"The Not-So-Brief Life and Times of the UH Writing Mentors Program"

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This panel will have two parts.

In the first, I will give you a history--insofar as I know it--of supplemental writing instruction for students in the UH-Mānoa first-year writing courses for the last four decades. In the second part of our panel, Matt Ito will discuss his experience being a mentor this academic year in the current version of this supplemental instruction for FYW students.

The UH Writing Mentor Program is in its tenth year. For the first four years, it was brilliantly administered by its founder, my now-retired colleague Professor Jim Henry. He was more than ably assisted by Holly Bruland, whose dissertation for the Ph.D. that she got from our department was based on their experiences setting up and running the program. I took over the program for the next three years, followed by my colleagues Professor Georganne Nordstrom for a year and then Professor Daphne Desser last year. Our new colleague, Professor Sarah Allen (who is presenting at this Symposium and who was also on the Symposium Planning Committee), will direct the program next year at the start of its second decade.

OK, on to the details.

When I got here in 1980, students did have to take ENG 100 in order to graduate. However, if they received a D in ENG 100, they had to take an additional course--ENG 109--in order to graduate. While there was a certain logic to this, it was also the case that many students got that D in ENG 100 not because of problems with their writing but because of problems with their time management at the end of their sometimes first semester in college.

There had to be a better way; so, during the 1980s, Mānoa instituted a placement test. (This test, by the way, became a nationally recognized model: it asked students to write two essays, one based on a prompt asking for a response to a text, the other based on a prompt asking for a discussion of a personal experience. Students had five hours to write the two essays: three hours in the morning, a lunch break, then two hours in the afternoon for revision.) Originally, this test stratified students into four tiers: those performing well were placed into ENG 100A (honors); those performing as expected were placed into ENG 100; those performing slightly below expected were placed into ENG 101; and those performing below expectations were placed into ENG 22 (and they had to take the course at a community college).

It is ENG 101 that concerns us, although it is also the case that students placed into ENG 101 were mainstreamed into an ENG 100 section. Such sections, then, had 15 ENG 100 students and 5 ENG 101 students. The ENG 101 students were required to participate in supplemental writing instruction provided by modestly paid undergraduate peer tutors: the undergraduate peer tutor met with her or his five ENG 101 students once a week for an hour as a group and also once a week for a half hour with each ENG 101 student individually. (Supposedly, the only people who

knew about the ENG 101 students were the students themselves, the teacher, and the 101 peer tutor.)

Training for the undergraduate peer tutors was provided by ENG 405 (Teaching Composition), a course that they were required to take as they were tutoring. (I taught that course a number of times. It was the perfect teaching situation: students were learning things in class and then applying what they learned to their tutees immediately.)

Eventually, we added to the pool of undergraduate students providing ENG 101 peer tutoring the Ph.D. students in the Mānoa English Department who were also graduate assistants. This allowed these doctoral students not just to observe a regular faculty member teaching ENG 100 (and ENG 101) for an entire semester but also to meet with FYW students outside of class, both of which helped these doctoral students when they were teaching their own ENG 100 (and sometimes ENG 101) classes the very next semester.

As already mentioned, the UH Writing Mentor Program came into existence nine years ago. Initially, it was funded by the UHM Chancellor; after four years, funding was then taken over by the Dean of the College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature. Also initially, the program was robust in size: 15 or so mentors in the fall (ten quarter-time Master's students + the five Ph.D. GAs); the 10 quarter-time mentors in the spring. Unfortunately, the program is no longer so robust. A couple of years ago, we had to change the way the Ph.D. GAs were trained to teach FYW, meaning that they could no longer be mentors; we also trimmed the number of quarter-time master's students from ten to six, which is where it stands now (so Matt is one of just six mentors this academic year).

For a while, there was overlap: we had ENG 100/101 sections with undergraduate peer tutors providing the supplemental writing instruction as well as graduate students doing the same.

But a few years back, we deep-sixed the Placement Exam. We decided that it wasn't "cost-effective" to use a very expensive placement apparatus to separate out maybe 100 students for placement into ENG 1001. (We'd also lost two of the original four tiers: placement into ENG 100A became the *kuleana* of the Honors Programs; and we no longer placed students into ENG 22). After a bit, we then deep-sixed ENG 101 entirely (we had been using SAT/ACT scores for that placement, which we could do because we had reliable correlations between those scores and the scores resulting from our Placement Exam.)

The penultimate part of this history of supplemental writing instruction at Mānoa is that, rather than working with individual FYW sections, the undergraduate peer tutors now work in the English Department's Writing Center.

Finally, then, this is where we stand today. Six master's students work with all of the students in the section of ENG 100 whose teacher has asked to work with a mentor.

For details about what these mentors are asked to do, here's the URL for the mentor job description as written by Jim Henry: