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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes how Loyola University New Orleans's Writing across the Curriculum program began extending writing support to its distance learners through e-mail. The paper also explains why a limited group of students was targeted for this service, as well as how the tutors developed their online voices and personalized these "e-conversations." It also discusses outcomes, successes, and surprises. Noting that the biggest challenge in establishing e-tutor service for off-campus students has been to maintain the personal, to sustain the kind of online "voice" Justin Jackson details in "Interfacing the Faceless," the paper explains that in one of the earliest tutor meetings during the Fall semester, Jackson's article was distributed and discussed. It states that by setting the article into context with past tutoring practices and with anticipated online demands, it was hoped that the challenge of preparing the e-tutors to "talk the e-talk" could be met. According to the paper, most off-campus students who sought writing help during the Fall semester preferred to fax rather than e-mail their drafts and to talk about their writing during a phone session rather than online. It finds that the real surprise, after increasing requests for online tutoring (from students as well as from teachers) is the small percentage of writers who actually took up the offer. A handout memo describing the program is attached. (NKA)

## Launching Loyola's E-Tutor

T. R. Mooney

Paper presented at the National Writing Across Curriculum Conference  
(5th, Bloomington, IN, May 31-June 2, 2001).

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## **Fifth National WAC Conference 2001**

### **T. R. Mooney : Launching Loyola's E-Tutor**

This presentation describes how Loyola University New Orleans's Writing Across the Curriculum began extending writing support to our distance learners through e-mail. It also explains why we targeted a limited group of students for this service, as well as how our tutors developed their online voices and personalized these e-conversations. I'll also discuss outcomes, successes and surprises.

WAC has worked with on-campus writers face-to-face since 1987 and with distance learners through a combination of fax and phone since 1993. In their sessions with writers, our peer tutors focus their dialogues on the person as well as the process. We believe, as do MIT's writing center and other WAC facilities, that face-to-face writer/tutor collaborations work best for improving writing.<sup>1</sup> However, in response to increasing requests to try e-tutoring for our distance learners – and on the eve of Loyola's launching two online graduate degrees – WAC formally began offering writing help through e-mail during Fall 2000.

Electronic connectivity and access issues posed periodic delays. These problems aside, though, our biggest challenge in establishing our e-tutor service for off-campus students has been to maintain the personal, to sustain the kind of online "voice" Justin Jackson details in "Interfacing the faceless."<sup>2</sup>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/lab/owl/tutoring/JacksonOnlineTutoring.html>

In one of our earliest tutor meetings during the fall semester, we distributed and discussed Jackson's piece. By setting this article into context with our past tutoring practices and with our anticipated online demands, we hoped to meet the challenge of preparing our talented

tutors to talk the e-talk. From our “faceless” experiences with fax/phone tutoring, we anticipated the need to work harder to promote writers’ self-questioning and reflection about their writing, to set a friendly tone, to respond in a timely albeit asynchronous fashion, and to encourage feedback.

Initially, to keep the projected demand manageable, we offered e-tutor primarily to our distance learners. For Fall 2000, we contacted all teachers whose classes enrolled off-campus and online students, inviting them to encourage their learners to use e-tutor. With the approval of those teachers who accepted our invitation, we then posted individual notes to learners, detailing how to access e-tutor’s writing help.<sup>3</sup> In our efforts to tailor help to each writer’s specific needs and to promote some self-questioning on the part of writers, we requested some basic information: their names, what they wanted to accomplish during a tutoring session, the names of the class and teacher for which the writing assignment was being submitted, directions for the assignment, and contact information. We also set the information we provided about e-tutor in the context of face-to-face and fax/phone tutoring with which seasoned distance learners were already familiar.

Of the writers who responded to our invitation during the fall semester, most who contacted e-tutor with questions or requests for help chose to “talk” with tutors through the already established fax/phone method. Somewhat surprisingly, after using e-mail to ask whether tutors were available at specific times to discuss a particular draft --- and then scheduling a tutoring session --- most distance learners who sought writing help preferred to fax rather than e-mail the draft. And they preferred talking about their drafts over the phone rather than online.

Eventually, during Spring 2001, we also offered e-tutor help to on-campus students

enrolled in one of our City College's eight-week courses. At the request of a Political Science professor whose course met on consecutive Thursday evenings, mid-March through mid-May, we extended the invitation on-campus. Interestingly, of the students from this class who sought writing help from WAC, most chose to meet with tutors face-to-face rather than online.

Two-to-one, this selected group of on-campus writers preferred F2F rather than online help.

Through the e-mail help provided for distance learners and for on-campus students enrolled in the short-semester course, tutors gave special attention to generating discussion and focussing on the person as well as the process, just as they did in F2F sessions with writers. Take, for example, these excerpts from an e-tutor session, made in response to a writer who e-mailed a draft with the request: "Please check the attached paper for grammar and documentation of research sources."

- ✓ Tutor is careful to establish a friendly tone: *"I enjoyed reading your Global Warming paper and I'm happy to say. . ."*
- ✓ Tutor addresses higher order concerns (HOC) by offering a possible clarification of the writer's "supposedly" assertion: *"The 7% reduction in fossil fuel emissions proposed by the Kyoto Protocol is not intended to 'supposedly stop global warming.' Rather, the reductions are seen by many in the global scientific community as a necessary first step leading to further, more stringent reductions of CO2 emissions."*
- ✓ Tutor responds to writer's lower order concerns (LOC) about how to use APA documentation for online sources: *"Your citations look accurate (except the accessed date should be after the website*

*address and in parenthesis) but I must admit that I am not completely familiar with APA, so I suggest you check the Purdue website to be certain.*

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_apa.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apa.html)

*Look under the “Examples” heading for internet citation.*

- ✓ Tutor responds also to writer’s LOC about grammar: *“As far as grammar in the text – in the second sentence on page 3, ‘Action is occurring. . . .’ you should perhaps change the phrase to show who is acting. Action implies a doer; it is not spontaneous. . . so something like, though much less cheesy, . . .”*
- ✓ Tutor encourages further dialogue by engaging also with writer’s chosen subject of “Global Warming: Fact or Fiction”:  
*“If you are interested in bolstering your paper somewhat (or just interested in a good read) you might perhaps look at a book called *Maybe One*, by Bill McKibben. Another good source is Ross Gelbspan’s *The Heat Is On* – a book about global warming and the government.”*

As mentioned earlier, most off-campus students who sought writing help during the fall semester preferred to fax rather than e-mail their drafts and to talk about their writing during a phone session rather than online. That preference repeated itself during Spring 2001, with most distance learners choosing, again, to dialogue with tutors through fax/phone rather than through e-tutor. So, although we initially limited the scope of our online tutoring, doing so out of concern for maintaining the personal connection between writer and tutor, for fostering the “voices” of tutees and tutors, we were not, as projected, inundated with requests for online help.

The real surprise, after increasing requests for online tutoring (from students as well as from teachers), is the small percentage of writers who actually took us up on our offer.

Since we did not ask individual writers why they chose F2F or fax/phone or e-mail help, and since we formally survey our distance learners at the end of the academic year [and have not yet received those survey responses] , I am left to offer the following conjectures about our first year of e-tutor help. Seasoned distance learners who chose the familiar mode of fax/phone tutoring may have done so simply because they are comfortable with it and are confident of how it works for them. Or they may have shared our concern for maintaining a “voice,” wanting literally to hear a tutor’s responses to their writing and wanting to vocalize their further thoughts with the tutor. Or, as one of our veteran tutors speculated, writers in face-to-face encounters with tutors very often are unsure of what they want to accomplish during a tutoring session. The challenge of self-questioning and reflection, of figuring out what they want from their writing and from the person who is responding to that writing, is a daunting one. It’s one that seems better met in face-to-face or phone conversation rather than through even the most diligently established online “voice.”

From those of you who have more experience with online tutoring, I’d love to hear how things have been working for you. If, unlike us, you have been inundated with requests for online writing help, I’m curious about how you maintain a “voice” and manage to be timely. From those of you who haven’t tried e-mail tutoring, I’m interested in why you haven’t and whether you will.

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## Handout Memo with Two-Page Attachment

TO: OCLP Students Enrolled in Professor \*\*\*\*\*'s COMP-\*\*\*\*-051 Class  
FROM: Dr. T. R. Mooney, Writing Across the Curriculum, Bobet 100  
DATE: October 17, 2000  
RE: Writing Help Now Available through E-Mail

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For several years, Writing Across the Curriculum has provided help for Loyola University's distance learners. This help has been offered in face-to-face writing conferences and via FAX/phone tutoring sessions. Now, WAC is extending our services to Loyola's OCLP students via e-mail, at the address [etutor@loyno.edu](mailto:etutor@loyno.edu). We invite you to access our assistance through this new address, if you cannot visit our Bobet 100 facility in person.

If you have a writing question, a draft for us to discuss with you, a concern about documentation, we can help. You are welcome to visit us in person, through FAX/phone, or through e-mail. To access our e-mail tutoring, send a message with your question, draft, or concern, to [etutor@loyno.edu](mailto:etutor@loyno.edu). Be sure to include the following information in your message, so that we can provide the fullest help:

- your name and your Loyola status,
- what you want to accomplish during a tutoring session,
- the name of the class/section for which you are writing,
- the name of your teacher,
- the requirements of your writing assignment, and
- a phone number where we may reach you.

The turnaround time for helping writers through e-mail is at least 48 hours; this time will be longer during busier weeks of the semester.

To help you obtain tutoring support, we have attached a two-page explanation of our services. Whether you seek our help face-to-face, via FAX/phone, or through e-mail, we look forward to working with you.

Attachment



# Writing Help Available for OCLP Students

▶ Face-to-Face Tutoring

▶ FAX/Phone Tutoring

▶ E-Mail Tutoring

## *What writing help does WAC provide for Loyola students?*

Tutors provide writing help in the Bobet 100 WAC Center seven days a week, on a first come, first served basis. This help is offered free of charge.

For OCLP students, this help is provided face-to-face, through FAX/phone, and through e-mail. Whichever way you bring your writing to WAC, the tutor who works with you reads it carefully and provides feedback, as needed, about its thesis, development, organization, paragraphing, structure, and the like. Tutors do **not** "correct" papers; instead, they help you recognize strengths and weaknesses in your writing, so that you can revise your work before submitting a final draft to a professor.

WAC tutors are undergraduates trained to assist other students in all phases of the writing process, from planning and pre-writing to revision and editing. Tutors train in a semester-long course that focuses on composition theory, effective tutorial practice, and the writing conventions of different disciplines. Tutors also attend refresher workshops each subsequent semester on staff.

## *How do I get face-to-face help from WAC?*

Before you visit us, establish your writing goals and decide what you want to accomplish during your tutoring session. Then, when you visit WAC, share these goals with your tutor. Bring your writing and your professor's assignment directions with you; the more information you give us, the more help we can offer. Face-to-face tutoring sessions are typically 30 minutes long.

For Fall 2000 and Spring 2001, help is available in our Bobet 100 facility daily. We are open 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Friday, and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, **except** on holidays and between semesters. Our summer hours are more limited.

## Writing Help Available for OCLP Students:

▶ Face-to-Face

▶ FAX/Phone

▶ E-Mail Tutoring

Page 2 of 2

### *How do I get FAX/phone tutoring from WAC?*

If you are an OCLP student and cannot visit us on campus, you can access our help via FAX and phone. The turnaround time for helping writers through these media is at least 48 hours; during busier weeks of the semester, this time will be longer.

For FAX/phone tutoring, please follow these three steps:

1) Once you've typed/word-processed the writing you'd like to discuss, phone us during our hours of operation at 504-865-2297 or 504-865-3094. When you phone, we'll ask questions about your assignment, schedule a time to discuss your writing by phone, and confirm the number(s) where you can be reached.

2) After you phone, FAX your draft to us at 504-865-2038. Include your contact and appointment information, as well as the guidelines for the assignment.

3) Keep a copy of your writing handy, to discuss when a WAC tutor phones. Please jot down notes during your tutoring session; we do not FAX your work back to you. Phone tutoring sessions are usually 45 minutes long.

### *How do I get e-mail tutoring from WAC?*

If you are an OCLP student and cannot visit our Bobet 100 facility in person, you can get our help through e-mail, also. The turnaround time for helping writers through e-mail is at least 48 hours; this time will be longer during the busier weeks of the semester.

For e-mail tutoring, send your writing with a message to [etutor@loyno.edu](mailto:etutor@loyno.edu). Your message must include the following information:

your name and your Loyola status,  
what you want to accomplish during a tutoring session,  
the name of the class/section for which you are writing,  
the name of the teacher to whom you submit the assignment,  
the directions/requirements of your writing assignment, and  
a phone number where we may reach you.

***Whether you access our help face-to-face, via FAX/phone, or through e-mail, we look forward to working with you.***

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<sup>1</sup> Strang, Steven. "Overview and Policies of the Writing and Communication Center." Accessed 13 Oct 2000.  
<http://web.mit.edu/writing/Center/about.html>

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, Justin A. "Interfacing the Faceless: Maximizing the Advantages of Online Tutoring." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 25.2 (2000). <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/lab/owl/tutoring/JacksonOnlineTutoring.html>

<sup>3</sup> See Handout Memo with Two-Page Attachment.



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