

## IUP Writing Center Tutor Wins NEASEA Student Employee of the Year Award, Heads to National Competition

By Keven Dvorak

Indiana University of Pennsylvania Writing Center tutor Jim Peterson has been named Northeast Association of Student Employment Administrators (NEASEA) Student Employee of the Year for the 2003-2004 academic year. Jim qualified for the award first by winning IUP's Student Employee of the Year, then by winning Pennsylvania's Student Employee of the Year. He is now one of four finalists competing for the National Student Employee of the Year Award hosted by the National Student Employment Association (NSEA).

A senior undergraduate student majoring in English with a Philosophy minor, Jim maintains a 3.4 overall grade point average. Along with his academic work and writing center employment, Jim is an active member of the campus radio station, volunteering as a disc jockey every Wednesday for WIUP's "Afternoon Archives" program where he plays classic rock songs from the 1970s and 1980s; his musical preference, however, ranges from electronica to early 90s indie. Jim also gave his first conference presentation this academic year at the joint IWCA- NCPTW Conference last October in Hershey, PA.

Dr. Ben Rafoth, Director of the IUP Writing Center, nominated Jim for IUP's Student Employee of the Year Award because of the leadership, dedication, and initiative he saw Jim bring to work every day.

"When he began work here as a shy sophomore, I could not have imagined how much he would mature and grow into the role of a peer leader. He has now tutored hundreds of students and given workshops to over a thousand students, and he has been a role model for all tutors in the Writing Center – all in an effort to help his peers become better writers and achieve academic success," said Dr. Rafoth.

While working at the writing center last summer, Jim took the initiative to create a writing center PowerPoint workshop for the summer College Undergraduate Success Program (CUSP), and begin a second PowerPoint workshop designed to help students with proofreading. He also redesigned a third workshop for citing research sources. Each of these workshops is given at the writing center to up to 30 students at a time.

Jim administered his CUSP workshop to over 750 first-year students the week before the Fall 2003 semester began. The workshop orientated students to the demands they would meet in their college writing courses. Jim designed the proofreading workshop using his experiences working with writers who struggle to edit and polish their papers. Only a few days went by between the time he completed the workshop and the time the first IUP writing instructor brought her class down to the writing center to experience it.

Jim also played a vital role in revamping the interior layout of the Writing Center, making it more student-friendly, and assisted in creating a new tutor training program for writing

center tutors. These leadership roles earned him a lot of respect from his fellow tutors. “Jim leads by example, by doing. His leadership is through example and reliability. Whenever there is a problem or situation with a session, I immediately ask Jim. If I’m not sure how to handle a student’s question, I look to Jim. He makes the writing center a positive atmosphere to learn and work in,” said Lindsey Hamilton, junior and third-semester tutor.

While Jim prefers to remain low-key, his name may be recognizable to many of you, especially if you attended the IWCA-NCPTW joint conference in Hershey, PA last fall. Mr. Peterson was in charge of registering conference participants.

“I was so impressed with Jim’s work ethic and organizational skills that I asked him to take charge of registrations for the conference I coordinated, all of which he completed in the Writing Center when he was not needed to tutor,” said Dr. Rafoth. Jim was originally expected to register 600 participants; that number eventually reached over 1000. Many readers of this article may have spoken with Jim over the phone or through email regarding the conference—and if you didn’t, or did and don’t remember his name, there’s a good chance he still remembers you!

"I enjoyed being able to talk to registrants one-on-one, even if that meant they were having problems with their registrations. And, I feel great satisfaction that those who had concerns about registration that I spoke with over the phone or by e-mail indicated that I dealt with their concern in a positive way," Jim said.

“Looking back on the tremendous number of details Mr. Peterson kept track of and the hectic days we experienced in the few weeks prior to the conference, I cannot think of anyone who could have done a better job,” said Dr. Rafoth.

The most important part of Jim’s work, however, was not in facilitating workshops or registering conference participants. The most important part was tutoring writers. In the fall semester alone, Jim tallied approximately 250 one-on-one appointments. His work with students led many students to return to the writing center requesting his assistance and had many students recommending him to friends.

"Last semester a college writing professor stopped me in the Oak Grove (IUP’s main quad) to tell me how much she appreciated the work I did. She said many of her students told her in conferences what positive experiences it was to work with me. She says that she's always felt comfortable sending her students to the Writing Center, but that lately she's been very impressed by the positive effect our tutors have had on her freshmen writing classes," Jim said.

So, what’s next for Jim Peterson? While he plans to graduate this May, he has still not decided what road he plans to follow thereafter. He does, however, realize what he’ll be walking away from.

"I'll really miss the writing center after I graduate this May. I'll especially miss working with the other tutors, Kevin Dvorak, and Dr. Ben Rafoth. I really appreciate the amount of faith

Dr. Rafoth instilled in me during my time at the writing center. He's such an effective boss because he assesses tutors' strengths well, and he utilizes those strengths without overwhelming us. Most of all, I'll miss the friendships with everyone at the writing center. We were never too busy to care about each other personally," Jim said.

During this past academic year, Jim Peterson has gone up and above his call of duty as a writing center tutor. His workshops have helped thousands of IUP students become better writers, his contributions to the IWCA-NCPTW Conference were immeasurable, and, most importantly, his one-on-one tutoring sessions have provided hundreds of IUP students with learning experiences regarding their writing.

And now he is being rewarded appropriately for his services.