

May 31, 2010

Christine Pyle  
9575 N. Parkview Dr.  
Baton Rouge, LA 70815

Dear Chancellor Martin:

I recently was made aware that the LSU Writing Center was slated for closure. As a current Writing Center tutor, I was alarmed—not for the sake of my job but because I have observed firsthand the Center's services to a wide range of LSU students. The Writing Center is the unique source of trained, individualized writing tutoring at LSU. Further, I believe that future students deserve the fulfilling experience and career preparation I have gained as a tutor. Therefore, I strongly urge you to reconsider your decision.

During my two years as tutor, I have encountered the full spectrum of students who come to the Writing Center. I recall, for instance, the Chinese PhD candidate who frequented the Center last summer, trying to capture the nuances of English in her geography dissertation. There was the mother of four who had not written a research paper in ten years; she needed encouragement and practical pointers. I remember the earnest senior who wanted to perfect his medical school personal statement. And there were the sophomore twins who scheduled back-to-back sessions for their literature papers—one sister gained confidence with a clear outline, and the other refined her argument. Whether the assignment is for communication studies, political science, chemistry, history, engineering, art history, or a job application, all kinds of LSU students continue to bring their writing questions to B-18 Coates.

I am particularly concerned about two student populations. First, many international students have come to regard the Writing Center as a home within LSU, a safe place to hone their English skills. They come regularly, make great progress in confidence and accuracy, and express heartfelt gratitude for this resource. Second, students in the general education English courses, 1001 and 2000, particularly depend on the Writing Center. Many students in these courses have diligently returned to us for aid with each assignment. I have worked with countless uncertain freshmen, as well as seniors in their last writing courses. Whether they are earnest students striving to perfect each paper or discouraged students who just want to make the grade, these writers find encouragement and constructive criticism to help them through writers' block.

While the Writing Center exists to aid students, the benefits to tutors are just as real. Peer tutoring, prefaced by a semester of extensive training, provides accelerated leadership training and interpersonal skills. When I entered tutor training class, I was a freshman accustomed to being taught. After just a semester as a tutor, I began to acquire confidence in leading individual conferences. In addition, exposure to writing in multiple disciplines has enhanced my appreciation of other fields and the multi-faceted role of words. While facilitating others' learning, I discovered an affinity for teaching, which may lead me further in academia. My work with LSU international students applies to my immediate plans: teach English as a second language. Most importantly, I find great fulfillment in providing a valuable service to fellow students: writing skills that will give them a voice to share their accomplishments and their message with the world.

Tutoring others has revolutionized my own writing process. I often set a thirty-minute “appointment” with myself. I diagnose my paper’s problems and set goals for the session. I ask myself questions that I would ask a student: “How would you summarize this paragraph in a few words?” or “What is the main point of your paper?” As a result, my writing process is more efficient and my revision more in-depth. These are invaluable skills for any English major or aspiring writer.

Writing allows a student to develop thoughts at a deeper level, cement learning, and express his discoveries, but these benefits are not gained by simply putting pen to paper. Revision is the crucial step to development of critical thinking and effective communication. Writing a first draft is like discovering an ancient ruin: one sees the broad outlines of the edifice and hints of the mysteries within. The paper is not ready to be submitted to a teacher, however, with its “crumbling” paragraphs and its wordy, “dust-covered” interior. In revision, a writer surveys the site and makes goals for its renovation. At times, the draft is unstable and needs a foundational overhaul. Then, the satisfying work begins: rebuilding topic sentences, buttressing weak transitions and, at last, polishing a finished product. After the rubble of unnecessary thoughts has been removed, the renovated structure gleams with sparkling descriptions and the rich hues of subtle thought.

Revision is an in-depth process best navigated with one-on-one support. While general education English courses provide valuable writing instruction and assignments, there is something missing. Most students need extra guidance, and all writers benefit from one-on-one consultations. The Writing Center has helped many LSU students, myself included, push through the hard work of revision to become better writers. There is no other LSU institution which can currently fill this need.

I will enter my third year of tutoring this fall. Why have I remained with the Writing Center for so long? I have chosen this job over other university opportunities, because I have carefully observed its positive effect on both tutors and student writers. I fully believe in the Center’s mission to make better writers through individual consultation. Further, I am convinced that the Center’s literacy support is crucial not only to English courses, but to myriad writing situations across the university. Current and future tutors and students will thank LSU for continuing the rich legacy of the Writing Center.

Sincerely,

Christine Pyle