

BY OUR WTS

The Indiana University Writing Tutorial Services Alumni Newsletter

Writing Tutorial Services
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405

Overcoming Barriers

WTS tutor spends semester learning from his language barriers while witnessing how others deal with greater ones



Ben Smith standing on a landfill in the neighborhood of Nong Wang.

Ben Smith

In the Fall of 2010, I traveled to the Isaan (Northeast) region of Thailand for the semester to study development and the effect it was having on local self-sufficient farmers.

Throughout my time there, I had the opportunity to experience life in Thailand from many different vantage points, occasionally finding

myself spectator to a horror show of poverty and human rights violations.

I stayed with a variety of hosts who generously provided me brief access to their world: families crammed into dense, heavily-polluted city slums; villagers known locally as “scavengers” spending their time sifting knee-deep through city

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Image of the slum children.

landfills looking for items to sell on the side of the road; parents forced to bathe their children in water contaminated with, among other things, cyanide from a nearby mountain-top removal mine—in effect, enough images to leave me really disillusioned.

Of course, even in the worst conditions, I was presented with tremendous examples of humanity's more redemptive qualities, and experienced humbling encounters that allowed me an uncommonly

direct view of myself.

One of those moments, I've found, has given me insight into the task of tutoring, so I figure I might offer it to the rest of you.

When I first flew in to Thailand, I spent a couple of nights in Bangkok in a hotel on Khao Sarn Road, a tourist and backpacking Mecca where the average passerby is more likely to be English-speaking than Thai-speaking. My first taste of the country was decadent: a tour of the Thai Grand Palace grounds,

riverside dinners, late night drinking, a total sensory overload.

On day three, we were driven to a resort in the mountains of Leoi Province where the schedule said we were going to begin our language classes. This would be the site of my first true encounter with the Thai language, and unbeknownst to me during the van ride on the way there, I was about to suffer an enormous blow to my ego in the form of four hours a day of Thai language study—no English allowed.

Our teachers were good at what they did, and so we learned quickly as the semester progressed; still, the experience of the mountain resort, as I remember it, was unbearably stressful. A lot of the time I just sat there confused, looking around at the other students' faces to see if they understood what the teacher was saying. For a while nobody did, until one by one the other students started picking up words here and there, and I became progressively more isolated in my lack of comprehension.

To make matters worse, if we got a word wrong, we were scolded in front of everyone, or else the teachers

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 to us. Any comments on this issue or updates you wish to be included in upcoming issues may be directed to Shabrelle Pollock at byour-wts@indiana.edu

would make fun of us, roasting us in Thai and laughing hysterically at our poor pronunciations. One of the other students was from a Thai-speaking American family, so during lunch breaks she'd fill us in on the insults we'd received.

It was demoralizing, yes, but eventually I got used to it, and after a week in the mountains I had built up enough of a Thai vocabulary to speak to the kitchen staff at the resort about the food they were cooking, albeit like a toddler. I was starting to get confident.

The next item on the schedule after the resort would be a week-long homestay in the city of Khon Kaen. We boarded the vans, excited to meet our families and nervous about practicing our new conversational skills. When we arrived in the city, the vans split up and took us to different undisclosed locations. Some of the vans departed to affluent neighborhoods where the students stayed with the super-wealthy. My own van, however, ended up in the slums.

This was an intentional arrangement, a move on the part of the program directors to divide and conquer our student group, shock us into Thai culture and introduce us to the social and environmental issues that we would be studying.

Nong Wang, the neighborhood where I stayed, was an "illegal" settlement of former farmers who had been driven out of work by industrial agriculture and who couldn't afford normal housing in the city. The settlement was deemed illegal because it was located on state rail road property. The streets there were lined with Frito-Lay wrappers and broken glass, and across the road

from the houses was a large pond filled with human waste; because it was an illegal settlement, the city was unable to provide proper plumbing for the residents.

After a tour of the neighborhood, I was introduced to the family I'd be staying with, and as it turned out, my slight familiarity with the Thai language proved unhelpful: they spoke Laotian. This was going to be interesting.

For a week, I was completely incapable of interacting verbally. If I wanted to I could walk through the neighborhood shouting English, but like me trying to understand my teachers, the people would only hear a stream of unfamiliar syllables. It was like being an infant. It required me to pay more attention to non-verbal cues, like hand signals and facial expressions.

Eventually, though I never learned Laotian during that week, I did develop a close relationship with my hosts, to the point that for weeks afterwards I would receive incomprehensible late night calls from their children.

But when I was in that situation, I was desperate to communicate, and completely frustrated about my inability to connect with other humans. I'd been taking language for granted. I remember thinking to myself that this emotion may be a bigger part of my everyday experience than I previously imagined: it's the intense desire to express whatever it is that we have going on in our minds in order to not feel helpless and isolated from our environment.

It might not sound revelatory, but it was for me. I think of this whenever I tutor somebody (American or not) who is struggling to speak or write English. For one, I recognize that I also struggle everyday with language precision, and I know well how frustrating it is to not be able to communicate your perspective to others. Most important, I now recognize how fundamental our role is as tutors—it makes me feel good to know that I'm inching a person closer to the point where they can share their thoughts with others more completely.



Ben Smith with a resident of Nong Wang.

Seven/Eleven

The crew that provided tutees with luck and convenience



Leigh Hardy

Hometown: Lafayette, IN

Major/Minor: Speech & Hearing Sciences, Psychology

Years tutoring? 1

Plans after graduation?

This fall, I will attend Purdue University to get a Master's degree in Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences with a concentration in Speech Pathology. In the future, I hope to help people who have had strokes resolve any subsequent language impairments. After completing my Master's degree, I hope to work with this population in a hospital or rehabilitative care environment.

How will your experience with WTS help you in the future?

My experience at WTS has taught me more than I ever thought it would. Most important, it has taught me how to work with people who have very different experiences than I have had. Coming from a small high school where I had classes with the

same 50 people from kindergarten until senior year, attending Indiana University has certainly been a beneficial experience in that it helped me branch out from that small group. WTS, in particular, has given me the opportunity to work with people from all over the world, even if only in 25- or 50-minute increments. More than that, though, my experiences while working at WTS have improved my own writing such that I feel extremely prepared for any writing I may do in graduate school and in my career. Thanks for everything, WTS!



Meredith Wood

Hometown: Indianapolis, IN

Major/Minor: Political Science and History

Years tutoring? 2

Most memorable tutorial?

My most memorable tutorial was actually when I came to WTS as a tutee! I was writing a paper in my political theory class, and I was

beyond confused. I came in to WTS a frustrated and scared freshman, but the grad tutor gave me so many great suggestions and helped me to dramatically improve my paper. I'll never forget about how thankful I was when I got that A!

Plans after graduation?

After graduation, I will be spending the summer backpacking through Europe! I'm excited to see Paris and the Swiss Alps!

Words of wisdom?

Don't let a bad tutorial get you down. Even when you feel useless, you are probably helping that student more than you know. It's easy to appreciate being a tutor when you feel like you are making a real difference, but even when you don't feel it, you're still doing a great service!



Ben Smith

Hometown: Carmel, IN

Major/Minor: English with a

concentration in creative writing (I know, real practical).

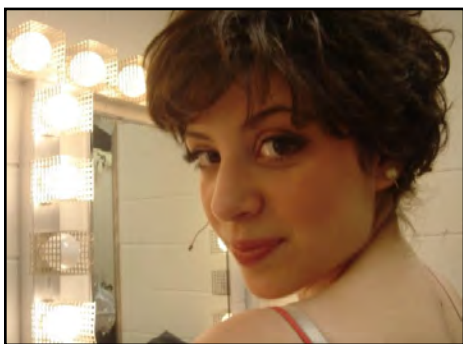
Years tutoring? 2.5

Plans after graduation?

I'll be managing the community-supported agriculture program for Stranger's Hill Organics, a farm a couple miles west of Bloomington—in other words, instead of spending all my time growing pale under the fluorescent lights in Ballantine, I'll be working outside in the sun every day on a beautiful farm in the hills. Get in touch with me if you want a weekly supply of local, organic vegetables!

Words of wisdom?

I don't know how much wisdom I have to offer, but here it goes. If you're like me, every day you think of something really interesting that you could do, but then you find yourself saying, "Eh, I'll wait until I graduate." This is a dumb way of thinking. Our lives would be a lot more interesting if we made it a point to actually do that stuff.



Claire Kruschke

Hometown: Bloomington, IN
Major/Minor: Sociology Major with Departmental Honors, LAMP Certificate, Public and Environmental Affairs Minor
Years tutoring? 2

Plans after graduation?

I will be spending the summer in Bloomington, continuing with my job at the IU Auditorium and taking some time to figure out my next steps. I hope to spend the next year or two traveling or working overseas (perhaps through the Peace Corps), then plan on returning to the States to attend graduate school for Sociology or Library and Information Science (or, perhaps something else entirely!).

How will your experience with WTS help you in the future?

Tutoring at WTS has taught me the power of choosing your words carefully and stating your ideas precisely. I have learned to critique my own work with a more discerning eye, address issues with others more carefully, and suggest changes delicately enough that sometimes you can make someone believe it was their own idea in the first place. I'm sure that all of these lessons will serve me well in the future.



Olivia Gershman

Hometown: Munster, IN
Major/Minor: Psychology BS/ Biology; Chemistry
Years tutoring? 1

Most memorable tutorial?

My most memorable tutorial occurred when a young man came to WTS because he was not doing as well as he wanted to on his biology lab reports. I was especially comfortable tutoring him, since I have written more lab reports in my college career than I care to remember. One of the most important aspects of a lab report is making sure each section includes exactly what it's supposed to, nothing more and nothing less. I made the rubric into a checklist, and we went through the student's lab report together, checking off an item when it was included in the correct section. If an item didn't get a check, the student knew he needed to make revisions to include it. By the end of the tutorial, the checklist had turned into a sort of game, where the student was getting excited and giving me a high five every time he was able to check a box. This "game" helped the student to understand the importance of organization in a lab report, and I was especially happy to see that in the following tutorials I had with this student, he was able to check more and more boxes.

Plans after graduation?

After four years of hard work during my undergraduate education, I was able to gain acceptance to Indiana University School of Dentistry. I will be moving to Indianapolis and starting dental school this summer. The program lasts four years, and I will earn a D.D.S. degree. After becoming a doctor, I may choose to specialize within the field of dentistry, but that remains to be decided.

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Shabrelle Pollock

Hometown: Jeffersonville, IN
Major/Minor: Journalism/
 Marketing
Years tutoring? 3

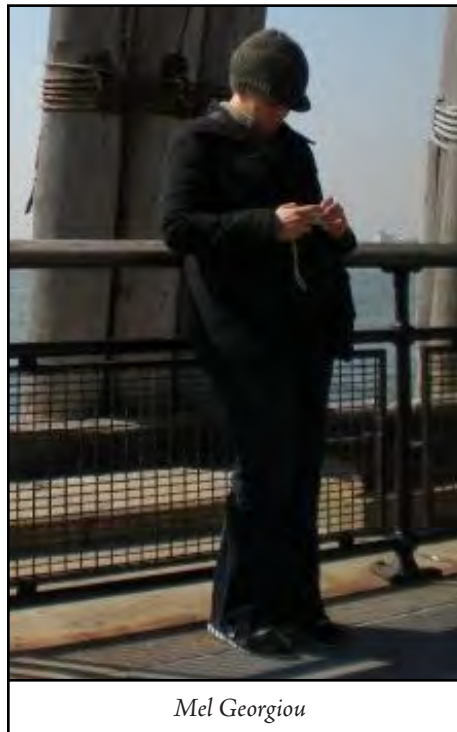
How will your experience with WTS help you in the future?

Working at WTS has given me the chance to meet so many incredible people— both the ones that I've tutored and those that I've worked with. I have thoroughly enjoyed the past three years here. Perhaps above all else, I believe the communication skills I've developed as a tutor will serve me well in the future. Good tutors are more than just walking "writing experts;" they are effective communicators. I feel that it is not a coincidence that regardless what field you enter once in the workforce, individuals that communicate effectively are highly valued. My time at WTS has given me this edge.

Words of wisdom?

Sit back and enjoy the ride. When I hear people say of a time period in their lives that "Those were the best years," I feel bad for them. I believe

you should cherish each moment for what it is and the experience it is affording you. Just because certain points in your life are spent doing different things than you will at other points doesn't make a particular time better or worse. You should appreciate each experience you have in life for what it brings you and rejoice in the fact that you were granted it. Live in the moment and make the most out of each moment.



Mel Georgiou

Hometown: Saint John, IN
Major/ Minor: English/Theatre and
 Drama
Years tutoring? 2

Most memorable tutorial?

One of my favorite recent moments was when a student, after an hour of what seemed like nothing but struggle, turned to me and said the following: "Wow. Have you ever thought of being a teacher? That was really, really helpful. Thank you!"

At the time, I could only

thank them for coming to the tutorial. I was pleased with how the student's unsolicited comments affirmed why I've enjoyed being a tutor so much. I may not become a teacher after graduation; however, I think that anyone who has the knowledge and skills to teach or tutor someone else should seek that reaffirmation you can only get from helping another person in need.

How will your experience with WTS help you in the future?

I've never had a job where the byline or slogan of the organization actually guided the employees and bolstered the strength of the group. I will never underestimate just how being "friendly and helpful" can open so many different opportunities. Maybe being friendly seems like a no brainer, but I've had such good practice getting students through tough moments just by remaining as kind and helpful as possible.



Amanda Mast

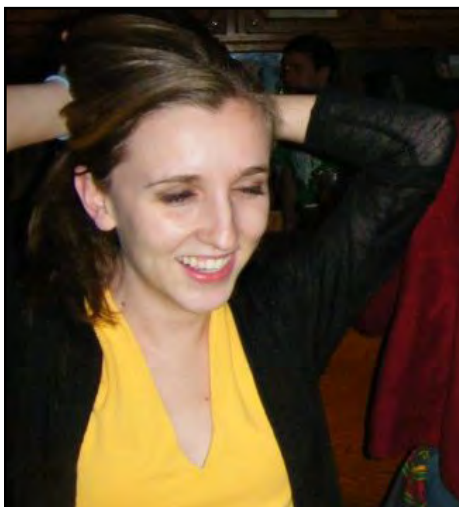
Hometown: Fort Wayne, IN
Major/Minor: double major in
 English (Concentration in Creative
 Writing), French
Years tutoring? 2

Plans after graduation?

I'm doing everything in my power to move out to Colorado for a year, and then I'd like to teach abroad—either somewhere in Asia, or again in France. And, in an undefined number of years (probably 2-3), I'd like to get my MFA in poetry. And from there, I'm open to however things happen in life!

Words of wisdom?

Take full advantage of every situation you're in. No matter where you are or where you're living or what you're doing in life, try to see the best of it, because there's something to be learned and gained from all of your experiences. And on a completely unrelated note, never forget: The cake is a lie.



Nancy Coner

Hometown: Trafalgar, IN
Major/Minor: English and Communications & Culture Major
Years tutoring? 1

Most memorable tutorial?

The most memorable tutorial I've had transpired because of a really memorable assignment.

The tutee had to write a business communication to one of his team members telling them why they were being fired from the group. The professor would be the only person to see it. I just thought it was a very sneaky, kind of underhanded, but very cool assignment.

How will your experience with WTS help you in the future?

Tutoring at WTS has helped me with my communication skills. Interacting with all sorts of people working on very different assignments means that I have to adapt my way of conveying information to fit each scenario. It has helped me to think on my feet. And, of course, it's been a great help to my verbal fluency. I think about how my words are employed, rather than doing it merely intuitively.



Rachel Saltgaver

Hometown: Greenwood, IN
Major/Minor: Journalism/Marketing
Years tutoring? 1

Plans after graduation?

I will be working as a Public Relations Intern at Indiana Farm Bureau Inc. in downtown Indy for the summer. I am extremely excited to begin this next chapter and hope that I can get the most out of the internship.

How will your experience with WTS help you in the future?

My experience with WTS has helped me in numerous ways besides improving my reading and writing. The constant face-to-face interaction with other people has definitely helped me learn to work with others and develop my communication skills, which are crucial for any type of job. WTS has also helped me learn how to "think on my toes." As a tutor, you never know how a tutorial will go, or what a tutee will ask, so it really helps you think quickly and efficiently.



Lauren James

Hometown: Terre Haute, IN
Major/Minor: English major with minors in history and Latin
Years tutoring? 1

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Running the World of WTS

A Q&A with WTS Site Manager Anita Shields

Mel Georgiou

MELISSA: Where are you from?

ANITA: I grew up in Bloomington, IN. And I'm still in Bloomington, IN. And I love it. I love traveling and seeing other places, but I love coming back home.

MELISSA: Where have you traveled to?

ANITA: I've been to Spain... I've been to New York... to actually see one of my previous tutors. I've been to Florida, Talladega... I mean, Alabama – stuff like that. But I have not been West. I have a few ex-tutors that live out West and I plan on visiting them. They've been wanting me to come.

MELISSA: What were past jobs you had before coming to WTS? Can you give a brief history of how those jobs went?

ANITA: Before I came to IU, I worked for the Department of Corrections. [laughter] I know, imagine that! It was a work-release center. So, when the people, the "offenders," got to the last six months of their sentence they went to a work-release center. And that was interesting. And then I came to IU. And I actually felt more safe at the work release center... because the first week I worked at IU... somebody jumped off the building.

MELISSA: Really? Of Ballantine?

ANITA: Of Ballantine, yes. I worked in the English Department for five years before coming [to WTS]. I was friends with Kathy Smith and Laura Plummer from the English Department. And then I saw Kathy

Smith at the grocery store one day and she told me that her husband, Ray, was looking for a secretary. So, I applied and got it! And I've been here ever since.

MELISSA: Beyond a particular title... Actually, what is your particular title for this job?

ANITA: I am the WTS Site Manager.

MELISSA: What does that title entail? What would be the official description of your job?

ANITA: I think the majority of my responsibilities would be to schedule... the tutors, not the students. Schedule tutors, purchasing, payroll, and I'm here for morale. [laughter] You understand that last one?

MELISSA: Oh, yes. Definitely. Now, how would you describe your job?

ANITA: I think my job is bittersweet. It's sweet because I get to meet all these great people and I become really close to them. And then, they move away! And get real jobs! To different states and different countries... The good part about that is I can go and see quite a few of them. So... whoever is reading this invite me to visit where you are!

MELISSA: What makes a job at WTS (or at IU) different from any other job?

ANITA: You mean on campus?

MELISSA: On campus or any other job you've had.

ANITA: I'll compare this job to the English Department. In the English Department we had cubicles and... there were so many secretaries in one room so if one secretary wanted to



Anita Shields

take a break they all wanted to take a break. If one person got a raise, they ALL wanted a raise.

At Writing Tutorial Services, I'm the only staff member. So, I'm kinda spoiled. And I like that. I work for really good people that actually care about me and I care about them and we're friends. That's hard to find.

MELISSA: That's very true. That's very hard to find in a job. It's actually one of the reasons I really enjoy being a tutor here.

So, since you're the staff member and you're also on the forefront of knowing the changes that are going on at WTS before the tutors will really know... what are some changes that are upcoming?

ANITA: Well, WTS has been in Ballantine Hall since the beginning of time. And now, under new administration we are actually pulling out of Ballantine and heading to the Wells Library. So, we're not sure if it's

going to be super busy all the time or people aren't going to be able to find us! But, it's an adventure and I'm... an adventurous person!

MELISSA: What would be the ideal space, you think, for WTS? We are moving to the Wells Library... but can you think of a better place for WTS on the Bloomington campus?

ANITA: I think it would be better if it were a little more private to give students the confidentiality that they need. And myself! I'd like for my director and co-director... whatever her title is now. They changed her title. I'd like them to be in one office... with separate offices, of course, not just in one big room. It would be nice to all be together.

MELISSA: Do you think that not having that ideal space affects how WTS is operating right now?

ANITA: I don't think so. I think it would just be the icing on the cake. I mean, I could run WTS in my sleep, but it takes a team. And it's a lot more enjoyable to have everybody. We have a lot of fun here.

MELISSA: Yes we do. Actually, I'm really looking forward to the party on Friday.

ANITA: Oh, me too.

MELISSA: What do you think is the function of WTS at IU? Or maybe another way to phrase this would be... why should WTS remain on the IU campus?

ANITA: I think WTS helps the professors. And I think it helps the students. The professors send their students to us to make sure the student is following the assignment, which makes it easier on them. We teach students grammar rules, which also makes things easier on the professor.

It helps the student because, one of these days, they're going to be out in the real world, at a job, and they're going to remember what WTS taught them. That's what I hope for that when a student comes to WTS they don't just improve that paper, you want that too, right?

MELISSA: Right.

ANITA: I want them to become

better writers for the future. Because, one of these days, they won't have us there explaining everything. They're going to have to remember what we taught them along the way.

MELISSA: This was asked by another WTS tutor: What changes have you seen in WTS tutors over the years? Or consistencies?

ANITA: When I first started, it seemed like the tutors we had... we hung out more. It seems like, either I'm getting older or the tutors are getting younger. I'm not sure. [laughter] It just seems like we don't really hang out. I mean, people used to sit around my desk and talk and stuff like that. We still do somewhat. I don't know how to answer this question...

MELISSA: It's fine. It's just meant to spur conversation.

ANITA: I have seen the changes in administration also kind of put a strain on the staff because we have fewer tutors and we're more busy and we don't have time to sit around and talk that much and get to know each other as well. But we still manage to do that every once in a while.

MELISSA: Are there traits that you think tutors, in general, have?

ANITA: WTS Tutors need to be friendly and helpful. I think deep inside they're actually good people who want to help.

MELISSA: But outside we're just grumpy and cranky? [laughter]

ANITA: That I don't know...

MELISSA: My last question is a similar question that has to do with the clientele we serve, the students. Do you see changes in the students? Have you seen changes in the students from when you started working?



Anita working at her desk at WTS.

ANITA (continued from page 9)

ANITA: Yes. When I first started working at WTS, it seemed like students appreciated coming in, they wanted to learn and they would keep coming back to improve their writing. It seems like in the society we have now it's so fast paced that they want to drop their paper off; they want online tutoring instead of having the one-on-one contact. Which... hopefully we won't go to that online stuff because I like one on one. I just think its beneficial to everybody to be able to see the paper and have a conversation back and forth between a tutor and the student.

MELISSA: That's the end of my questions. Do you have any additional things you would like to say.

ANITA: Yes.

MELISSA: Oh?

ANITA: I would like to say something about my new name.

MELISSA: Oh, right! So. Anita. Do you want to tell me about your new name?

ANITA: [laughter] Actually, it's my old new name. I am now Anita Shields, as I was when I was born. So, if you guys want to find me on Facebook – you'll have to look up Anita Shields. That's all I got to say about that.

MELISSA: OK! I think that will be a great way to end the interview. Thank you, Anita!

ANITA: No problem.

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 this newsletter and have the alum email us at byourwts@indiana.edu.

Thanks!

LAUREN (cont'd from page 7)**Plans after graduation?**

The Master of the Arts Program in the Humanities (MAPH) at the University of Chicago. After that, I will probably work for a while—hopefully in a field connected to my major!—and then consider PhD programs or jobs in publishing. It's a scarily open future, but I'm excited.

Words of wisdom?

For tutoring, always try to put yourself in the tutee's shoes and imagine how nerve-wracking it can be to have your paper in someone else's hands: so be kind. For school in general—I'm not sure. I've never taken any of my own advice before! Try hard, talk to your professors, study, do your papers in advance—and again, be kind, in this case to yourself. Don't beat yourself up about a bad grade or a bad tutorial—they happen to everyone.

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Getting Social

Tutor uses skills from WTS to help host a social media conference

Rachel Saltgaver

As a WTS tutor, I have had the privilege of working with students from other disciplines and backgrounds. My experience working with other disciplines has helped me tremendously outside of WTS, especially in this past year.

This school year, I decided to apply for a director's position for IU's chapter of Public Relations Student Society of America. To my delight, I was named the hospitality director for the regional conference that our chapter was hosting. As a journalism major with a concentration in PR, I knew this would be an important thing for me to be a part of, but I didn't realize how much I would be using my skills from WTS in planning the event.

My job with WTS has also allowed me to work with professionals and students, which has helped me develop communication skills with both as well. Our PR event invited numerous professionals to come and speak about the role of social media in journalism and businesses. We also invited students from various schools across the Midwest to attend. I continuously had to communicate with both groups before and during the conference. My experience at WTS has allowed me to develop effective communication skills with these



Banner from PRSA "Get Social" Conference.

groups, and it also allowed me to feel extremely comfortable talking to people I had never met before.

The big weekend came and thankfully all the hard work paid off. I met with numerous professionals and other students from different universities. Just as in working at WTS, I really appreciated the chance I had to meet with people that brought different ideas, theories, and opinions to the group.

Since the topic of the conference was social media I began to wonder: How can WTS utilize social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter? While I believe the one-on-one conferences are extremely beneficial, I also think that implementing social media could help WTS grow and help students 24 hours a day. College students really

engage with social media. If WTS could put quick tips and helpful hints for students to easily access while they are working on papers, it could enhance the writing experience.

As I was told at the conference, one of the best skills for someone to have is the ability to write well. I'm thankful for the experience that I've had with WTS and the skills it has given me. As I have already learned, they will be something that I will always be able to use.

So, with that I'll leave you with some words of advice from one of the conference's speakers, Michael Herman: "Value people and use things; do not use people and value things." So writers (and tutors) use your skills and value the people that you get the chance to work with.