Requests to Instructors Participating in the Support Services Project

We will be able to provide weekly support services for up to 40 students (half workshop, half tutoring) in Writing Intensive courses during the Fall 2004 semester. But in order to do that, we need your help as Writing Intensive instructors.

Participation in this WAC Support Services Network pilot project is voluntary on the part of both instructors and students. We do urge all instructors in introductory-level Writing Intensive courses to participate, because it will make things easier both on you and on your students if they get the help that they need. If you do decide to participate, we have several requests of instructors:

1) **Give a diagnostic essay during the first week of the semester.** Either at your second class meeting (probably better) or else at the first, we ask that you assign a 40-minute essay to your students to help gauge their readiness to write at the level that you will expect in your course. The essay should be analytical in nature, and, in order to call upon appropriate critical reading skills, should be focused in response to a short (probably one or two paragraphs) excerpt from a text related to your discipline. (This would not necessarily mean an article in a technical journal; it might also be from an article written for a general audience concerning recent developments in your field.)

The WAC Program will provide sample diagnostic essays which instructors may either use as they come, or else (better) use as a paradigm for constructing your own question based on the specific objectives and content of your course. If used in this latter way, the diagnostic essay will not be an added-on class-time-user, but rather the first writing-to-learn exercise of your semester, a way of getting students actively engaged in writing about your course material right from the beginning.

We ask that you print out and duplicate the “Student Cover Sheet” and have all students fill it out when they write their diagnostic essay. It asks them for general information about their writing background, allows them to express preferences about their willingness to participate in support services, and requests that they sign a waiver allowing instructors, tutors, workshop leaders, and the staff of the WAC Program and the Writing Center to exchange information concerning a student’s progress over the course of the semester. We recommend that you bring a stapler to class so that all students can attach this cover sheet to their diagnostic essay when they turn it in to you.

The “Student Cover Sheet” is followed by a sample diagnostic essay, in this case one that might be suitable for a survey course in American history. As indicated above, we anticipate that many instructors will prefer to use their own reading and question, but we ask you to follow this general format. We also request that you reproduce the general directions and writing conditions as they are given here, in order to standardize the student experience and help us in making decisions about support services.

2) **Refer students from your class for extra help.** Please read and comment on the diagnostic essays promptly. For those students in your class who in your opinion would most benefit from weekly workshops or tutoring, fill out the “Instructor Recommendations and Comments” area at the bottom of the “Student Cover Sheet.” (Note that this evaluation will be shared with the student later on, by the tutor or workshop leader, so it should be written in student-friendly language.) Forward
the student’s diagnostic essay with the stapled to it as soon as possible, but certainly during THE 2ND WEEK OF CLASSES.

The Campus Mail address of the WAC Program is:
          Jonathan Hall, Coordinator, WAC
          English Department
          Hill Hall.

In making the decision of which students to refer, you should consider the following factors:

   a) The general level of the student’s writing skills. You’re looking for students who need significant improvement in order to bring them into the mainstream of the course.

   b) The student’s preferences regarding support services, as expressed on the Cover Sheet. There’s no point in referring someone who has opted-out of support services. If a student has expressed a preference for workshop over tutoring, or the reverse, you should probably honor it in your referral, unless the criteria in c) below strongly point you in the other direction, in which case you should probably discuss it with the student directly.

   c) In deciding whether to recommend workshop or tutoring, you should consider what kinds of problems you have identified in the student’s diagnostic essay. For students whose primary problem seems to be critical reading skills, or organizational issues in the essay as a whole, the WAC workshop may be the best place for them. For students who need intensive help at the sentence level, including ESL issues, tutoring may be the best approach.

3) **Communicate with the workshop leader or tutor as the semester goes on.** If you observe significant changes in the writing of a student who has been referred for support services over the course of the semester, either positively or negatively, you might want to discuss this with the workshop leader or tutor. In any case, there will be a formal mechanism for such communication to take place at least once in the semester: a mid-term evaluation form will be filled out by the workshop leader or tutor, and forwarded to the instructor, who will be asked to return it with comments that will help the workshop leader or tutor adjust his or her approach to the student’s support services during the balance of the semester.

Thank you for participating in this effort to support student learning.