND IDEAL PLAYS OUT

I select all classroom activities with *The Dream* in mind, although some activities hit closer to the mark than others. If I look for patterns in my lessons plans, I see that writing and talking (not me talking!) play the biggest roles in our time together. I am a big fan of collaborative problem solving through play, so I

often pose reality-based teaching conundrums for us to negotiate. I also value practice. I want you to have a chance to rehearse when it doesn't count (in class) what you'll say to cranky writers before they get in your faces. Because I am not a student nor am I the traditional age to be one, I must depend on you, my colleagues, for in-the-trenches expertise. That's why I plan lessons in collaboration with student coordinators, and I ask them to facilitate the activities they wish.

Because assignments require such an investment of both your time and mine, I pay special attention to their selection and design. Sadly, there's no such thing as a perfect assignment. That's why my overall approach to them is flexible. If you see an assignment that just doesn't engage you, ask me about ways to adapt it to your purposes. That said, I propose what follows for Fall. (For those who look ahead: Winter and Spring feature the informal writing and the developing legacy piece.)

Quick Writes and Reflections: I include informal writing in almost every class session, mostly because I believe writing is essential to learning. I will usually have a series of questions to guide the writing, but know that you are always free to adapt the prompts to your own goals. Unless the prompt specifically mentions otherwise (reading summaries), quick writing will never be shared; be as personal and experimental as you wish. I also assign reflections, informal writing that is shared. Although you will be mindful of having an audience, use these reflections to process your own learning.

Philosophy/Practice Piece: This assignment is newly redesigned for the year, but it combines a couple different pieces I have assigned in the past. Basically, the purpose is to articulate our personal philosophy of guiding writing and then analyze our real practice at the conference table in terms of the values we say we hold. From my background in anthropology, I know that humans have a set of ideal standards for their actions and a set of real behaviors that often don't match. For me, the more consistency I achieve between ideal and real, the more satisfied I am with my teaching. For the first part of the assignment, you will choose a way to represent your philosophy of guiding writing. For the second part, you will analyze an artifact of your practice with this philosophy in mind. This artifact, by the way, is a transcript of a conference you facilitate. Each quarter, everyone on staff (including me) collects a transcript, which becomes the basis for self-assessing our teaching habits.

Legacy Project: I value this assignment for both product and process. The process is long and messy, and at times, it's also tiring and consuming—just like thinking. This is a piece of scholarship you will barely conceive in the Fall and won't birth till next April, a long time frame that mirrors the publishing process. The fact that we publish in community exemplifies composition theory—the social construction of knowledge, because the whole community has a hand in the thinking and writing displayed in each piece. I also value the products because they leave a legacy for the entire writing center community. This legacy project assignment has resulted in formal writing that has been published internationally and in scholarship featured at our regional writing centers conferences (held in April each year). I get a thrill when I think that writing center scholarship internationally has been enriched by our little staff. How cool is that? Even if our future staff is the only audience, this legacy piece gives each of you a chance to add your voice to a collection wisdom that passes from all who have gone before to all who will come after.

Portfolio Collection with Introductory Reflection: Since I keep everything I ever wrote as a student (do you?), I, from my down-the-road perspective, most appreciate courses that assigned a portfolio, a collection that showcases my learning for the class and serves as a reminder of my development. In the past, we've developed this portfolio in fall quarter only, because that's the three-credit quarter. However, we have a whole year together, so I'd like to continue revisiting and adding to the portfolio over the year, because that's the only way to showcase development over an entire year. And since it takes at least a year to master the complexity of guiding writing, I think it makes sense to collect and turn in the first draft of ourselves as writers and writing assistants in the fall, but then to reflect and revisit that initial draft in

winter and spring. Basically, then, what I'm asking is that you write each quarter a new introductory reflection to your portfolio collection.

PERSONAL POST SCRIPT

I'm not quite sure where to include this personal background, but I think you should know it because this summer's life experience has influenced my thinking about teaching and learning a great deal. Long story short, this summer I lived a near-death experience (not mine; my husband's). We spent 16 days in Swedish Medical Center, many of them in ICU. James is now recovering from two major surgeries repairing two medical problems, one of which should have killed him years ago and one which doctors speculate was days away from leaving him with permanent neurological deficits. We both feel very happy to be here—together. I know it's a cliché, but close calls really do prompt a lot of re-evaluating. We're both in the middle of that process, but I here's what I know: I'm not willing to invest time into stuff that doesn't matter. Busy work doesn't interest me, period. Teaching and learning matter only because people matter. Relationships matter. Okay, I know that sounds like I'm about to suggest a big group hug. Eeeyooo. Just know that I'm working very hard in my personal and professional life to feature only the essentials in both the class and the Center. If you see assignments, tasks, or practices that don't meet this bottom line for you, please mention them. I'm more than happy to negotiate options that *will* enrich your life.

COURSE OUTLINE—Fall 2007

	TOPIC	INQUIRY QUESTION	READING DUE	WRITING DUE	LAB TIME
9/27	Getting Centered	Who are we? What the heck does the Writing Center do?	Syllabus; Policy manual		NO LAB
10/02	Getting even more Centered	What do we do—in the seminar and in the practicum?	Blackboard Course info TW—1 & 4 BPH— p. 15	NOTE—class meets at Roberta’s for hors d’oeuvres potluck	Writing Center resources orientation and scavenger hunt
10/04	Observing	How do we take effective notes?	ABG—4 & 5 BPH—p. 37	Reflection	
10/9	Assignments	What criteria do we use to analyze assignments?	ABG—3 & 6 BPH—p. 22 Handout		Nonverbal Communication workshop
10/11	Getting started Strategies	What strategies work best for writers as they are just getting started?	TW—5 Handout	Reflection	Play “Stump the Coordinators!”
10/16	Reader Response	What kind of reader response helps writers most?	TW—3 & 6 Straub		Written Response Training, Session 1
10/18	Setting the agenda	How should we select priorities for response?	ABG—7 Reader’s choice #1	Reflection	
10/23	Strengths	How does strength-based response affect writers? How do we attend to strengths?	Kjesrud BPH—p. 8		Debriefing your first conferences
10/25	Communication strategies	What strategies work best for delicate communication tasks?	ABG—13 BPH—p. 43	Reflection	
10/30	Written Response	How does our f2f pedagogy transfer to written response?	ABG—12 Underwood/Tregidgo		Written Response Training, Session 2
11/1	Reading	What strategies can readers use to aid comprehension?	ABG—8	Reflection	

11/6	Writing in the Disciplines	What are the disciplinary features of “good writing”?	TW—8 Reader’s Choice #2		Written Response Training, Session 3
11/8	Special Needs: ELL	What are the main challenges for ELL writers? How can we help?	ABG—9 Harris & Silva	Reflection	
11/13	Editing	What are our own patterns of error? What are the rules?	Bring your handbook		Written Response Training, Session 4
11/15	Editing	How do we read for patterns? What proofreading strategies can we teach?	Bring your handbook Reader’s choice #3	Reflection	
11/20	Revising strategies	What are some effective strategies to help writers re-see their work?	TW—9 Reader’s choice #4		NO LAB THIS WEEK
11/22	HOLIDAY!				
11/27	Ethics	What are the ethical dilemmas inherent in our work?	Reader’s choice #5	PP Draft (w/o intro) due in lab	Group conferences on PP draft
11/29	Facilitating group work	How do we adapt individual conferencing strategies for groups?	ABG—10		
12/4	Negotiating across power differentials	What strategies can we use to communicate with those in power?		PP Intro Draft (Due in Closing Conferences)	Closing Conferences replace lab time
12/6	Portfolio Preparation during class time				
12/13, 1-3 p.m. Final exam time	Celebrate our work!			Portfolio & Pizza Potluck— note attendance during final exam time is required Portfolio Due!	

PRAXIS PROJECT (PP) (Assignment)

Or, "A WA—What the heck is it?"

TOPIC: Your philosophy and practice of guiding writing.

PURPOSE: To articulate and represent the values/principles/theories of guiding writing that govern your approach to being a writing assistant and explain how they are evidenced in your practice.

AUDIENCE: Other writing center scholars and writers.

RATIONALE: All quarter we will hear a number of writing center scholars theorize our role and consider the strategies and behaviors they recommend for the conference table. Now it's your turn. My purpose in assigning this project is to give us all a chance to synthesize the experts' theories with our own internalized theories of teaching and learning. Once we make explicit our own core values, we will then contrast them with the real behaviors we practice. Because practice and scholarship recursively enrich our praxis, I want us to revisit this project throughout the year, each quarter reflecting on the growth we evidence.

PROCESS: Identify readings that most closely relate to your own approach to WC conferencing. Reflect on your own teaching and learning metacognitions. Craft a physical representation of the values you hold most dear in teaching and learning and guiding writing. You have a lot of choice in how you represent your philosophy; you can build something (an object, a tableau, a ???), perform something, modify objects you already have, create a visual (draw, paint, doodle, map). We will try various options in class. Explain your model in some form of text. Again, you have a lot of choice in the genre for this explanation (e.g., story, narrative, dialogue, script, poem, word collage). Revise your philosophy model/statement based on in-class conferencing response. Analyze the transcript artifact representing your practice at the conference table. Reflect on the connections between them, choosing moves from your artifact that serve as evidence of your philosophy in action. Also analyze the contradictions between your artifact and your philosophy representation. Write an introductory reflection that synthesizes the connections between your philosophy and your practice.

COMMON

PITFALLS: Merely describing; failing to connect theory to practice with evidence. Sounding too pat; failing to account for complexities, contradictions, or gray areas. Omitting a controlling idea for your philosophy representation.

MODELS: This is the first year for this exact assignment. We have several models of just a philosophy statement several included on staff development CD.

FORMAT: Titled.
Cited in MLA style.
Follows conventions for your chosen form.

REFLECTIONS (Assignment)

Or, "I Blog, therefore I think..."

TOPIC: Writing center topics suggested by readings, observations, conferences, or conversations.

GOAL: To explore and reflect on theoretical or practical conundrums with your colleagues.

- RATIONALE:** Reflections use informal writing to learn more deeply. Most of us are prone to mulling things over, but there's just something about making your reflections explicit that prompts an "Aha!" I reflect on teaching situations that worry, surprise, or puzzle me. Through the writing, I often discover a new approach or find a new question worth investigating.
- AUDIENCE:** Yourself and your colleagues.
- PROCESS:** Read assigned readings.
Observe (and later conduct) conferences.
Record any puzzles or concerns that come up for you.
Frame the concern as a question.
With the question in front of you, freewrite in response.
End by posing a new question.
Or, instead of coming up with your own question, respond to your colleagues' questions posted on our blog.
(NB: These steps represent just some that may help you complete this assignment; your own process may vary.)
- COMMON PITFALLS:** Evaluating without analysis ("I loved it").
Worrying too early about having something to say or saying it correctly.
Being definite rather than exploratory; failing to suggest new questions.
- MODELS:** See reflections posted on BB (WC Blog) and on PeerCentered.
- FORMAT:** Be prepared to bring a hard copy of your reflection to class if instructed.
Otherwise, copy and paste your reflection to the "WC Blog" section of *Blackboard*. If you write a reflection that you don't wish to share publicly, bring a hard copy for Roberta's eyes only.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT LEGACY PROJECT (LP) (Assignment)

Or, "What can I contribute to WC scholarship?"

- TOPIC:** A teaching/tutoring issue raised by the seminar or the practicum.
- PURPOSE:** In groups of two or three, collaboratively produce an interactive staff development session and a handout or resource for our staff resources files.
- AUDIENCE:** Current and future writing assistants.
- RATIONALE:** Guiding writing is complex work, and our readings barely scratch the surface of what we encounter at the conference table. We need more scholarship to inform us about the many aspects of tutoring—accounting for personality; working across cultures, genders, age, and other differences; accommodating learning disabilities, etc. This project gives you a chance to share your own scholarship; you'll get a chance to research, interpret your research, recommend strategies, plan a lesson for staff to practice and reflect on those strategies, and develop a handout that leaves a legacy of your scholarship. Many, if not all, of these steps mirror the kind of professional work you will be doing beyond the writing center. But it also gives you a chance to leave your mark on our Center, one that will linger long after you're on to bigger things.
- PROCESS:**
Fall 07
- CONCEIVE THE PROJECT**
10/11 (in class): Generate a list of questions you have as you approach guiding writing.
Focus your inquiry on one issue, one also of significance to others.
Identify your current understandings or misunderstandings about the issue.
Frame your inquiry in terms of a single, over-arching question.
Revisit your question throughout fall; abandon or revise it as necessary.

12/4 (in lab): SF (shitty first) draft of a proposal that includes your topic, your inquiry question, and a rationale for the scholarship you intend to pursue.

12/13: During the final exam time, present your 1-2-page proposal to your colleagues; include your proposal in your fall portfolio. The proposal draft may be very exploratory and informal.

Winter 08 **DEVELOP THE PROJECT**
Use seminar meeting times to pursue research and produce a 40-minute lesson plan that includes presentation of info and strategies and activities for practice, a handout of recommendations, and an annotated bibliography of sources for further information. More details in the Winter Syllabus.

Spring 08 **IMPLEMENT THE PROJECT**
Implement your staff development session with finalized resources. More details in the Spring Syllabus.

COMMON PITFALLS: Choosing an obvious or already well-researched issue in tutoring writing.
Excessive reliance on telling—failing to provide participants opportunities for practice, talk, and reflection.

MODELS: See Nonverbal Communication notebook and PowerPoint workshop.

FORMAT: Final project in spring should be electronically created using software appropriate to your genre, references cited in MLA format, flawlessly edited according to standard conventions.

PORTFOLIO COLLECTION

Or, “Who am I as a WA?”

TOPIC: You and your practice as a writing assistant.

PURPOSE: Document and showcase your growth as a writer and a writing assistant.
Explore the connection between theory and practice.

AUDIENCE: Writing center scholars.

RATIONALE: As a student, I valued collecting my best works from a course because it documents my learning. Overall, this portfolio will represent your entrance into the role of writing assistant by documenting the work-in-process nature of our practice. The reflective introduction will be re-written each quarter, allowing you the opportunity to synthesize more deeply and trace growth over time.

PIECES: Three reflections, raw and unrevised.
Staff Development Legacy Project proposal (may be exploratory and informal)
Philosophy / Practice Project (bring your model to the final exam; turn in written representation and reflection in your portfolio)
Transcript artifact
Writer’s self-assessment form (done in class when you turn in the portfolio)

PROCESS: Assemble the required elements.
Title each individual piece, and make sure I can identify which piece is which.
Revise and edit as appropriate for a good-as-it-gets-for-fall presentation.
Title your portfolio according to an overarching theme you identify.
Use the philosophy/practice reflection as an introduction to your portfolio.
Complete the writer’s self-assessment.

For final exam: Share with the class a 5-minute oral tour of your philosophy model and highlight your main reflections, including the Just One Thing you are taking away from this quarter’s experience. Also be prepared to float your idea for the Legacy Project.

COMMON Omitting required pieces.

PITFALLS: Failing to submit/keep an electronic copy.

MODELS: While we lack models of this precise portfolio configuration, I will make available models of past portfolios.

FORMAT: Follow individual piece guidelines; include a title page for the portfolio with title, your name, course title, date; submit hardcopy in a three-hole folder *and email Word attachments to Roberta.*

NOTE: The hardcopy of your portfolio becomes part of your employment record and will not be returned. Keep a copy for your files, because we will revisit this portfolio in successive quarters.