New Look, Same WTS

CWP Director Laura Plummer discusses the electronic evolution of By Our WTS and the state of the program

Laura Plummer

Perhaps the first thing you’ll notice about this issue of By Our WTS is its electronic form. While cost is a factor—and I’ll get to that in a moment—we also hope this format eases a few other difficulties. We find that while you all move around geographically quite a bit, particularly right after graduation from college, you maintain Internet presences that are consistent and stable. We’re confident, then, that we will have fewer BOW issues bounced back to us now that we’re sending it out via the Internet.

Having said that, thank you all for keeping in touch, updating your contact information with the Editor, and responding to this biannual missive. It’s nice to know we’re not shipping this thing out into the void. You’ll note that WTS has a presence on Facebook now (as do I); please join our merry e-band.

“But what about the money?” you ask. While we have undergone some administrative reorganization above us, the Writing Program and WTS remain much as you left them. Our budgets have been pinched a bit, however. The whole university has less funding this year, and while we hope that the reduced support from the state is a temporary situation,
Anyone who has lived through a stack of papers can probably relate to
the reality of the time being is that we have fewer hard dollars in hand.
Consequently, the printing and mailing costs of BOW have become
unappealingly expensive. To put this
totality aside, when
undergraduate tutors for the entire
company is necessary. It's been smooth from all reports.
My hope is that none of you are
brought to tears by work or school,
and that you continue to flourish. To
those of you who are teaching: good
luck with this last slide toward the
close of the term. To everyone: We
miss you! Keep in touch!

Over the years, we’ve lost contact with
many of our friends from WTS as jobs
have changed and moves have been
made. If you know of a former tutor
who’s fallen out of touch, please forward
these comments or updates you wish to be included
in upcoming issues may be direct-
ed to Shabrelle Pollock at byour-
WTS@indiana.edu.

Thanks!

Meet the Sheriffs

The “wranglers” discuss their jobs, including the perks and obligations

Amanda Mast

Running and maintaining
the multiple locations of the writing
center can be a challenge. After all,
there are sites in Ballantine, the Wells
Library; the School of Education, and
ASC locations in three of the dorms.
Each year, two undergraduate tutors
are hired as “wranglers” to help ease
the stress and oversee the ASCs.
This year, the wranglers are seniors Sri Chatterjee and
Chris Frisz. Chatterjee is a finance
and marketing major, and Frisz is
majoring in computer science.

“Essentially, wranglers are
responsible for the smooth running of
the ASCs,” Sri explains. Wranglers
help with any possible problems that
could arise at the ASCs.

“I try to make sure that all
peer tutors are happy,” Chatterjee
said. “[I try to] have all their
questions answered, and [make sure
they] aren’t being eaten alive.”

As wranglers, Frisz and
Chatterjee must also help out WTS
director Jo Ann Vogt whenever
needed.

“I think Jo Ann told Sri and
me at our first meeting that our role
was to take care of the things that she
can’t get done because there aren’t 36
hours in the day,” Frisz said.
He and Chatterjee are
there to handle WTS-related
problems that Vogt might not have
the time to address. Additionally,
wranglers are in charge of scheduling
the undergraduate tutors at the
beginning of each semester.

Aside from the more typical
work that must be done, there
consider most rewarding. Chatterjee
likes getting to see all of the tutors,
and Frisz enjoys “the responsibility
of managing the undergraduate tutors.”
When asked jokingly if they
wore Wranglers (and if so, blue or
black?), Frisz and Chatterjee
happily responded.

“I used to wear Wranglers
until high school! Does that count?”,
Frisz said laughing. “Then I upgraded
to big-boy Arizona Jean Co. jeans.”
Chatterjee chimed in as well.
“I don’t, though it’s definitely
an interesting idea. Considering
Chris and I keep wearing blue on
the same day, I’m going to say we
would’ve gone with blue. Though I
wouldn’t be able to get any work done
on account of the cowboy boots and
hat I would have to pair my wranglers
with. Just me?”

By Our WTS is produced for the peer tutor alumni of Writing Tutorial
Services, Indiana University’s writing center.

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Please read, think and write back
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in upcoming issues may be direct-
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Studying WTS

Peer tutor takes on the task of reviewing the culture of WTS

Melissa Georgiou

A bit of backstory: I have been covertly observing the tutors. Yes, you. And you. Well, maybe not you.

I am currently enrolled in an undergraduate Communications and Culture course which attempts to analyze culture through ethnographic means, like participant observation and reflexive writing. Our major class assignment is to conduct our own "mini-ethnography" looking at how a cultural group has formed on campus. Our teacher encouraged us to pick a group we were a part of... So, I picked Writing Tutorial Services.

The results of our cursory studies have been interesting and are (by no means) conclusive. I have discovered how to apply the knowledge from course readings from ethnographers like Geertz, Bucholtz and Kiesling (and many other people you may or may not have heard of). Significantly, analysis led to an understanding of myself and therefore, more power. Similar to ethnographer Mary Bucholtz’s ideas and reflexive writing, my experiences at WTS will hopefully encourage you to consider how much the people and groups with whom you choose to hang out with whom you choose to hang out and thereby question what allows a member of the WTS community to be successful and attain status and belonging. What I discovered was that the Writing Tutorial Service tutors’ cultural group is defined by their understanding of experience as a form of capital to acquire power and authority; this understanding of the function of experience is a reflection of how Writing Tutorial Services works as a business.

Capital! Like money, WTS tutors exchange experience for power. Part of this is a reflection of the WTS business model. After all, tutors who are perceived to have more experience are paid more. The annual peer tutor roundtable is a fantastic example of the non-monetary value placed on experience. The “round table” is physically arranged to encourage the separation of the less experienced, so that they may pose questions to the more experienced and attain more capital and therefore, more power. Similar to Geertz’s article "Capital in a Communitie of Self-Proclaimed Nerds, WTS tutors seem to observe experience as a form of capital between them in order to form together as a social group. (I’m not suggesting they are or could be defined as ‘nerds, but it’s quite possible.)

Furthermore, it’s not only work experience that is valued; questions asked by the “baby tutors” to the peer and graduate tutors were largely asking for stories of a typically humorous nature. Questions like, “Have you ever had a haunting tutorial?” and “What was your most satisfying tutorial?” prompted lengthy stories and conversations about similar experiences between tutors of all different levels. Experience is one of the tools used to connect tutor to tutor. My notes on the roundtable discussion, between the practicum students, undergraduate and grad students, prove that the existence of such an event (involving food, drink and lively discussion) reinforces the idea that the WTS higher-ups wish the tutors to "acculturate", as the director Jo Ann Vogt mentioned during the meeting. This value placed on experience makes sense because WTS is, after all, a business. If the goals of WTS are to provide experienced peer and graduate tutors to the student populace, the tutors’ behaviors are going to reflect the wishes of those higher up in the hierarchy.

Therefore, hiring practices seek to find students from a multitude of disciplines and most of the workers are graduate students, who are perceived as more experienced. Clifford Geertz’s article “Blurred Genres: Reconfiguration of Social Thought”, posits that “…the world of the gods… is at the same time a template for that of men” (66). WTS tutors do not, obviously, view their work as religious in any manner; however, the quotation points to the relationship of one higher in the hierarchy setting a model for the one who is lower. Most businesses and institutions model their organizations in this manner. The activity for the practicum I observed was to watch a video recording of a more experienced tutor tutoring a student. While the tutees were expected to critique their observation and see what tutoring techniques they could learn from the video tutor’s lesson, I also wonder if the choice in activity might be an influence of the expected value of knowledge and experience by Jo Ann Vogt. In other words, WTS values experience and demonstrates it by lots of peer teaching, even for the tutors.

I don’t mean to suggest all of the tutors are one hundred percent molded by the WTS “gods” to fit this job description. Most would find that to be “creepy.” Instead, individual tutors share common characteristics with one another which allow them to not only be effective tutors, but accepted members of the WTS community. I observed in my first field notes that the practicum students often performed quiet study skills without prompting. This demonstrates a common appreciation for academia and academic culture. Furthermore, the school setting may have reinforced these ideas. Power and experience and their place in the WTS tutorial cultural group are made evident in other ways including word choice from the WTS tutors. Emphasis placed upon “interactions,” “personal,” “ideas” and of course, “experience” when answering questions about WTS and other tutors instimates that these concepts resonate in the tutors’ understanding of their work. Something as mundane as furniture arrangement even suggests how WTS directors and tutors can manipulate power and perceptions of power within WTS. The roundtable opened the room for discussion of shared experiences, but the tables we work at during a normal tutorial in Ballantine certainly add a different atmosphere.

These observations really (continued on page 7)
Fantastic Five

Senior peer tutors reflect on their time at WTS as they prepare to graduate

Hometown: La Porte, IN
Major/Minor: English major, Germanic Studies, Comparative Literature, and History minors
Years tutoring? 2 years (minus semester abroad and plus semester of training—)
Plans after graduation? Pursing a career in publishing, I hope to be an editor. Also, graduate school in the near future, possibly.

How will your experience with WTS help you in the future? WTS has helped me to be a better critical reader of texts. It’s also helped me be a better communicator.

Hometown: Chesterton, IN
Major/Minor: Spanish and Lamp/Russian, Russian and Eastern European Studies, Political Science
Years tutoring? 2
Plans after graduation? I will be working for the Spanish government as a language and cultural assistant, teaching English in Seville.

How will your experience with WTS help you in the future? My experience at WTS has taught me to be patient and listen. These skills are important in friendships, relationships, and work, and especially important in a teaching situation. Work at WTS has helped me to understand how beneficial it is to focus on an exchange between parties.

Hometown: Scottsburg, Indiana
Major/Minor: Computer Science, B.S. with minors in Biology and Mathematics
Years tutoring? 3
Plans after graduation? Get my PhD in computer science researching compilers and programming languages at University of Michigan.

How will your experience with WTS help you in the future? An important part of research is communicating it with others. Many people in my field don’t have the skills to do that effectively, but working at WTS has helped me hone those skills.

Hometown: Minneapolis, MN
Major/Minor: Psychology and Lamp/Marketing
Years tutoring? 2 years
Plans after graduation? Backpacking Europe for 6 weeks, and then moving to Chicago to start as a Business Analyst in Strategy and Operations for Deloitte consulting.

How will your experience with WTS help you in the future? Definitely helps with listening skills and figuring out how to most efficiently and effectively help someone. Outside of WTS, these skills help attack any task by ferreting out the most crucial aspects of the situation and what needs to be done.

Hometown: Guilford, IN
Major/Minor: English
Years tutoring? One

How will your experience with WTS help you in the future? I do not yet know what my future holds, but it will likely involve teaching. If it does, then my time at WTS has certainly helped me. I have learned how to work with fellow students on their writing, and I have learned quite a bit about the sorts of barriers many students consistently face. As I look back on the tutoring I have done over the course of my year here I find a modest but very satisfying thread of memories, a collection of instances in which I do feel that I not only made a paper better, but also made a student into a better writer and— in the process—relieved some of their anxiety and torture. I’ve also learned the very real satisfaction one can derive from helping people to acquire or hone a worthwhile skill— it’s a good feeling.

Even if my future does not involve teaching or writing or human interaction (perhaps I will live alone in the mountains, shooting wild beasts and drinking wine and filling the stars with my lusty, echoing song nightly), I have at the very least met and connected with some truly remarkable people in my time at WTS— people who have, beyond their knowing, helped me through a grim time with their conversation and companionship.

R egardless, my time spent spying on others has reminded me that people watching will always be an interesting way of spending an afternoon. Now, I have the tools to make something of the practice.
Follow that old lady!

WTSer spends Spring Break 2010 in Tokyo, Japan

Shabrelle Pollock

After about 15 minutes of wandering down a narrow side street in Nikko, I realized we were lost. How this happened, I wasn’t quite sure, but I was sure that the cute gates we thought were entrances to temples were really just entrances to houses. In short: we were probably trespassing on private property which is pretty much illegal worldwide.

It was road maps, language barriers and cultural immersion. It was Spring Break 2010.

The trip was my first outside of the country. Selected as one of 16 students to be a part of the Indiana University School of Journalism International Public Relations course, I was given the chance to travel to Tokyo as real-world exposure to the topics studied in class. The course, lead by Professor Jim Bright, focuses on PR on an international scale, specifically in the East Asian countries where the field is making great strides.

In our class, we recognize that the world our generation will live and work in will be a global one. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that we develop some knowledge of cultures beyond our nation’s borders. It was this quest for cultural understanding—or “misunderstanding” as the case would be—that led my classmates and me off the main road and down an alley that met back up with the main road taking us directly to the Nikko National Park.

While bowing awkwardly before we were all able to tell her “Arigato!” for trespassing, she showed us an entrance to her yard, she began to ask several questions in Japanese that sounds suspiciously like “gaijin.” Instead of turning us in or reporting us, she showed us an alley that met back up with the main road taking us directly to the Nikko National Park. Despite being incapable of talking to her before, we were able to tell her “Arigato!” while bowing awkwardly before we continued to our destination.

Professor Bright always says that the most important word in “public relations” is “relations,” and I believe this idea speaks a great deal to our overall experience on the trip. While in Japan, we built relationships both of the professional and personal variety.

During the week, we visited several businesses and met with different professionals, learning about their experiences working in Japan. The stops included a tour through the Nissan Oppama Plant and Headquarters, dinner at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan, a visit to Kreab Gavin Anderson and an afternoon at the U.S. Embassy. Each presentation and conversation expanded our knowledge as future professionals. They also helped us understand Japan and East Asia are looking to us for their cues to the future, as examples of how our world is changing. It was reassuring to interact with them and see that they too understand, respected and embraced the differences between our cultures; as our future “colleagues,” they were prepared— as we were—for a more globalized society.

For people not in tune with the reality that different cultures have different values, it is all too easy to see things they don’t understand as silly or, even worse, wrong. The current saga of the Toyota crisis is a prime example of this. As we discussed in class and were reminded during our overall experience on the trip. As we discussed in class and were reminded during our trip was all about gaining cultural understanding while simultaneously building relationships.

Asakusa, home to Senso-ji, a famous Buddhist temple.
Fun facts about fellow tutors and WTS staff

Deborah Strickland
Here’s a fun game - two truths and a lie. Can you guess which ones of these three facts about Deborah is a lie?
- She holds dual citizenship, American and English.
- She was born in Saudi Arabia.
- She is a actually a bunny.

Jo Ann Vogt
JoNan the Grammarian once owned an opossum and currently drives a Smart Car. While she was in the movie Fahrenheit 911, the most interesting fun fact about her is that the two topics she knows most about are serial killers and traditional country music.

You can do what?!

Our WTS Alumni Directory

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On any given night...

What happens between tutorials, stays between tutorials

Tutors having a little fun in their downtime.