Appendix E: Recommendations

For all the information it [this book] provides and for all the questions it explores,
it will invariably invite new questions and exploration on the reader's part.

—Christina Murphy, Forward, xiv

The examination of the OSU Writing Center shows that it is efficiently-run and effective, serving its purpose to assist students with their writing. Improvement can nearly always be made, and this appendix examines several suggestions for improving different facets of the Center. None of these suggestions is meant to replace any portion of the existing program; instead, they are merely deeper investigations into various ideas and/or recommendations and the possibilities and drawback of those ideas. For all or nearly all the suggestions, a major drawback is resources, either financial and/or personnel.

Although it is tempting to make suggestions about how to manage the probable future budget difficulties, both the budget and the ways in which cuts are made are too complicated to address here. Instead, the following issues are addressed loosely in order of how much they would change the existing Writing Center, with the least invasive first; each issue is only related to the others superficially, if at all. It is possible, even likely, that some of these ideas (or forms of them) have been discussed among the CWL staff; perhaps, though, the following ideas may offer slightly different, more workable, options.

The following concerns are addressed: attracting students to the Writing Center, publicizing the Writing Center, the overworking of the coordinators and the director, developing training and credit courses for writing assistants, adapting the Brown University Writing and Rhetoric Fellows Program, and utilizing the space of the Writing Center most effectively.

Publicity and Attracting Students

Despite the increasing numbers of student contacts over the years, for many students, a reluctance to use the Writing Center remains. Indeed, even most of the writing assistants had not gone to the Writing Center for assistance, and some admitted to feeling uncomfortable about doing so. This is ironic but not entirely surprising. One of the most effective countermeasures to the remedial connotations may be having those writing assistants who haven't used the Center as a student do so. Sometimes Lisa Ede recommends that writing assistants participate in at least one session as a student. Combining this with word of mouth—that "good" students get help, too —may reduce some students' reluctance to visit.

A related concern is that of attracting students. As stated in Chapter Three, word of mouth appears to be the best way of informing students about the Writing Center. Although representation at student orientation and other events is useful, students are likely overwhelmed with information, both at the start of the term (and perhaps the start of their college career) and on the day of student orientation. The handouts they collect at each table likely end up in a pile buried on their desks.

Thus, the classroom visits are a vital element in reinforcing awareness of the Writing Center's existence, both for students and for professors. Expanding these visits by having various writing assistants visit classes—with or without the coordinator—would both broaden the number of classes that could be reached and put a student face (as opposed to a staff one) on the Writing Center. Some classes that superficially may not seem to require writing may, in fact, have elements of it; for instance, even the yoga and ballroom dancing classes require short papers which figure into students' final grades.

Elements that may work against sending writing assistant to classes include training them, feeling assured that they represent the Writing Center accurately, and scheduling the visits in a fair and convenient manner. While it is possible that a peer representing the Writing Center will appeal to some students in these classes, it could repel others; they may see the Writing Center as less professional, perhaps. In addition, the time that writing assistants spend visiting classes would need to be counted in the writing assistants' hours for that day or week, making them less available in the Writing Center itself. However, if the class visits occur more at the beginning of each term, this will have less of an impact, as those who work in the Writing Center tends to be less busy at the start of the term (unlike at the end of the term!).

Encouraging faculty to let students know about the Writing Center has been useful and could possibly be more so. Faculty are busy at the start of the term, of course, so making arrangements for these visits should be as easy as possible. Offering the opportunity for a writing assistant to visit a class could, potentially, be made smoother, perhaps by sending out an email to all faculty with an easy reply form (perhaps checking off days of the week and times when their classes meet).

In addition, while some professors, especially those in the English Department or those teaching WIC classes, put information about the Writing Center in their syllabi, all faculty could be encouraged to make Writing Center information standard in their syllabi. The Writing Center coordinator could, for instance, send all professors a short, pre-written description of the Writing Center and its services by e-mail for inclusion in their syllabi (and perhaps on individual writing assignments, as well). This would ensure that the correct information (or understanding of the Writing Center) is disseminated and save professors from that extra piece of work. When students are paging through their syllabi or assignments (with frustration!), they may be reminded of

where they can get assistance. In addition to this, the coordinator could also send an attractive flier by e-mail and encourage faculty to post it in classrooms and on their office doors. While waiting for a professor, students might see the flier and be reminded of this additional source of help. While this would place the onus for printing and posting the flier on the faculty members and the cost on their departments, the time and money involved is minute. Most of these suggestions have been used at LBCC with very good results.

A further option to attract students more specifically—or perhaps more specific students—is to explore Dennis Bennett's suggestion of increased collaboration with the English Department. He suggests a for-credit course for those Writing 121 students who are having difficulty with the class. The students would, of course, need to complete the class with the same skills as those in other Writing 121 classes, but the approach could address the types of difficulties these students are experiencing (after some assessment) and combine the course with weekly appointments in the Writing Center. This course, instead of being taught by a first year GTA, could be taught by at least an experienced GTA, if not a regular instructor or professor—or perhaps co-taught with the Writing Center coordinator. This program could cost the school (or the department) more money, at least initially. In addition, coordinating the curriculum and the schedules, not to mention compensating the Writing Center staff for their time, could be complicated. As greater retention is in line with the current OSU strategic plan, Academic Affairs may be willing to assist in developing this because providing these students with success in writing may lead to increased retention (in the university and perhaps within the department, itself) and in greater success for these students in other classes, especially those which require writing.

Additional options to attract positive attention are to make use of the the campus media, such as the newspaper and the TV and radio stations, in different ways. Although placing ads in *the Daily Barometer* is expensive and its effectiveness questionable, the advertising staff at the newspaper may welcome the opportunity to fill the gaps at the bottom of the classified columns with a brief "Visit the Writing Center!" This would not cost the CWL any money, since it does not require purchasing actual newspaper space, and it would be a reminder to students of the Writing Center's existence. To ensure that all student support services benefit from this, the *Barometer* could alternate between the various support services (the Writing Center, the Academic Success Center, the Math Center, etc.) (Ginn).

Less traditional use of the media is also a possibility. The staff and students at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington have used a number of unusual and fun options to attract people to their writing center. One way Evergreen attracted students was by enacting several sessions of the game "Password" and televising it on the school's station. The apparent enjoyment that the players were having attracted students, who came to see the place that produced it.

At a presentation entitled "The Sleeping Dog: Awakening Publicity Potential" at the April, 2006 PNWCA conference, Evergreen State College students Noah Dassel and Shaun Johnson suggested various ways of publicizing writing centers. Johnson discussed a "Publicity Web," in which the various forms of getting the information out (media such as print, radio, digital, and video) and the different audiences to reach and events to participate in are brainstormed by all people who work in a writing center. Because each tutor has various interests, the link to heretofore undiscovered audiences is made. The OSU Writing Center could take the brainstorming a step further by asking students who visit the Writing Center to participate,

adding additional potential audiences and events. (The web could be posted on one of the walls, and the students waiting for an appointment or finishing one could be encouraged to look it over and add to it.) The various interests of the tutors at the Evergreen State College are also used to publicize the center. Johnson, a graphics arts student, made eye-catching and sophisticated posters for events, and Dassel, a videographer, made a short of film about the Writing Center. Both were interesting and different, and both attracted attention and provided information.

The OSU Writing Center could easily implement a publicity web, culling any and all ideas from the writing assistants and the staff. And because the writing assistants come from nearly all the departments at OSU, they would have a sense of how best to convey the Writing Center's message to peers in their major. For instance, Theater Arts majors might develop a skit that could be performed for their peers—and in other classes and settings—drawing on their skills as actors and directors. A further enticement would be to offer credit for these contributions; that is, because all writing assistants working for credit must do a project in addition to their hours each term, the project chosen could align with their external interests and benefit the Center.

There are several drawbacks to this type of publicity, however. As Lisa Ede points out, any type of media, be it a skit, a poster, or a film, would need to be checked closely before it was shown or presented to the university at large (E-mail). This monitoring would be necessary to ensure that the Writing Center was appropriately and correctly represented and that nothing could be seen as offensive. (It is likely, though, that only some students would do a project of this sort; the rest might choose with traditional projects which require little extra attention.) An additional drawback is that it's often difficult to get writing assistants to turn in their projects (Ede E-mail). However, because this type of project would align with writing assistants' other interests

(and perhaps other classes and majors), they might be more inclined to do them, in particular if versions of it could address projects for Writing Center credits and for another class, as well. In sum, although media and other projects that reach outside the Writing Center would require more ongoing evaluation by the staff, the benefits of encouraging writing assistants to share their other skills and of attracting more students may be worth it.

The Tendency to Overwork: Job Commitment

The staff's commitment to the Writing Center is remarkable. Both Ede and the coordinators work many hours; it has never been a nine-to-five/forty-hour-per-week job. This commitment has had costs for coordinators and for Ede as individuals, such as the loss of time at home, engaging in activities outside of the Writing Center. The "real, human cost" that Ede describes is also paid by other staff. Robertson currently works at least fifty hours a week. And while he enjoys his work immensely and is excited about the response to his film, he alludes to postponing activities in his personal life, such as children, until later.

Why do these jobs take so many hours a week (more than forty), and why are they so draining? Is that true other places? Is it worth it? What could help?

It is likely that the situation is not specific to OSU; in fact, Ede says that it seems to be inherent in academic work (E-mail), both in teaching and in support services. Finding remedies for this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this thesis; still, there are several possible solutions for relieving some of the stress on the coordinator.

One possibility for reducing the strain on the coordinator is to hire a student assistant for him, either a graduate student (graduate research assistant[GRA*]) or an undergraduate (a student worker). (This has been done in the Academic Success Program when it was part of the

CWL, with positive benefits.) This student could perform activities (chores) that are presently done by coordinators (and directors) but which *could* be done by someone else, freeing up the coordinator's time. For instance, if the parameters of the schedule are in place, a student worker could create each term's schedule. In addition, a student worker could take over some of the classroom visits (those explaining what the Writing Center is)—and/or the scheduling and training of other writing assistants for the visits—and clarify any questions the students and professors ask. If the student worker was also an experienced writing assistant, he or she could fill in with advising students when the coordinator is not around.

This experience would be extremely beneficial for a student, giving him or her not only writing center experience, but also administrative experience. However, training this student assistant would require a fair amount of the coordinator's time which he might otherwise spend on other job commitments. In addition, turnover occurs because of students' schedules, other commitments, and graduation. A possible solution to both issues is to ask that assistant to make a commitment to work for at least two or three terms, if not more. This is not a new idea; several of Ede's annual reports have mentioned the need for student assistance for the coordinator. She reports that arrangements for this have been unsuccessful (E-mail), perhaps because it is probably fairly complicated in regard to payment and/or credits. It is, nonetheless, worth further study.

The Writing Assistants' Training

Like many other writing centers, the OSU Writing Center uses students—in this case, both undergraduate and graduate students—as writing assistants. While some schools offer a term- or semester-long class to train tutors, OSU focuses more on pre- and in-service training. One of these training techniques was mentioned earlier in this chapter: to have writing assistants

who have not already been to the Writing Center as students conference with one of the writing assistants. The experience of being on the other side of the table will, in many cases, make them more sensitive to the myriad feelings of the students with whom they work and probably make them more effective writing assistants.

Training or education concurrent with experience is often very beneficial and is used in various areas (education and social work, for example). Information that writing assistants read in assigned articles is often demonstrated in the Writing Center while it's still fresh in their memories, and this contributes to remembering the reading and to more fully understanding it.

But there is no way of knowing whether writing assistants are actually doing the reading or whether they are understanding it. They aren't tested on the reading, so there's no proof that they've done it except what they may write in journals, type on the portal, or mention in meetings. Ideally, they ask questions if they don't understand or if they disagree with a reading, but they may not (due to lack of time, embarrassment, or feeling that discussing it isn't important). The recent implementation of the writing assistant training being online and of the writing assistants turning in each entry of their journal (or blog) as they write it may increase the ability of the coordinator to assess if all students are keeping up with, understanding, and using the reading. (Additionally, the benefits and compromises of the online training is an opportunity for further study.)

Many schools offer a class to train writing assistants, perhaps concurrent with working in a writing center. Purdue University, for example, offers English 390, a Practicum in Tutoring Writing. It is a semester-long weekly lecture (fifty minutes) and a weekly experiential class (one hundred minutes) usually offered both semesters (though it's unclear whether it has been offered every year) ("Course Information"). Students must meet certain requirements to be accepted into

the class, and the amount of classwork required depends on the number of credits they wish to receive. The focus is either on English composition or on professional writing, each with its own section ("What is English 390?"). The experiential time consists of working on projects and observing in the Writing Lab, and students who successfully complete the course can then apply to work in the Writing Lab the following term ("What is English 390?").

Would the OSU Writing Center benefit from a similar course? Certainly, it would ensure that writing assistants are committed to the Writing Center, as well as that they are familiar both with the theory and pedagogy and with the actual workings of the Center itself. These students could even take over manning the desk, thus freeing up another trained writing assistant.

Although it is a drawback to ask students to pay for the class, the class could cover a number of different skills, which could benefit them in other classes or in work. There would be a fair amount of reading and journal-keeping required; students could respond to the readings and how students see them being used in the Writing Center and in their other experiences (peer-reviews in classes, for instance). Students could also explore what makes them uncomfortable, ask questions, and agree or disagree (or both) with the readings. In-class practice simulations of various situations that could arise in writing center sessions would also be beneficial. In addition, there could be a project or a paper (something that is required at Purdue to earn three credits instead of two). Possibly, the course could be integrated with the Teaching of Writing course. Although it might be beneficial to have the students merely observing and becoming familiar with the Writing Center while taking the course, this is an unlikely luxury; thus, the course would need to be combined with the first term of work in the Writing Center.

However, a separate course would present problems. First, who would offer it? If it were offered by the English Department, for instance, it might not be "found" by interested students in

other fields (who may not look at the courses offered in English). If it were integrated into the Teaching of Writing Course, this could create some other problems: because the Teaching of Writing is an upper-level and a graduate course, it would exclude first and second year students. In addition, this course, because it is required for some majors and for the masters in English, is sometimes too large to include additional students. Additional difficulties with requiring a specific training class are that the CWL does not offer credit-bearing courses, and this course should be credit-bearing. It's possible that a collaboration between English and the CWL would be necessary. But the cost, both to students and of faculty resources, may not be cost-effective. Further, it delays new writing assistants from actually working in the Writing Center. In a university like OSU, in which terms are only ten weeks and students graduate every term, there is more turnover than there may be at some other schools. Still, this is another area in which further research could be done to truly assess the pros and cons to a separate training course for writing assistants.

Adaptation of the Brown University Writing and Rhetoric Fellows Program and/or of Supplemental Instructional Study Tables

The Brown University Writing and Rhetoric Fellows Program is an option that Ede has mentioned trying in conjunction with the OSU Writing Center and/or CWL. The program is quite involved, both in regard to selecting and training fellows and in matching fellows with classes, and would, of course, need to be adapted for OSU. Indeed, various schools, both large and small, public and private, have adapted Brown's program ("About the Program").

As stated above, the program is quite involved and a full description is beyond the scope of this paper. Basically, the fellows, who are good undergraduate writers interested in helping other students, vie with other applicants for a space. Each chosen fellow is attached to a class, which

they attend regularly. They read and comment on drafts of twenty students' papers two weeks before students turn them in to the professor ("About the Program"); thus, the assistance is focused in that it matches what is expected in that class by that professor. More information is available at the program's website (http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Writing_Fellows/).

Instituting a similar program at OSU would have many benefits. Because the fellows would sit in on the classes, they would know, again, what was expected by the professors. The focused attention and involvement in the class by the fellows could enhance the feedback about students' writing.

Naturally, the program would need to be adapted for OSU, and studying how various other schools have adapted it would be useful. One adaptation would be adjusting it to a term program instead of a semester program. And, as it is associated with Writing Across the Curriculum programs, it might be a joint effort with the WIC Program, providing the program with access to more resources.

In fact, the Brown program shares some similarities with the Supplemental Instruction Study Tables (SISTs) used for Math 111 (college algebra) in the Academic Success Center. With the SISTs, experienced students (facilitators) who have taken a specific class meet with a small group of students weekly to facilitate a learning and discussion group. The SISTs emphasize dialogue between all of the students in the group, not just between the facilitator and each student. Wayne Robertson says many more Math 111 students expressed interest in participating in the Tables than could be accommodated. Those chosen to participate scored lower on the placement test, and they significantly improved their grades and their confidence.

Both the Brown program and the SISTs could benefit students immensely. However, either would take a great deal of study to implement. Parameters for the Fellows would need to be

established, and publicity about the program (to find applicants) would be necessary. Furthermore, faculty would need to be trained and to feel comfortable with what could be perceived as an intrusion. And each faculty member involved and his or her Fellow(s) would need to spend time coordinating various facets of the course, including the professor's expectations for the essays. Also, just scheduling an upper-level student as a Fellow in the appropriate class and section could be difficult.

In comparison, the SISTs would be an easier choice. First, because they were designed at and for OSU and their success with Math 111 could reassure and encourage both faculty and students who are ambivalent about participating. In addition, because the ASC has already arranged the Math 111 SISTs at OSU, they could proceed with less initial study, looking back to the arrangements for the Math 111 SISTs for what to do and what not to do. Further, these types of SISTs could, potentially, be adapted for many different classes (introductory or advanced) in most if not all departments. This, of course, would require considerably more time for personnel to choose, train, and monitor the SIST facilitators. Just having SISTs for Writing 121 would require a significant amount of resources (personnel, money, and, likely, physical space). Because all or most first-year students take Writing 121 during their first of college and there are numerous sections with approximately thirty students each, numerous SISTs of six or even eight —each with a facilitator—would be necessary. While a SIST for Writing 121 could be offered to students on a volunteer basis, it's possible that many students would opt for it (which is what happened with Math 111); in that case, some sort of prioritization (based on SAT scores, placement tests, or timeliness in responding) would need to be instituted. Despite the potential difficulties with both the Brown and the SIST programs, possibilities for adaptation and implementation could be studied.

The Physical Space

Similar to many writing centers, the Writing Center space is not ideal, although the best efforts have been made to make it user-friendly and efficient (and it is larger than some other writing centers, according to the WCRP). Like many centers, it's on the lower level of a multi-use building, and natural light is sometimes blocked. (As this is Oregon, though, the natural light is often fairly dim anyway!) In addition, the walls are painted institutional off-white in all the rooms, and, though there are pictures (and photos of the writing assistants), the atmosphere isn't cozy or homey. Also, there is no established private area for writing assistants to talk out of the hearing of students (or to stash their belongings, for that matter). Though Beth Boquet celebrates writing center noise in her book *Noise From the Writing Center,* that noise can be distracting for some students and writing assistants.

Ede has mentioned the possibility of a new building being built for student support services at OSU. Presumably, she would have input in regard to the design of the CWL. Apart from addressing natural lighting and room colors, the noise that arises in the Center could be addressed. A number of small rooms (soundproofed) with windows in the doors for individual meetings could be included. A drawback to these rooms is that would make it harder for the coordinator to surreptitiously observe the writing assistants working, which is necessary. And that this observation is unobtrusive makes the sessions more comfortable and natural for both writing assistants and students and allows the coordinator to make a more accurate assessment. Although it seems not to be discussed much (Ede E-mail), some writing assistants and likely some students get distracted by the ambient noise and can't do their best work. Another advantage of private rooms is that sometimes the content of students' papers is quite personal; reading aloud or even

asking clarifying questions can be very uncomfortable for both students and writing assistants in these instances. A less expensive and more flexible alternative would be to create small offices by using dividers to create cubicles; these would dampen noise and increase privacy to a certain extent yet still allow the coordinator to "eavesdrop." This choice, both for writing assistants and for students, would be a beneficial option.

In addition, if Ede were able to design a writing center, a space for the writing assistants to gather away from students would also be beneficial. Often, backpacks and other belongings are strewn on the floor and couches of the central room of the Writing Center while writing assistants who aren't with students sit on the couches and chat. This not only looks unprofessional, it can be uncomfortable for students entering the Writing Center; some seem loathe to interrupt the conversation and perhaps feel uncomfortable moving someone's belongings in order to sit down. Further, while writing assistants would not hide in this room, they could use it to consult privately about a certain student or situation.

Because a new building is unlikely, at least in the near future, the current physical space could be evaluated to see if it is being used as efficiently as possible. In some cases, writing center rhetoricians have designed ideal writing centers—on paper. But what is more important, point out Kim Sharp, Michael McConnaha, Amanda Barth, and Erik Echols from the University of Washington, Bothell, in their presentation "Examining the Space of the Center," is how each tutor uses the space. After showing how they made the best use of minimal and far from ideal space (which included having a computer available in every tutoring space/with each desk), they shared their observation that their students tended to gravitate towards certain tutors because of the tutors' use of the space—that it is the way of using the space more, really, than the style of tutoring, that students find comfortable. (Granted, there is a certain amount of overlap in this.)

Sharp et. al.'s talk also suggests that good work can be accomplished in less-than-ideal space. The walls in that writing center are made of concrete, the private study rooms are very small, and the center is so small that no more than four tutors can work at one time. Yet students come and they come back. Similarly, work is done at OSU's Writing Center despite the unimaginative wall color and fluorescent overhead lighting. Perhaps it would be nice to have pastel colored walls or one brightly painted wall in each room or a mural on a wall, and maybe floor cushions or easy chairs would welcome students, or a desktop fountain could sooth occupants with its gentle flow of water. But none of these are necessary for the dialogues between writing assistants and students. In fact, writing assistants and students appear to get so involved in their work together that their surroundings seem to fade.

Along this line, Writing Center staff must examine what they wish to accomplish when deciding how to arrange their centers and where to allocate resources. If a move toward increasing students writing while conferencing is important, then perhaps having computers at each tutoring station is a good idea; if the Writing Center staff want to allow students to keep working even after their appointments, then computers away from the actual tutoring area works better. (Of course, both of these options could be implemented, with fewer computers available at both the conferencing tables and the computer area.) If the staff encourages students to always be prepared, then it is less necessary to provide pens and pencils for them to use; if writing down *any* thoughts, ideas, corrections, etc. is more important, then a supply to pens and pencils at hand will encourage this. And if insulation from what is happening around the duo of writing assistant and student is important, then a nurturing stance is needed only from the writing assistant; if, instead, the writing center wants a warm, nurturing *atmosphere*, then table and/or floor lamps could soften the harsh overhead lights.

This collection of suggestions run from the very feasible (using writing assistants' skills for publicity) to the unlikely (getting a new building and how to design the space). And it is not meant to suggest that the OSU Writing Center is especially lacking or inefficient in any of these areas. I have only shared my ideas—and, in one or two cases, concerns—about how the Writing Center could improve. Paramount in all these suggestions is the evaluation of each; the more extreme the change, the more necessary the examination of pros and cons. In some cases, too, the decision would rest not solely on those involved with the CWL, but with OSU at large, too. Feasibility studies which involve specific data (for example, resources such as money and personnel) are recommended before deciding for or against any of these recommendations.