

March 7, 1983

TO: Dr. John Ruszkiewicz
FROM: David A. McMurrey, Writing Lab
SUBJ: Increased Lab Use and Resulting Needs

The following is my best estimate of what will happen in the Writing Lab as a result of the new composition requirements and what the Lab will need in order to function effectively under these new conditions.

Estimate of Increased Lab Use

In the past three years the Lab has seen the following volumes of students, assisted by the following staff numbers:

| <u>semester</u> | <u>avg. students/hr.</u> | <u>avg. student hrs./wk.</u> | <u>avg. staff/hr.</u> |
|-----------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| fall | 6 | 210 | 3 |
| spring | 4 | 140 | 2 |
| summer | 10 | 350 | 3 |

The new composition requirements, assuming the same policies for provisional students' admissions, I think will produce the following:

| <u>semester</u> | <u>avg. students/hr.</u> | <u>avg. students/wk.</u> |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| fall | 15 | 525 |
| spring | 15 | 525 |
| summer | 25 | 875 |

These figures are based on several things: 1) the same pattern for admitting provisional students--minimal in the fall, moderate in the spring, and heavy in the summer; 2) an assumption of 20% freshman composition students required to attend lab, with one-fourth of that group required to attend two hours a week; 3) non-required attendance continuing at the same rate we have seen in the past; and 4) the same 80% provisional student enrollment in summer sessions, with three-fourths of that group required to attend lab.

What may throw these figures off are 1) different policies on the admission of provisional students, which is the most crucial element of these estimates, 2) a different ratio of students required to attend lab than the rather conservative one used here, 3) greater use of the Lab by the sophomore and junior composition students, and 4) increasing use of the Lab by non-required students as a result of increasing awareness of the lab by teachers and students generally.

Writing Lab Needs as a Result of These Increases

As a result of this doubling or tripling of the volume of students that we see in the Lab and as a result of students being required to attend lab for credit, we will need additional staffing, space, equipment and materials, and program development. Also, the increased complexity and importance of the Lab will necessitate a formal training program for the staff and will place a greater load of responsibilities on the director and assistant directors.

1. Additional Staffing Needs. While a doubling or tripling of student flow into the Lab implies a similar increase in lab staff, only a doubling of our current 105 staff hours will be necessary. We can compensate for any addition staffing needs by using computerized testing and self-instruction.

Also, we will need a full-time assistant director, which can be filled by two half-time graduate students, and a three-fourths or full-time secretary to help assure the continuity of the program, consistency of recordkeeping, and availability of instructional materials.

2. Additional Space. As a result of the additional student traffic, staffing, and equipment, the Writing Lab will need to double its current floor space. I suggest expanding to Parlin 1 next door. To do this, we'll need to cut a doorway from Parlin 3, the Writing Lab, to Parlin 1 and take out the elevated tiers of fixed desks in Parlin 1.
3. Additional Equipment and Materials. To accommodate the increased testing and self-instructional needs of lab students the following:

Additional books (20 copies of each):

| | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <u>English Fundamentals</u> , Form A | <u>Writing Fundamentals</u> , McMur- |
| <u>English Fundamentals</u> , Form B | rey/Campman |
| <u>English Fundamentals</u> , Form C | <u>Spelling Improvement</u> , Fergus |
| <u>English 3200</u> , Blumenthal | <u>Words People Use</u> |
| <u>Writer's Option</u> , Daiker | <u>Form and Style</u> , Campbell/ |
| <u>Writing Themes about Literature</u> | Ballou |
| <u>The Least You Should Know about English</u> , Form A | |
| <u>The Least You Should Know about English</u> , Form B | |

We will have to add to this list as we see what the needs of the sophomore and junior composition courses are going to be.

Additional Computer Terminals: In addition to these books needs, the Writing Lab will need computer terminals or microcomputers to handle at least 10 students at all times. These students will be using our self-instruction programs or taking tests. The University should consider purchasing microcomputers for the Lab to save on storage costs, log-in delays, student-user frustration, and to enable us to use and to develop our own nationally marketed CAI programs for composition. Also, the University should consider acquiring enough computer facilities for the Lab to enable instructors in advanced composition to teach word-processing skills in their courses.

4. Additional Program Development. To provide effective instruction for this increased volume of students, we will need to purchase or develop in the Lab a) tests and self-instructional exercises for grammar-and-usage units, b) paragraphing skills, c) essay-level skills, d) foreign students' needs, and e) a revision strategies

program. The tests and exercises for the grammar units are being written and entered into the computer now, but the rest will require a great deal of work over the next two years. After exploring what is available nationally, I believe that our best alternative is to develop these programs in the Lab. To do so, the director will need to devote as much of his time to the project as possible for the first year (which increases the importance of the assistant directors), and we will need a part-time graduate student with experience teaching English composition and programmin in Basic to work all of his time on the project. There are several people in the Department who can fill this position well.

5. Additional Responsibilities of the Directors. With the doubling or tripling of student flow into the Lab, with the increase in staffing, with the necessity of developing new programs and formally training new staff members, and with the overall increase in complexity of the lab program where students will be required to attend and recive credit hours, the responsibilities of the director and assistant directors will increase greatly.

As mentioned above, the assistant directors should continue to be graduate student assistant instructors since writing lab experience has and will continue to put our graduates in jobs. But this position should be increased to a full-time one.

Because of the increased complexity of the Lab and the responsibilities and work load of the director, I believe that director needs the following:

- a) No classroom teaching assignments for the first year of this new expanded program: this will permit the director to develop and oversee the development of CAI programs, supervise closely the E406 and E506 students programs, devise and run a training course for lab staff members, and attend to the many other details that the new program will require.
- b) Three classroom teaching assignments per year in the years following.
- c) Some kind of compensation either in the form of a salary increase or in the form of permanent or assistant professorship status. The latter, the assistant professorship, will enable the director to i) count on some degree of permanence in his position, which will assure continuity of the Lab, ii) serve on university and departmental committees where decisions are made about the Lab, iii) campaign much more effectively for the Lab and its future needs, iv) handle the problems that the new composition program will bring about much more effectively, and v) conduct a practicum/training course for graduate student lab staff members where they will receive course credit for their work in the Lab.

Some Concluding Comments

While the new composition program raises a good many problems for the Writing Lab, I welcome these new challenges with a great deal of excitement. And while the needs outlined here may seem extravagant, they are justified considering the increased use and importance of the Lab.

Just this past weekend in Waco at the CCTE meeting, where writing lab directors and staff members from all over the state formed the Texas Association of Writing Centers, it was clear to me that our own lab is the focus of a great deal of interest around the state. As co-founder of the organization and its secretary, I will be doing much to develop it, in particular, to establish a state or regional journal, all of which will only add to the importance of our lab.

With the expansion of the Writing Lab I have outlined here, our lab will become a leader and model not only in the state but nationally. It will become even more so a center of research in composition and of development of a whole range of instructional materials. I'm convinced that our lab had much to do with the publishing of Writing Fundamentals, a freshman composition text I co-authored with M.Sue Campman, a former assistant director who now directs the writing lab at Texas A&I.

And more importantly, the new lab will be able to provide more effective instruction for increased numbers of students, effective support to classroom composition faculty, and excellent teacher-training, experience, and vita credentials for the graduate students who work in the lab.