

QATAR TESOL NEWS

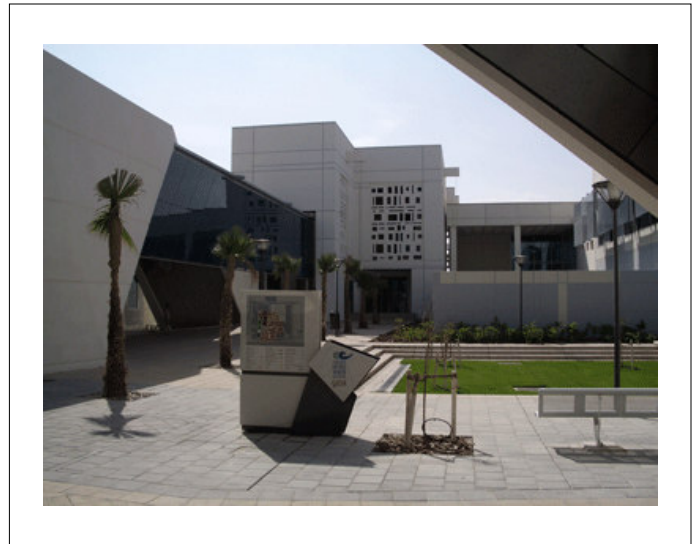
THE SECOND QATAR TESOL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The Second Annual Qatar TESOL International Conference will take place at the College of the North Atlantic (CNA-Q) on April 13-14, 2007 (Friday and Saturday). The theme is *Challenges and Solutions in ELT*.

Stephen Bax of Canterbury Christ Church University is the Plenary Speaker sponsored by the British Council in Doha. Bax has extensive experience in Arabic-speaking cultures. He speaks Arabic as well as Spanish and French.

Dr. Mohammed Abbas Ali of Bahrain is the second Plenary Speaker. Dr. Abbas Ali is the EFL Curriculum Specialist in the Directorate of Curricula for the Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Sue Sroda of Murray State University, Kentucky, is the third Plenary Speaker. She is



College of the North Atlantic-Qatar hosts the Second Annual Qatar TESOL International Conference

sponsored by the State Department Specialist Program through the Regional English Language Officer (RELO), Rebecca Smoak, in Bahrain.

Sessions are organized ac-

cording to strands again this year with the IT strand proving to be the most popular.

For the most up-to-date schedule, check the Qatar TESOL website at www.qatartesol.org.

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HOYA ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM (HELP) INITIATED AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

The Hoya English Language Program (HELP) was initiated at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar in the fall of 2006.

The needs of the local community as well as the volunteer interests of Georgetown stu-

dents were assessed. A team of two staff members, a professor and a freshman student proposed the HELP initiative to Group 4 Security, the private company contracted to secure the Education City campus.

Six members of the class of

2009 volunteered as educators. After attending a week-end training session, the educators were each assigned a class of fifteen learners. During a six week period, each class met a total of five times for one hour sessions. Certificates were awarded to participants.

QATAR UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION PRESENTED ELT MINI-CONFERENCE

Qatar University Foundation Unit presented a three-day ELT Mini-Conference from February 6-8th, Wednesday through Thursday. The theme was *Transitions in Teaching*.

A panel of educators and stu-



Qatar University ELT instructors discuss issues in workshop.

dent teachers kicked off the mini-conference with a panel entitled, "Nonnative English Speaking Teachers' English Language Needs." Dr. Zohreh

Eslami, Assistant Professor of ESL Education in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture in the College of Education at Texas A & M University in College Station began the session.

Eslami addressed several issues including the language proficiency of NNESTs and some strategies that can be used to develop their English language proficiency.

Dr. R. Malatesha (Malt) Joshi is a professor of literacy education at Texas A & M University where he teaches courses and conducts research on assessment and intervention of reading and spelling difficulties, research in literacy, and literacy and orthography.

Malatesha talked about the language-related issues he has observed among the pre-service teachers such as spelling and literacy issues.

The students on the panel discussed what they learned at the English Foundation Unit and how that increased knowledge and skill helped them prepare for their future positions as English language teachers in Qatari schools.

Almost 50 sessions were scheduled. IT workshops were so popular that participants had to reserve a seat in advance.

Dr. Mohammed Abbas Ali concluded the three-day event with the Plenary entitled, *Creating a Collaborative English Department Culture*.

"Written directions serve as a reference for students to read . . . and save the teacher from repeating . . ."

TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR STUDENTS ON TASK BY ALICIA CUNDELL

Quick Guide:

Key Words: Classroom management

Learner English Level: High Beginner through Advanced

Learner Maturity: Junior High through Adult

Do you ever wonder why your students do not do what you ask them to? Do you ever see your students sitting and staring at an empty page with blank looks on their faces when they should be working on the task at hand? Do you have students who race to finish the task and then begin talking and disrupting the class? Very often when students are not on task, it is for one of the following reasons:

1. They do not know what they are supposed to be doing
2. They do not understand how to do it, or
3. They have finished the assigned task and have nothing else to do.

Here are a few tips for teachers to give students the tools to stay focused and busy.

Tip #1. No matter how simple the instructions are, write them on the board.

Even native speakers sometimes have difficulty following verbal instructions in their own language. When we write instructions down, we take the time to think carefully about how to word things clearly, often using fewer words; this in turn makes written instructions easier to follow. Written directions also serve as a reference for students to read and re-read for themselves and save the teacher from repeating instructions.

Cont on page 4.



Alicia Cundell

THE TAMUQ WRITING CENTER: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES BY DOUGLAS MCPHERSON, CECELIA WATSON, AND JOSEPH WILLIAMS

The Technical Communications Center (TCC) opened its doors in August, 2006 with the mission to provide writing support to the engineering students at Texas A & M University at Qaar.

Fall 2006 was the TCC's first semester as a fully functioning entity. With a plethora of activities to choose from, students responded well to the TCC's non-threatening environment, while working individually or collectively. The records document that almost half of the students enrolled at TAMUQ visited the TCC at least once, with many students visiting even twice a

week.

Visitors to the TCC this past autumn chose among a number of options: individual tutoring sessions, workshops, computer-assisted language learning activities (CALL) or the writing studio (independent work on writing assignments with access to tutors for advice as needed).

Tutoring sessions provided one-on-one contact in order to address student writing in various forms, from English papers to PowerPoint slides to science or engineering pro-



Douglas McPherson Cecelia Watson and Joseph Williams in the Writing Center.

jects. Workshops were intended to increase student prowess in academic skills like research and documentation.
Cont on p. 5.

Kanakam Debaguptapu is the winner of the Teaching Tip Contest, supported by Macmillan Publishers. He receives a copy of the book, Straightforward along with Jim Scrivener's Teacher's Tips deck of cards.

MEMO WRITING: A TEACHING TIP FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION BY KANAKAM DEVAGUPTAPU

Quick Guide:

Key Words: Memo writing skills

Learner English Level: Upper Intermediate

Learner Maturity Level: Adult

Preparation Time: 30 minutes to select correspondence and copy (students); 10 minutes to plan and set up classroom (teacher)

Activity Time: 40 minutes

This memo writing class proved very successful and the students were quite active working in groups.

Learning Objectives:

- Students are conversant with the language and organization of memos
- Students draft a memo with ease and skill.

The three steps involved in the activity are; reflection, negotiation and collaboration.

Step 1, Reflection: In the lesson preceding the memo writing session, students brought several copies of official and personal emails, faxes,



Kanakam Debaguptapu introducing the lesson on memo writing to his Business Communication class.

memos. The language, style, layout and content of the different types of correspondence were discussed and analyzed in class.

Next, the material was distributed in random order among the student groups of three (3) students. Fifteen minutes time was given to the small

groups to note the similarities and differences among the various types of communication that they were analyzing. The teacher walked among the groups to monitor the discussion. Awareness of the distinctiveness of the memo writing style increased in the small groups

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TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR STUDENTS ON TASK BY ALICIA CUNDELL *CONT FROM P3*

Tip #2. Check that students understand the task before they start.

Checking that students understand **before** they start means that no time is wasted in the class; students can get straight to the task. A good way to do this is to ask concept-checking questions, which are questions posed to the students about how to complete the task. For example, I might ask my students the following questions after assigning a letter-writing task:

- Who are you writing the letter to? (open-ended question)
- Are you working along or with a partner? (choice of answers)
- Will this assignment be graded? (yes/no question)

Tip #3. Keep a place on the board to write the task at hand.

I always have a section on the board that says, "Now," where I write the task we are working on at any given time. Even if it is a whole class activity, it means that students

who do not hear the page number or who come in late know exactly which page to turn to without disturbing other students. *Example: Now: Reading "The Climate Train," p. 118.*

Tip #4. Let students know what comes next.

In any given class, students work at different paces. I always want to give enough time for the slower students to complete the task, but I also want to keep the quicker ones focused and quiet so as not to disturb the others. So I write "Later" on the board when they have finished. Thus, they will stay focused on the lesson and not disrupt the class. *Example: Later: Answer questions #1-5 about the reading, p. 119.*

Tip #5. Always have an extra task ready for students who finish quickly.

There are always students who race to finish all the tasks. When they have nothing to do, they usually start distracting the other students from completing their activity. Having an extension task above and beyond what you have planned for the lesson keeps them from disturbing the others.

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*The 42nd Annual
TESOL, Inc.
International
Convention,
New York City,
April 2-5, 2008*

MEMO WRITING: A TEACHING TIP FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION BY KANAKAM DEVAGUPTAPU *CONT FROM PAGE 3.*

groups. The students processed their learning, monitored their progress and set the goal of writing a well-structured memo.

Step 2, Negotiation: Once students understood their roles and responsibilities as a group, they quickly shared the content and knowledge and arrived at their learning goal. Working in groups made the students understand their vital role in their own learning. They used their active listening, questioning and discussion skills. The content structure motivated the students to work actively in their group and to move from one stage of the learning process to the other enthusiastically and effortlessly.

Thus, by the time that the students had identified the main differences between a memo and other forms of correspondence, they were conversant with the structure of a memo and the

language skills required to write one.

Step 3, Collaboration: Each group wrote their memo on an overhead transparency to present to the class. Feedback was given by the class members. This activity enabled the students to increase their language skills through social interaction; they listened, took turns, solved problems, made eye contact and communicated to clarify or elaborate.

Teacher Observation: This activity, based on sound teaching methodology, resulted in effective student responses; the students learned easily and automatically. Students were actually enthusiastic about the homework which was to write a memo communicating the manager's directive to the company employees about the usage of company cars.

THE TAMUQ WRITING CENTER: SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES

BY
DOUGLAS MCPHERSON, CECELIA WATSON, AND JOSEPH
WILLIAMS *CONT FROM P 3.*

CALL activities attempted to help clarify student writing issues via grammar software and instructor facilitation. In addition, the TCC sponsored writing workshops for TAMUQ staff that focused on communication issues crucial to the TAMUQ workplace.

In four months' time, the TCC staff has developed a comprehensive and growing website (<http://www.qatar.tamu.edu/tcc>) and an in-house library of resources focused primarily on writing in engineering with an emphasis on ESL. In cooperation with engineering faculty, we developed instructional materials, including guidelines, checklists, instruction sets and sample documents. To enhance the CALL capabilities, the TCC has purchased a number of powerful computer-based language tools as well as a typing tutorial for students to improve their key-boarding abilities.

Though the center is still quite young, the TCC team has learned a great deal about setting up and operating a writing center. Here are some of the keys to success as well as the challenges faced in three major areas: Management and Organization, Individual Tutoring, and CALL.

Management and Organization of the Writing Center

What works!

√ **Establishing and maintaining administrative support.** To be successful, a writing center must have strong and on-going support for its mission from the institutional administration. Administrators must value what the writing center does and be willing to allocate re-

sources and space to make the writing center work.

√ **Finding a good location.** A good location for a writing center is at the intersection of lots of student traffic. This provides good visibility and allows students to drop in to make an appointment or ask a quick question.

√ **Creating a warm and comfortable environment.** Writing centers are traditionally safe havens where students can seek help and take communication risks without worrying about grades or evaluations. The physical space should contribute to this welcoming and relaxed atmosphere. Out student receptionists have added immeasurably to the friendly ambience staff want to create.

√ **Providing an orderly appointment and reporting process.** An on-line appointment system that is easy for the students to access and allows staff to record comments on individual tutoring sessions as well as trace overall center usage is essential. This system also provides good data reports are required by the administration on what is done.

√ **Promoting the services.** Be sure to invest time and money before the center opens to develop a visual identity—a logo, posters, banners, promotional materials like pads and pens—in order to profile the center and become part of the familiar landscape at the institution. Also, continue to promote the center activities, seek chances to visit classes, give presentations and offer to write features and provide photos of the activities at every opportunity.

Cont on p 6.

“To be successful, a writing center must have strong & on-going support for its mission from the institutional administration.”

TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR STUDENTS ON TASK

BY ALICIA CUNDELL *CONT FROM P 4*

For example, when my students finish a writing task quickly, I tell them to write more; when they finish a speaking task early, I instruct them to change partners and repeat the task.

Conclusion: In addition to promoting independent study habits, these tips also help teachers avoid spending time repeating themselves and dealing with disciplinary problems. In this way, teachers use their

THE TAMUQ WRITING CENTER: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES BY DOUGLAS MCPHERSON, CECELIA WATSON, AND JOSEPH WILLIAMS *CONT FROM P 5.*

The Challenges!

? Coping with crowding and lack of privacy.

Writing centers are often relegated to the “left-over” spaces in the institution. As a result, a busy center can seem crowded and noisy, and the privacy necessary for good individual tutoring sessions can be compromised.

? Reaching out to students. Even the best promotional campaign can fail to draw students into the writing center. E-mails or flyers announcing appointment availabilities or special workshops are seldom read. The writing center goes unnoticed by the students who need it the most, unfortunately. Continue to search for ways to entice students into the center, knowing that once they come and have a positive experience, they will be repeat visitors!

? Increasing the use of the writing resources.

Writing resources are often under-utilized. The TCC has a website rich with handouts and helpful links, bookshelves full of specialized writing guides for every field of engineering, and a rack stacked with handouts on topics from comma splices to citation guides. Eventually, faculty and students will really begin to turn to these resources. They will awaken to the wealth of resources available through the TCC!

Individual Tutoring in the Writing Center.

What works!

√ **Having good resources at hand.** Different professors not only want different kinds of answers, but also different. Formats. It would exhaust the tutor to attempt to memorize all types of accepted formats so the TCC has developed a comprehensive collection of resources to abate this issue. The TCC website not only provides information on standard formats (MLA, for example), but also specific requirements from specific professors. The file cabinet complements this website so that a hard copy is available to tutors when working with tutees.

√ **Reading aloud.** Reading the student’s work aloud in the initial few minutes of the session encourages aural and visual understanding. Students often recognize their grammar errors

immediately, which frees the tutor to focus on more global student writing issues.

√ **Handing the student the pencil.** Much to the student’s dismay, it is the student’s paper—not the tutor’s paper. The simple act of handing the student the “marking pencil” provides the right amount of tutor-tutee distance. The tutor does not feel so obligated to edit the tutee’s paper with an overwhelming number of remarks, and the tutees can transfer what they learn in their own language process. After all, it is ultimately the student’s job to build on what s/he has learned during the tutoring appointment.

√ **Providing alternatives.** TCC tutors believe that it is often a better idea to guide students to the right answers instead of telling them the answers outright. This guidance promotes a deeper understanding of the writing issues involved in the process. In some cases, it is more appropriate to say, “This word does not work her,” or “There is a difficult grammar issue between lines 4 and 7. Can you find it?” Alternatives can give students a chance to learn via self-discovery and allows tutors to check tutee progress.

The Challenges!

? Demystifying what a tutor does. Oftentimes neither the student nor the professor knows what the tutor is supposed to accomplish. The professor may believe that tutors simply give tutees all the right answers, and the tutees hope this is true, too. Defining or clarifying roles to these two groups makes the TCC tutor’s job less stressful and tutoring times more meaningful and constructive.

? Dealing with students’ time management issues. Students on occasion approach a teacher for help on a paper . . . 10 minutes before the paper is due. Tardiness in executing tasks and asking for last minute help are constant sources of frustration for writing center teachers. Students slowly come to realize that writing center instructors will not simply give the right answers and that those students with better time management skills receive more meaningful help.

Cont on p 7.

“ . . . once they (tudents) come to the writing center & have a positive experience, they will be repeat visitors!”

THE TAMUQ WRITING CENTER: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES BY DOUGLAS MCPHERSON, CECELIA WATSON, AND JOSEPH WILLIAMS *CONT FROM P 6.*

? Finding the best motivation. It appears that the TCC encourages intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Students develop a better working knowledge of those necessary components to create a meaningful essay or proposal or project. Later when they receive their grade, students make the correlation that more visits to the TCC equals a better grade. Hard work pays off!

Using Computer-Assisted Learning in the Writing Center

What works!

√ **Having excellent support from the IT department.** Developing and maintaining a good working relationship with the instructional technology specialists is crucial if incorporating any level of computer-related activity into the writing center.

√ **Profiding online resources.** In addition to the TCC website, with links to most of the general resources and handouts (<http://www.qatar.tamu.edu/tcc/>), the tCC uses a large collection of resources, collated by Douglas McPherson when he worked at Dubai Women's College. The site is currently being redeveloped within the TAMUQ domain (<http://dwc.hct.ac.ae/courses/hd1english/>).

√ **Providing a wide selection of communications software.**

- *ClarityEnglish:* This software offers quite a range of rich, interactive, multimedia learning material. Occasional inaccuracies within the program, and occasional prescriptively misleading feedback detract from the overall effectiveness of the program. Clarity is, however, open to feedback from customers. For more information, see <http://www.clarity.com.hk/>.
- *Criterion:* This essay assessment software provides students with automated feedback, even perhaps a form of tutoring, from the computer. The TCC is in the process of trialing it with a developmental writing course. A TCC "class" in Criterion where tutees submit work as part of the tutoring process has been created. For an overview of the product in the form of an online presentation, see http://www.ets.org/Media/products/Criterion/tour_06/index.html.

- *Rosetta Stone:* This software provides immersion for a beginner, using the universally accessible teaching tools of sounds and pictures with very little meta-language. This provides a nice balance to some of the other tools used in the TCC. The TCC has licenses for the two upper levels of English and the beginner level of Arabic; the latter is for faculty use. One negative point about this product is the somewhat arbitrary choice of vocabulary items. See <http://www.rosettastone.com/en/>.
- *TypingMaster Pro.* This is keyboarding software. Good keyboarding skills enhance student effectiveness and productivity. TCC uses it systematically in freshman courses, integrating it into course assessment profiles. It will soon be made available to all TAMUQ students on a self-access basis. See <http://www.typingmaster.com/>.

The Challenges

? Encouraging self-access. We have not yet found the most effective way to integrate the computer-based tools into the tutoring setting. While using it to complement an individualized tutoring session with a customized set of follow-up exercises on the computer would be the next goal, ways to motivate students to take that extra step have not been determined yet.

? Finding the best interface. We are still looking for the most efficient way to guide writing center visitors to our computerized resources. Online course management systems like Blackboard and WebCT and quiz development software like Respondus can be powerful tools for promoting that interface in the writing center. The potential exists to create quizzes linked to learning resources, where students could inteeractively test their knowledge and understanding and whre writing center staff could track usage. As a licensed and supported WebCT institution, the TCC could have all students registered on this site relatively easily; students could be directed to specific areas within the site. A non-licensed institution could do soemthing siillar in Moodle which resembles it and is *Cont on page 8.*

TESOL 2009

Denver, Colorado

March 25-28, 2009

THE TAMUQ WRITING CENTER: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES BY DOUGLAS MCPHERSON, CECELIA WATSON, AND JOSEPH WILLIAMS *CONT FROM P 7.*

and is free and an open-source learning platform. See <http://blackboard.com/us/index.Bb>, <http://moodle.com/>, and <http://respondus.com/>.

? Finding the right CALL management system. The TCC is in the process of identifying, purchasing and bringing into commission a lab management system. Although the system will be used primarily in TAMUQ's language lab classes, the instructors will be able to use the system's interactivity features during workshops offered through the writing center. The

search has been narrowed to two systems: Robotel Symposium (<http://robotel.com/english/index.html>), and Genesis (<http://www.linguatronics.com/>)

Visitors to the TCC are encouraged. To schedule a visit or to make an inquiry, feel free to contact Cecelia Hawkins (cecelia.hawkins@qatar.tamu.edu), Joseph Williams (joseph.williams@qatar.tamu.edu), or Douglas McPherson (Douglas.mcpherson@qatar.tamu.edu).

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*"Thank you to
the 2007
Conference
Committee!"*

Qatar TESOL was founded on April 2, 2005 . . .

. . . when the Qatar TESOL President, Sarah Al-Kuwari, signed the affiliate agreement with TESOL, Inc. The purpose of Qatar TESOL is to establish a network of teachers, supervisors and researchers who are committed to improving teaching in English as a Foreign or Second Language in Qatar and/or the region.

www.qatartestol.org

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