

By Our WTS

The Indiana University Writing Tutorial Services Alumni Newsletter

Writing Tutorial Services
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405
www.indiana.edu/~ByOurWTS

How Our WTS Began

Joe Roy

Once upon a time, WTS was not centrally located in Ballantine; it served relatively few students and did not even employ peer tutors. Back then, it was known as the Writing Center, and it was located in a little house called the Student Academic Center on 7th Street and Jordan. It had been operating for some time with a small staff of about five graduate students who did, on average, forty tutorials a week.

The purpose of the Writing Center was to offer assistance to students in classes in all disciplines. This concept of "writing across the curriculum" was being explored in colleges across the country, and in 1990, Raymond

Smith responded to a national search for someone to head up IU's new and improved writing center. The committee in charge of the search thought that a bigger, more encompassing center would help to increase the number of intensive writing courses across the disciplines. At the time, Ray



Ray Smith

was directing the University of Missouri's writing center while working on his Ph.D. When he came to Indiana, Ray was, "in essence...asked to start from scratch."

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In his first year as Director of the yet-unnamed program, Ray spent the majority of his time networking across campus: meeting faculty, attending meetings, and building support for the burgeoning writing center. Professor Barry Kroll, the director at the time, stayed on as acting director so that Ray would be able to attend to these duties. Shortly after he came to IU, however, Ray saw the need to change the name to the Campus Writing Program (CWP), because of its new two pronged purpose: "to administer a writing center for students and to assist faculty members who used writing to teach." The student part of the program was now called Writing Tutorial Services (WTS), which was a variation of the name of the writing center at the University of Missouri, Writing Intensive Tutorial Services. This new name reflected Indiana's goal: to offer a writing center to any student in need

of writing help in everything from elementary composition to the last stages of a dissertation.

One of the first big changes for the new CWP was its location. The program was moved from the Student Academic Center to Ballantine Hall, with the original administrative offices located underneath the Ballantine parking garage next to a lawnmower storage room. As Ray puts it, "When we weren't being driven crazy by the blades of the lawnmowers being sharpened, we were suffering from the stench of the hot gasoline engines next door." Although the conditions were cramped, Ray saw this move to the center of campus as early evidence of the university's support of the writing program.

Throughout 1990 and 1991, Ray also made changes to the way in which tutors themselves were viewed, both by students and by faculty. Even

the decision to call them "tutors" was a deliberate one: across the country, the names given to writing center staffs could be anything from "coaches" to "counselors" to "tutors." At the time, Ray's decision to call them "tutors" was controversial, as the term connoted remediation. However, Ray disagreed, citing the use of the terms "tutor" and "tutorial" for "instructor" and "class" at Oxford University. Another WTS change was in the relationship between tutors and instructors. In previous years, the records that tutors kept of their tutorials were hand mailed to faculty members in order to demonstrate that the students were making an effort. This process made the faculty integral in correction and revision. However, Ray saw WTS as more of a third party: a "friendly listener," not a part of the actual grading process. To Ray, the aim was to be "a colleague or a friend or a coach or a tutor to the student, not to be a junior varsity teaching assistant."

This was at a time when computers were beginning to be widely employed in composition courses. Some faculty and administrators saw computers as a sort of "silver bullet" to aid the new program. Instead, Ray preferred an "old-fashioned" technology, the copy machine, to aid in tutorials; tutors would make copies of the paper, which would help keep "ownership" of the paper firmly in the hands of the student. Perhaps surprisingly for some, Ray used computers only for the tutors to record the tutorials given. In 1992, the first "Jake" records were introduced (named after Ray's dog, a retriever), with Ray and his colleague John Peterson writing the original program.

In the next year, 1991 to 1992,

By Our WTS is produced by and for the peer tutor alumni of Writing Tutorial Services (WTS), Indiana University's writing center.

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Please read, think, and write back to us. Our website is designed to facilitate this communication.

www.indiana.edu/~ByOurWTS

Laura Plummer, *CWP Director*

Lisa Kurz, *WTS Director*

Anita Schaad, *WTS Office Manager*

John Peterson, *CWP Office Manager*

WTS was moved into its present central location in Room 206 of Balantine Hall. This year, there were around eight Graduate Tutors working. Around this time, discussions about having Undergraduate Tutors took place. In 1992, Ray trained the first group of "Peer Tutors." At this time, Ray was trying to work against the assumption that WTS is merely an editorial service, something that WTS struggles with even now. The ethos of WTS became to "first, do no harm, and second, 'better writers, not better papers.'"

In 1993, Ray became an Assistant Dean of the Faculty. With this change, Lisa Kurz became the director of Writing Tutorial Services. Laura Plummer, who had been a graduate tutor at the Writing Center when Ray arrived, was chosen to be an instructional consultant to hire and train peer tutors. According to Ray, he was "booted upstairs, and [he] was permitted to hire more competent people as [his] replacement." In 1994, the idea of expansion began to be discussed, and in 1996, the first satellite location for WTS was opened up in Briscoe Quadrangle, and another one in Ashton Hall followed in 1998.

Writing Tutorial Services, with locations throughout campus, currently serves around 75 students daily and does an average of 10,000 tutorials a year. With its current staff of 28 graduate tutors, specializing in various concentrations, and 14 peer tutors, who offer a direct connection to the undergraduates tutored, WTS and the CWP work in tandem with students and faculty in fostering writing across the curriculum.

Farewell to Lisa Kurz

Cecilia Wolford

Lisa Kurz, Director of WTS for 15 years, will soon be leaving us for a new position. In an interview with her, she told By Our WTS a little about her new job and some stories about her time at WTS. Although she is only moving across campus to Maxwell Hall, she will be doing some very different work that will bring her closer to where she began as a science researcher. "This is kind of going back to my roots—a good thing," says Lisa of the change.

During her tenure at WTS, Lisa both directed tutors and the Writing Center and did research for Ray Smith, Assistant Dean of the Faculty, to determine why students drop out of college, and what the university can do to keep them here. This research has become so important, that it is the basis of Lisa's new position. Although she is sorry to leave, she believes that WTS will do well with new direction and that change is a good thing.

So how did Lisa's story all begin? She was here with a family and knew

that she wanted to stay in Bloomington and came across this job listing on campus. She had never worked in a writing center before but had a little experience teaching writing. "When I was a grad student at Cornell. I taught a class in their writing program." She believes her lack of writing experience is what got her the position. "I was not a PhD in English." This allowed her to talk with natural and social science staff with expertise and ease—although she still admits, "I had no idea what I was doing." Starting at WTS was scary, especially since Lisa had not tutored before. Although she says that working with student "tutors [was] the easy part," learning to tutor was more challenging.

It would be impossible to work at WTS for 15 years and not have some, well, interesting stories. She has seen tutors get hit on, and tutors date students. One vegetarian tutor was even asked out by a tutee to eat hotdogs—oh the irony of WTS.

Always a WTS leader, Lisa does



Lisa takes a break from her work in the CWP office. After 15 years at WTS, she is taking a new position in Maxwell Hall as _____.

have some advice to give current and future tutors to keep the center strong. "I think what I respect the most are the tutors that are most open to new ways of tutoring"

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and ones who are “actively seeking answers.” She believes it is also important to be generous with your ideas on tutoring, without being pushy. Those who can listen and learn, who let the students think for themselves, always make the best tutors. She also wants tutors to acknowledge their specialties, so that they can be better matched to students. Tutors must be able to go from being AI’s to practicing less directive tutoring, not “student-teacher conference types,” in order to give the best writing advice.

Lisa has achieved much during her time here, but the thing she is most proud of is the growth of WTS since she started. Ballantine started with 15-20 tutors and now we staff 45-50 qualified, intelligent writers. WTS started out with one location and “now we have lots of locations” says Lisa on her progress. But through all of this, Lisa believes “we’ve maintained our standards.”

For whoever will take over Lisa’s job, Lisa believes that “it’s an opportunity to make some changes in how we do things.” These are healthy changes that will be beneficial to us and help us grow even more. Tutors should “try and see [their] time at WTS as a resume item.” She believes that tutoring students offers more than knowledge of MLA style. It offers real-world experience and skills, such as working one on one with others, giving relevant feedback with tact, and being a responsible employee; these are just a few of the wonderful things we all have learned at WTS.

As excited as she is about her new job, WTS has a lot that she will miss, and “working with the tutors” is at the top of her list. “I’m not just saying that because you write for tutors”—Lisa

was sure to clarify for me. She looks for social people to tutor, so that they can easily talk to strangers for hours on end about a subject as tedious as writing. She believes that it makes for an interesting, and gregarious bunch of people, who are fun to work with.

The most important thing to Lisa is that WTS continues to be a fixture at the university. “I hope to see that it stays an important part of the academic program here. I want it to be closely integrated with the fabric of the university.” In her experience with WTS and other writing centers, she has seen that they feel marginalized at

the university. She wants WTS to be such a given, that no one can imagine losing it. And a true dream for her would be to see a writing center designed specifically for tutoring. Things such as separated nooks would help with the noise issue, and an online tutorial booking system would certainly make appointments (and Anita’s job) far easier. Looking back at WTS, Lisa sums up all of the interesting people she respects with a single phrase: “It’s been fabulous.”

About Those ASCs



WTS tutors Deborah Strickland and Erin McGuan take a break with desk attendant Sandra Goodman during their Tuesday night shift at Teter ASC.

Brandon Haffner

Nowadays, the Academic Support Centers in Briscoe, Teter, and Forest are the “happening” place for writing tutors. The general consensus is that, while tutoring at WTS is of course highly pleasurable, the ASCs are the favorite place to work for us peer tutors. The atmosphere is more relaxed, the tutorials are short and sweet, there’s usually time for home-

work (many of the tutors’ favorite part about working at the ASCs is “getting lots of homework done”) and, of course, we get paid more.

It’s also an environment that allows for easy interaction with fellow tutors, sometimes even important intellectual conversation. One peer tutor writes of such conversations, conveying that “talking about memory-enhancement,

tampons, and Wicker Man” is one of her favorite ASC activities.

The ASCs may be more relaxed, but in the last several years they’ve used a receptionist sign-up policy that prevents things from becoming too awkward or informal. (In fact, the system worked so well that they recently switched the math sign-ups to the same policy.) This combination has made the ASCs an excellent place to work, keeping the tutors and (we hope) the tutees happy.

The tutees do seem to enjoy the informality of the ASCs as well. In response to a small survey I conducted, one of them stated that she liked “being able to relax” and oth-

ers wrote that they actually preferred the ASCs to WTS in Ballantine. Of course, because the tutorial time is only half of the fifty minutes allotted at WTS Central, almost all of the tutees surveyed agreed that they want more time.

The informality also seems to generate a host of interesting tutorials over the school year. We continue to get tutees who “just need the stamp,” but some others have become infamous within our peer tutor community. One tutee brought in a breakup letter to her boyfriend for a tutorial (the bewildered tutor kept her composure and conducted the tutorial as normal). Another tutee came in one night, said hello to the tutor, and then sat down and asked if they could

brainstorm. When the tutor asked one question about the material, the tutee exclaimed, “Yes, that’s it!” and ran out of the room. At the ASCs, whether we’re busy tutoring at Teter or doing homework at Forest, the peer tutors have come to expect just about anything.



WTS tutor Rowenna Miller works with _____ on his paper during a Thursday night tutorial at the Forest ASC.

Although WTS visits are only 15% of the total tutorials that occur yearly, at the ASCs, we had 1,248 writing tutorials in the Fall of 2006 at all three locations. Teter was the busiest, and thus the most heavily staffed of the three, while Forest was by far the least busy. However, no matter what the ASC, there was something that connected all three of them. After some study and a few more surveys, I found a common theme beginning to appear in all of the tutors’ responses. Yes, the one thing that brings us all together: candy.

The all-important candy baskets in the ASCs generate much discussion and are held in high regard by peer tutors and grad tutors alike. The candy is perhaps the most crucial part

of the ASCs. It is, as one tutor puts it, “the first thing everyone checks when they get here is the candy basket.” When given a survey asking what their funniest, favorite, and least favorite memories from the ASCs, another tutor could write nothing but the fact that the “Math people take all the candy” (his answer for all three questions). Another tutor’s favorite is the “couches and candy,” while her least favorite is an “empty candy bowl.” What it is about the imperative ASC candy that makes the tutors so happy we may never completely understand, but it’s certainly an important component of the ASC lifestyle.

Overall, the ASCs continue to be a crucial aspect of our tutoring network at IU. Teter, the newest location, opened in the Fall of 2004 to replace the old Ashton center. Some other more minor changes include some renovation in the Briscoe ASC, including the addition of more advising offices and moving a nearby classroom space to a more technology-friendly room. Currently, although the tutoring systems for the ASCs seem fairly locked into place, there are some other small changes on the horizon for the appearance of the ASCs. Briscoe is getting a new coat of paint over the summer (we’re all very excited), and although no official plans have been made, there has been some talk regarding a makeover of the Forest ASC.

Leaving Our WTS Nest

Brandon Haffner

As the year comes to a close, all but five of us peer tutors are thinking about our summer plans and our classes for next year. But for Daniel, Rowenna, Jason, Gamble, and Cecelia, the “real world” approaches. Now, they’re going off down their own different paths. Two of them plan to teach abroad, two plan on going to graduate school, one plans to become a neighborhood nuisance (no, really, you’ve got to read this). Each one takes something unique from their experiences at WTS. All of them have plenty of fond memories of working with the rest of the WTS staff—peer tutors, graduate tutors, and yes, our wonderful bosses.

This year’s graduating peer tutors, a few weeks away from leaving our group for good, will not go unmissed. So, before they take off on their own, I was sure to ask them a few parting questions to give us something to remember them by.

Daniel Castro

Major: English
Minors: Spanish, Slavic Languages and Literatures

Post Graduation plans?

Plans? Generally, get out of the country and loaf around as much as possible, maybe get some writing done. I’m waiting to hear back on a Fulbright grant to Spain, which is a long shot. If that doesn’t work out, I’ll try to go teach English somewhere where Spanish is spoken.

What do you value most from your experiences at WTS?

All of my other jobs have been in the hospitality industry, waiting tables and such, where there’s always a lot of pressure from managers or patrons or both. So it’s been wonderful to work at a place where you can sit down on a couch and read or check e-mail every half hour, and shoot the breeze with really intelligent people (my fellow tutors— not the math tutors, of course) when the mood strikes. I’m fairly certain that working for WTS will be the most laid back job I’ve ever had, and I can’t imagine one better suited to



Jason Covert

Majors: Political Science, Classic Civilizations

Post Graduation plans?

I plan to attend Law School, most likely here at IUB.

What do you value most from your experiences at WTS?

I’ve learned patience. I’ve learned how to listen rather than speak. I’ve learned that no matter how many ways you try and get someone to see your point, that person will invariably ignore you and stick to his own idea of what is right or sounds better.

Favorite WTS memory?

Tutoring an ESL student who was asked to write a paper about her life and part of that paper was about her job. It just so happened that she was a student worker at the food court where I was a student supervisor and as I went to read the last half of the paper she started laughing in embarrassment and fold the paper up so that I could not read a very large paragraph. She explained to me that she didn’t want me to read that part so I skipped over how she wanted to be a supervisor and why she would be better at it than some of the current supervisors. We both laughed and went on with the paper, truth be told she



probably would be one of the better supervisors at the food court.

A favorite quote:

“Rule #76, no excuses play like a champion!”
--Wedding Crashers

“I’ve learned patience. I’ve learned how to listen rather than speak.” -Covert

Gamble Kersey

Majors: English, German
Minor: Business

Post Graduation plans?

Teaching English in South Korea.

What do you most value from your experiences at WTS?

Being connected to some of the brightest and most interesting people the IU community has to offer.

Favorite WTS memory?

Gamble and Brandon’s “Great Forest Draw-



off," counseling sessions/story exchanges with Anita by the filing cabinet, meeting interesting international tutees, extracurricular Hair Banger's Ball tutor meetings.

A favorite quote:

"Life's journey is not to arrive at the grave safely in a well-preserved body but rather to skid in sideways totally worn out shouting 'Holy shit, what a ride!'"

"Extracurricular Hair Banger's Ball tutor meetings." -Kersey on her favorite WTS memory

Rowenna Miller

Majors: History, French
Minor: Anthropology

Post Graduation plans?

Become a crazy cat lady. Frighten neighborhood children. Honestly, I don't know, but I've considered going back to the museum I interned for.



What do you value most from your experiences at WTS?

The people— it was always exciting to get a tutee who was willing to work, especially when they return and you see improvement.

Favorite WTS memory?

Hanging out with my fellow tutors in the bullpen, discussing current events (the, ahem, stripper article in the IDS counts as current events, right?)

A favorite quote:

"Great things have been effected by a few men well-conducted."
--George Rogers Clark

"It was always exciting to get a tutee who was willing to work, especially when they return and you see improvement." -Miller

Cecelia Wolford

Major: English Literature
Minor: French
Activities: Member of Pi Beta Phi

Post Graduation plans?

I'm moving to Chicago to work for a few years before I go back to graduate school.

What do you value most from your experiences at WTS?

It has helped my ability to tactfully critique the writing of another. Writing is a sensitive and personal subject, and no matter how much a person wants to be criticized, you can still offend them pretty easily at times. This will be incredibly useful in the real world and in the work place.

Favorite WTS memory?

Probably our Monday night classes when we were in tutoring school. And playing croquet at Laura's house at our tutoring after-party.

A favorite Quote:

"All good writing is swimming under water and holding your breath." --F. Scott Fitzgerald



Removing the Translucent ESL Wall:

Learning How to Approach an ESL Tutorial

Gamble Kersey

"But the last guy edited it for me." Ugh. It is the phrase we love to hate as tutors, and unfortunately, as our number of English as a Second Language students increases, the phrase is becoming more and more common in our WTS workday. Did the last guy really edit his grammar? With the increased number of ESL students, our center consistently faces the same types of issues. We don't do grammar—but we do. If I go through her whole paper and point out the missing articles, will she be able to tell me which article is missing? Should I be more directive? These questions continue with each passing semester, becoming some of the most important current issues facing Writing Tutorial Services.

ESL tutorials accounted for 56% of our tutorials at WTS central and the satellite sites last fall. ESL tutorials have also increased across the board in the three Academic Support Centers in the last year, especially in Teter's ASC. Beyond our concerns, though, as tutors, we are exposed to a uniquely beneficial relationship within the ESL tutorial.

Brag. Crow. Boast. Show off. Sing your own praises. With over six million words, it is no wonder that an ESL student would misuse or misunderstand synonyms. That is where we come in: diction to the rescue! One of my tutees described this assistance

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as one of the most useful benefits she receives from her WTS tutors. They work twice (sometimes three times) as hard as a native speaker to complete even the most simple assignment, and then they still make the time and effort to come use our services.

Even though they have double-checked their dictionaries, they have to worry whether 'crow' might offer a different (if not even the wrong) connotation than 'brag'- and denotations and connotations often stump our native speakers! It

may sometimes be easy to be reluctant to work with articles, prepositions, "countables," etc.

Yet, these are our most grateful return customers, our "Frequent Flyers," as we call them in WTS. When they visit us on a regular basis, we are able to help improve their English as well as to help them to function better as students in a foreign academic environment. Our ESL tutees are often brave, diligent students, but they must face their every minute assignment through a translucent wall of misunderstanding; we are the magi-

cians who attempt to make this wall disappear.

In our positions as English Magicians, we develop a symbiotic relationship with ESL students. While English is widely used and highly valuable worldwide, as globalization connects

globalization. We are able to develop the empathy and social connections required in international relations, which is a skill requested by almost every position, business or otherwise. Also, by exposing yourself to another culture, or at least another way of

thinking and understanding, you learn more about your own way of thinking and about yourself.

I would argue that the same is true of tutoring: going over composition details with a fine-tooth comb with our non-native tutees



WTS tutor Erin McGuan helps _____ with her paper at the Teter ASC.

more cultures, it becomes increasingly more important to be able to interact with different cultures. English may be the third most spoken language in the world, but Chinese is the most spoken language in the world and Spanish is the second. Our exposure to our ESL tutees offers us the unique opportunity to become familiar with multi-cultural and multi-linguistic encounters.

As the world inside and outside the academic community becomes more diverse, so does WTS. The face of WTS represents the forefront of

better prepares us as tutors for native tutees as well.

As we expand our relationship with the international community, we stand both to give and to receive the benefits we currently exchange and those of which we are currently unaware. Promoting the English language and exposing the writing center to multi-culturalism can improve the way we approach ESL tutorials. As we adjust to the increased number of ESL tutees, I hope that we develop our tutoring methods so that we can better serve in a modern, global academic environment.

Our WTS Alumni Directory

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Using Our WTS Skills In the “Real World”:

How Does Our Time at WTS Influence Our Lives?

Jen Johnston

“The ability to jump into problems and start working toward a solution, to relate to unfamiliar people, and to work quickly to gain trust and point them toward a feasible solution have all been great assets.”

-Bill Trovinger, Inventory Management Specialist at Mervyns

“I developed some degree of confidence, an ability to explain myself clearly, and an appreciation for listening to others explain their thinking. It helped me to see how the written and oral word can be quite powerful. It helped me to see that my way is not always best.”

-Dana Malkus, Attorney at Lewis, Rice & Fingersh

“Writing is such a critical life skill, and so few people (even those with higher education degrees) can write well. I credit my writing background with giving me a leg up in any work environment I’ve been in.”

-Angela Tharp, Associate Art Director for IU Marketing

“I learned to be patient and sympathetic. I also learned how to read people and how to be a more effective communicator. I honestly believe that my work at WTS was the major determining factor in my career choice.”

-Abby Ghering, Assistant Dean/Associate Director of Academic Support & Enrichment at Denison University

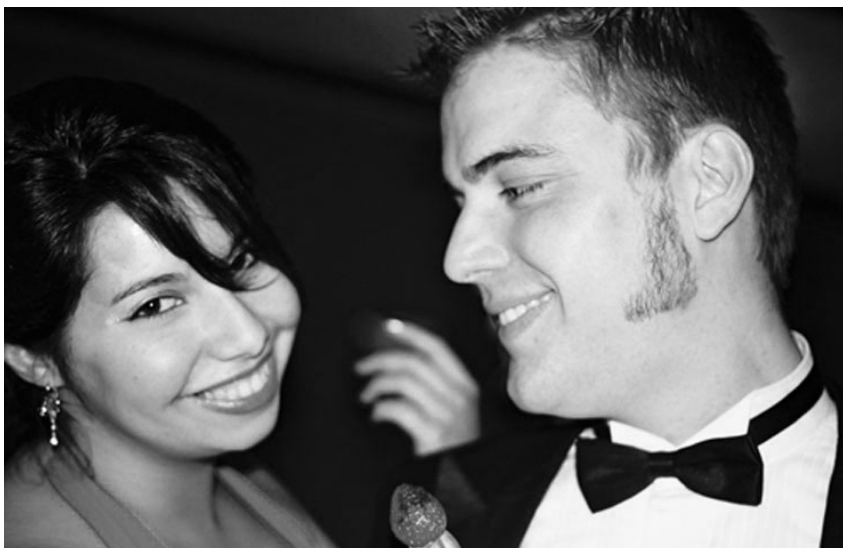
“More than anything, tutoring helped me to be able to talk freely to people I’d never met. That has been so valuable to me in my work life.”

-Alexis Pool, Operations Coordinator for the Steans Institute for Young Artists of the Ravinia Festival

“Working at WTS helped me develop and hone that special blend of a well placed suggestion and tact.”

-Allison Mikkalo, Advertisement Sales Assistant at Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia

What's Up With Our WTS Alumni?



Top Left: Peggy Larkin and Cameron Oehler are still “living, working, and dating each other” in Indianapolis. Peggy is teaching 9th-grade English at the Irvington Community High School. Cameron is working for the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library Foundation.

Top Right: Garth Stahl hangs out with a _____ in London England.

Bottom Right: In the fall of 2006, Kelly Colby and her husband visit the Grand Canyon to celebrate their third wedding anniversary.

Bottom Left: Michael-Lyn McBride, her husband Joe, and son Lincoln, at a recent antique aircraft show in their hometown of Lompoc, CA. “Family life has been great and so has flying. I’m a private pilot!” says Michael-Lyn.



Passing the *By Our WTS* Torch

Jen Johnston

In our debut (December 2006) issue of this newsletter, I explained a little bit about why and how the whole *By Our WTS* project got started. I'll willingly admit that I have become quite attached over the past nine months, having put a lot of "blood, sweat, and tears" into the first issue, as well as this one. However, it was always the plan to set a foundation on which others could build—to give it a good push and then pass *By Our WTS* on.

When this project began, I was still

coming down from that "just graduated" high. I was working part time here in "B-town," still searching for that first job in the "real world," and eagerly searching for a way to further develop a skill set that would make me more appealing to potential employers (I'm sure that most of you can relate). I am fortunate to have been offered this opportunity, as I am quite certain that it gave me the confidence and experience that I needed to get that first job—which I am happy to say that I now have.

In March, I started working for Option Six, an e-learning company based in Bloomington.

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The *By Our WTS* website, developed by Geoff McGregor, is currently under construction. Our plan is to make it possible for alumni to log in to the site, update contact information via the provided form, and share pictures with others.

We hope you will keep in touch and check back often!