

Published in *Southern Discourse: Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association* 10.3 (Summer 2007): 6-7.

Independent Studies in Writing Based in The Writing Center



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Many writing centers have writing fellows programs or peer tutoring courses connected to them; however, few have independent study writing courses based in their centers. From our experience attending a school that has offered independent study courses in writing through the writing center for a dozen years, we find the opportunity a unique one. Since we individually write our proposal and design the course with the writing center director, we benefit from working collaboratively and focusing on specific interests of our own and ones we did not even know about before we took the course. Below are our thoughts:

The existence of a writing center with an independent study is vital to the growth of the individual student. Whether working on a short article or a research paper, I find the writing center represents a solid ground for inspiration and of tolerance for poetry, the southern voice of Picasso and any other muse to be bent and molded into a master literary work. In the words of Emerson, "Put the argument into a concrete shape, into an image, some hard phrase, round and solid as a ball, which they can see and handle and carry home with them, and the cause is half won." The cause begins within the motivated writer who lives the restless process; the writing center becomes a savior to those of us who devote our time to an independent study, paralyzed by the deterring wit of the blasphemous semicolon. It is impractical for anyone involved in an independent study to receive network support from any place except the center founded upon the passion of writers.

Our writing center has given me the opportunity to push myself as a writer, forcing me to analyze myself, to recognize my weaknesses and to play off my strengths. None of my classes have challenged me in as many ways as the independent study has. With guidance, I recently completed a research paper selected for publication in the next edition of *Contemporary Reader*, certainly a project that I would have found impossible to create without the tools and knowledge offered through the writing center. My main project is to develop a screenplay. What makes

having a high school writing center so terrific is that we are allowed to pursue our dreams and given the tools to feasibly achieve them. I will also be exposed to poetry, a weak point of mine, but it will help broaden my horizons and make me a better literary “connoisseur.” Through the writing center, we are offered opportunities and challenges not found any other place in high school. I am grateful for being able to work with my school’s writing center; it is an asset no student should be without.

I find myself in a strange region between the standard and AP/IB* curricula. During my sophomore year I excelled and believed I was ready for an AP English class. The first semester of my junior year left me with the realization of my sub-par writing techniques. I attended tutoring sessions with my teacher, but they did not help me achieve the level of improvement I desperately needed. I yearned for a class, which met my needs for a personalized English workshop, so I applied for an independent study, based on the art of writing. With approval, I was able to draw up a plan for my semester-long course. Suddenly I was able to decide the direction my course would take. I found myself immersed in new forms of writing that I had never expected. My favorite aspect is collaboration, which takes place during the composition process. Each of us sends drafts to one another. Through this process, each writer is subjected to constructive criticism, which produces insightful revisions. Currently, I am composing a poem. After submitting many drafts to my peers, I feel as if it is finally ready to submit for publication. Without their feedback, my poem could never have achieved its level of quality.

As the writing center director and teacher of this class, I have the luxury of working with a variety of students, some whom I have never known well, and guide them in the discovery of new writing experiences. It allows me the joy of teaching writing, rather than what are sometimes only brief encounters with students in the writing center. The independent study students challenge me as much as I challenge them. Just as they respond to my writing for different audiences, I question their ideas that I want to understand more fully. I have co-authored several articles with students and helped them communicate with professional writers and writing center directors to get feedback on specific aspects of their writing. Our readings, based on their interests, allow us to share ideas on the composing process through new and different essays or poems that each recommends.

Independent studies based in writing centers offer support and resources to those of us who are trying to discover our own voices, communicate better, publish, gain experience with a variety of genres, and take risks with writing in a specialized course. We students are not peer consultants, but we have learned skills that enable us to voluntarily work with others on their writing and that empower us to continue developing as writers in college and throughout the rest of our lives.

*Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Curricula