

R

P

AXIS



10.2: WRITING CENTERS AT
THE CROSSROADS

FROM THE EDITORS: WRITING CENTERS AT THE CROSSROADS

Elizabeth Goins & Frederick Coye Heard

Managing Editors
praxisgmail@gmail.com

This latest issue of *Praxis* comes on the heels of the University of Texas at Austin Undergraduate Writing Center's 20th Anniversary and Symposium. This weekend-long event featured nearly thirty individual and panel presentations from writing center practitioners discussing the changing future of writing centers—technologically, theoretically, pedagogically, administratively, and globally. And although we did not issue a formal call for themed submission this issue, the focus articles and columns here all reflect that changes for writing centers are certainly on the horizon; figuring the ways to merge traditions of the past with practices for the future place writing centers in the U.S. and abroad at a crossroads.

Good and Barganier offer first-hand perspectives on navigating the difficult terrains of departmental politics and university funding for a new writing intern program. These challenges are certainly not new, but finding innovative and collaborative ways to bridge political divides and benefit students increasingly falls at the feet of writing center administrators. LeCluyse, Moore, and Sloan all examine the validity of traditional writing center theory and pedagogy through the lens of current day-to-day practices. Kavadlo and Raïgn both argue that despite general skepticism, online writing tutoring can have communicative benefits for students and tutors alike. Simpson and Phillips combine new and old approaches to supporting diverse populations of graduate student writers, with Simpson focusing on students from science and engineering and Phillips on multilingual writers. Olson and Chang also center their discussions on tutoring multilingual writers; Olson questions the ethical responsibilities of teaching these students, while Chang provides an overview of writing centers in Taiwan public universities. Rihn and Sloan round out the focus articles by examining, through a queer theory lens, how traditional writing center practices are affected by shifting individual identities. Finally, Davis, Gannon, and Bitzel—our three column authors—provide valuable insights on how writing center

administrators are adapting theoretical and practical traditions to the moving targets of what constitute a “writing center” in today's educational landscape.

With the largest number of submissions in *Praxis* history, this issue also represents a shift in our journal. Since transitioning to a peer-review format last fall, both the scope and size of our featured content has grown immensely. This would not be possible without our tireless team of editorial staff, as well as our invaluable editorial board; we thank you. As we pass the baton to next year's managing editors, Jacob Pietsch and Sarah Orem, we look forward to continuing the discussion about the future of both *Praxis* and writing center work.

THE RHETORICAL POWER OF HEURISTIC QUOTATIONS: INCORPORATING THE WEN FU INTO THE WRITING CENTER

Jeffrey C. Davis
Wheaton College
jeffrey.davis@wheaton.edu

For many years I have promoted a simple but useful routine in our writing center, typically practiced by my staff of student writing consultants on a weekly basis: the act of locating and displaying sage quotations on some aspect of writing, expressed by important thinkers—including philosophers, scientists, teachers, politicians, entrepreneurs, and artists, among others. Such quotations serve a different purpose than merely inspirational quotations, which appear on all sorts of things these days, and in many surprising places, from a coffee cup¹ to the webpage of UCLA's Office of Instructional Development². Using "heuristic quotations" (or "HQs"—as we call them) involves discovering substantive statements that capture the thoughts or sentiments of published writers from diverse backgrounds, with varied interests, each addressing an important facet of writing. The heuristic quotations we feature are typically written by hand, in bright colors, on a marker board that prominently hangs just inside the door of our facility. An almost effortless instructional method, the posting of heuristic quotations reinforces our collaborative approach to peer consulting in subtle but useful ways, providing visual prompts that can orient writers and consultants toward thinking about, and working on, common goals. Practically speaking, heuristic quotations operate as a kind of rhetoric, illustrating one beneficial way in which, as Melissa Ianetta argues, "the rhetorical tradition and contemporary writing center studies can illuminate one another" (39).

To better appreciate the benefits of heuristic quotations, in particular, a brief consideration of the purpose of a heuristic, in general, will provide some helpful clarity. Simply put, a heuristic is a rhetorical tool to facilitate new insights, problem solving, and applied learning. In other words, it promotes the activity of discovering fresh ideas (Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier 454). Emanating from the formal study of rhetoric, especially in relation to the first of its five major categories—the canon of invention—a heuristic presents the means to generate original thinking about a subject for a speaker or writer. "The canon of invention can be understood as a kind of *techné*," explains Michael Kleine, "especially when it serves an enabling function as new discourse and knowledge are produced"; furthermore, "it is invention as a heuristic strategy ... that has been the focus of many

contemporary compositionists" (211). As Christopher Eisenhart and Barbara Johnstone expound in *Rhetoric in Detail: Discourse Analyses of Rhetorical Talk and Text*, "A *heuristic* is a set of discovery procedures for systematic application or a set of topics for systematic consideration. Unlike the procedures in a set of instructions, the procedures of a heuristic do not need to be followed in any particular order, and there is no fixed way of following them" (11). This trait, the heuristic's fluidity, yields unexpected prospects, options, and choices, making it ideal for the unpredictable collaborative activities that characterize writing center practice. Providing a means for reflective consideration of options for the writer, as guided by the consultant, a heuristic generates ideas for taking the next step in the collaborative process. Eisenhart and Johnstone continue, "A heuristic is not a mechanical set of steps, and there is no guarantee that using it will result in a single definitive explanation. A good heuristic draws on multiple theories rather than just one" (11). Therefore, the use of a heuristic in the writing center is both generative and elucidatory, serving to encourage alternative ways of thinking and writing from among the many possibilities available to the writer and the consultant. Operating much like what Isabelle Thompson labels as "cognitive scaffolding" in the writing center, a heuristic, correspondingly, provides a promising matrix that "aims at supporting students while they figure out answers for themselves" (423).

Generally, heuristic quotations produce an indirect persuasive influence upon writing center visitors, setting a contextual frame of mind and having the potential to raise significant rhetorical questions within student writers. The following are some sample heuristic quotations on writing that we have posted in our center previously, each provoking a fresh awareness of writing issues and options, addressing our clients as the primary audience.

Regarding the value of cultivating a disposition of keen observation, especially by writers in relation to the natural world, marine biologist and conservationist Rachel Carson offers some sound advice: "The discipline of the writer is to learn to be still and listen to what his subject has to tell him" (qtd. in Brooks 2). How, then, might I, as a student writer, endeavor to *listen* to the *subject* of a paper more intentionally, and

what might the subject be trying to *tell*, if only I were to adopt the skill of being *still*, reflectively attentive in a posture of self *discipline*?

As to the importance of choosing the best diction to express an intended meaning, this famous quotation from author and humorist Mark Twain addresses the issue nicely: “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug” (qtd. in Ayres 252). Since a *right word* has the potential to capture the complexity of reality, how could I, as a student writer, come to value and employ the precise meanings to be had in an increasing repertoire of words that offer options of real *difference*?

Or consider this provocative and memorable definition of “research,” as crafted by anthropologist and folklorist Zora Neal Hurston: “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose” (143). Given the intensifying importance of credible investigation and the proper use of secondary sources, how should I, as a student writer, best understand the origins of satisfying *research*, especially the kind that encourages *poking and prying* of the sort that will sustain genuine *curiosity* throughout the many tedious methods involved?

Heuristic quotations such as these can work to rouse and invigorate a writer’s deliberative disposition, leading to genuinely invested thoughts and actions. Imparting aphoristic wisdom, these linguistic touchstones invite collaborative conversation, conducting deliberate writing practices within the context of the consulting session and beyond.

This semester our writing center began incorporating weekly heuristic quotations from a single, non-western source. The innovation occurred to me during winter break, when I had the occasion to read Sam Hamill’s stunning translation of the *Wen Fu*, “the first major discourse on the art of writing in ancient Chinese” (xv). Given to me by a good friend who grew up in Asia, this collection of “prose poems,” composed in the third century by the soldier-poet Lu Chi, offers remarkably practical advice for those who conscientiously strive to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Building upon the tradition of the *Ta Hsueh (Great Learning)* of K’ung-fu Tzu (Confucius), the *Wen Fu* can best be understood according to its English title—“the art of writing.” The translator explains that “In its most generic interpretation, *wen* means simply a pattern wherein meaning and form become inseparably united, so that they become one, indistinguishable” (xxv).

Incorporating select heuristic quotations from the *Wen Fu* into the writing center addresses two concerns

recently examined by columnists in this journal: Jessica Chainer Nowacki’s encouragement to consider innovative ways to conduct ongoing ESL training, especially in relation to Chinese students; and Kathleen Vacek’s call to include the reading and discussion of poetry in staff development, particularly as a means of enriching understanding about multiliteracies. Our institution, a “small Midwestern liberal arts college” like Nowacki’s (1), has experienced steady growth in its ESL services at the writing center, so much so that it now represents twenty-five percent of our annual total, with Chinese students factoring in significantly. And without the resources to support ongoing writing center staff training courses, our writing center welcomes the sort of solution that Vacek recommends, along with its benefits: “Reading poetry about language and literacy ... can stimulate a greater awareness of the issues writers face as they communicate across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts” (2).

Inspired by these concerns, I have designed an ESL-focused poetry experiment using the *Wen Fu* that plays out in the following manner. First, after providing each of the seventeen poems, in chronological order, one per week, I have asked staff members to carefully read each one with an imaginative consideration of how the text might apply to our clients, most notably ESL students. Second, from each weekly poem I have extracted a heuristic quotation, ultimately to be posted for our clients to see when they visit the center; each quotation can potentially foster an important concept about writing. Third, consultants have been encouraged to reference the heuristic quotations during their collaborative sessions with student writers, as natural opportunities arise to discuss them. Fourth, staff members will dialogically process the perceived impact of the poems on themselves, and the heuristic quotations on their clients, through the “consultant conversation” listserv each week. And fifth, staff members will be asked to respond to a survey at the end of the semester, providing further feedback for analysis. This experiment is in some ways similar to Nowacki’s use of weekly online discussion board posts in response to Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth’s essays in *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*, and through it I hope to persuade my consultants to “go from isolated islands to a cohesive, excited, and engaged team interested in helping each other better assist the students that visit the center” (3). Likewise, along with Vacek, I trust that my consulting staff—largely consisting of native English speakers “who do not have first-hand experience with linguistic disadvantage”

(2)—will become more sensitized to ESL student writers because of reading and discussing poetry on the subject of writing, brilliantly expressed in Lu Chi's *Wen Fu*.

The following heuristic quotations have been taken from the *Wen Fu*, each with its corresponding poem title, for your consideration. The insights about writing that the respective poems communicate are still relevant today. How might these heuristic quotations enhance the collaborative work that you do in your writing center?

Preface

“Only through writing and then revising
and revising
may one gain the necessary insight.”

I. The Early Motion

“Studying the four seasons as they pass,
we sigh;
seeing the inter-connectedness of things,
we learn
the innumerable ways of the world.”

II. Beginning

“It is like being adrift
in a heavenly lake
or diving to the depths of the seas.
We bring up living words
like fishes hooked in their gills,
leaping from the deep.”

III. Choosing Words

“Writing, the traveling
is sometimes level and easy,
sometimes rocky and steep.”

IV. The Satisfaction

“The pleasure a writer knows
is the pleasure of sages.
Out of non-being, being is born;
out of silence,
a writer produces a song.”

V. Catalog of Genres

“Great writing fills a reader's eyes
with splendor
and clarifies values.”

VI. On Harmony

“Ideas seek harmonious existence,

one among others, through language
that is both beautiful and true.”

VII. On Revision

“Only when revisions are precise
may the building stand
square and plumb.”

VIII. The Key

“While the language may be lovely
and the reasoning just,
the ideas themselves
may prove trivial.”

IX. On Originality

“The composition must move
the heart like music
from an instrument with many strings.”

X. Shadow and Echo and Jade

“When the vein of jade
is revealed in the rock,
the whole mountain glistens.”

XI. Five Criteria

“False feelings are
a slap
in the face of grace.
Even disciplined feeling
leads nowhere
unless there is also refinement.”

XII. Finding Form

“Know when the work
should be full,
and when it should be
compacted.
Know when to lift your eyes
and when to scrutinize.”

XIII. The Masterpiece

“I take the rules of grammar
and guides to good language
and clutch them
to-heart-and-mind.”

XIV. The Terror

“Work with what is given;
that which passes
cannot be detained.
Things move into shadows

and vanish;
memory returns in an echo.”

XV. The Inspiration

“The writer feels dead
as bleached wood,
dry as a riverbed in drought.

For a way out, search
the depths of the soul
for a spirit.”

XVI. Conclusion

“Through letters, there is no road
too difficult to travel,
no idea too confusing
to be ordered.”

(2002): 211-23. Web. 15 Jan. 2013.
<<http://www.jaonlinejournal.com/archives/vol22.1/kleine-heuristic.pdf>>.

Nowacki, Jessica Chainer. “An Ongoing ESL Training Program in the Writing Center.” *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 9.2 (2012): 1-4. Web. 15 Jan. 2013.
<<http://praxis.uwc.utexas.edu/index.php/praxis/article/view/48>>.

Thompson, Isabelle. “Scaffolding in the Writing Center: A Microanalysis of an Experience Tutor’s Verbal and Nonverbal Tutoring Strategies.” *Written Communication* 26.4 (2009): 417-53. Web. 15 Jan. 2013.
<<http://wcx.sagepub.com/content/26/4/417.full.pdf+html>>.

Vacek, Kathleen. “Developing Tutors’ Meta-Multiliteracies Through Poetry.” *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 9.2 (2012): 1-3. Web. 15 Jan. 2013.
<<http://praxis.uwc.utexas.edu/index.php/praxis/article/view/52/html>>.

Notes

1. The original link can be found at:
<http://www.cafepress.com/+inspirational+mugs>

2. The original link can be found at:
<http://www.oid.ucla.edu/units/tatp/old/lounge/pedagogy/quotes>

Works Cited

- Ayres, Alex. *The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain*. New York: HarperCollins, 1987. Print.
- Brooks, Paul. *The House of Life: Rachel Carson at Work with Selections from Her Writings, Published and Unpublished*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972. Print.
- Chi, Lu. *Wen Fu: The Art of Writing*. Trans. Sam Hamill. Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2000. Print.
- Eisenhart, Christopher, and Barbara Johnstone. *Rhetoric in Detail: Discourse Analyses of Rhetorical Talk and Text*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008. Print.
- Gigerenzer, Gerd, and Wolfgang Gaissmaier. “Heuristic Decision Making.” *Annual Review of Psychology*. 62 (2011): 451-82. Web. 15 Jan. 2013. <http://citrixweb.mpib-berlin.mpg.de/montez/upload/PaperOfTheMonth/gigerenzer_gaissmaier_2011-1-2.pdf>.
- Hurston, Zora Neal. *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006. Print.
- Ianetta, Melissa. “If Aristotle Ran the Writing Center: Classical Rhetoric and Writing Center Administration.” *The Writing Center Journal* 24.2 (2004): 37-59. Web. 15 Jan. 2013.
<http://casebuilder.rhet.ualr.edu/wcrp/publications/wcj/wcj24.2/WCJ_24_2_Final.pdf>.
- Klein, Michael. “The Heuristic Potential of *Rhetoric Reclaimed*: Toward Imagining a Techné of Dialogical Arrangement.” *Journal of Advanced Composition* 22.1

THE UNDERGRADUATE AS ADMINISTRATOR: RECOLLECTIONS AND LESSONS OF A GRADUATING SENIOR

Andrea Theresa Gannon
Southwestern University
andreatgannon@gmail.com

“The Teaching of Writing,” an upper level rhetoric and composition course that I took on a whim during my first year at Southwestern University (SU), was the spark that ignited my career path in writing centers. Although I was hesitant in the beginning, I was intrigued by the course description, which promised exploration of writing center pedagogy as well as an on campus job for qualified students. After taking the class, I participated in an internship at SU’s Debby Ellis Writing Center (DEWC), which eventually led to a job as a consultant, and subsequently, my current position as an assistant student director. It is from the undergraduate viewpoint of a client, intern, consultant, and student director that I explain how the DEWC has adapted writing center theory to meet shifting student needs at SU, a small liberal arts college with fewer than 1400 undergraduate students. Additionally, in order to increase my understanding of how the DEWC operated before my time as an administrator, I interviewed two former DEWC assistant student directors, Leslie Lube and Graham Oliver, to learn how they successfully applied graduate student writing center pedagogy to an institution that consisted of undergraduate consultants assisting undergraduate clients. Their experiences as administrators helped shape DEWC processes at SU from 2009 to 2011, providing me with a firm foundation to build on during the 2012 and 2013 school years.

In “The Teaching of Writing,” I learned about the broad scope of teaching methodologies in writing centers as well as the anticipated needs of the students who visited. However, I found that much of the existing scholarship on writing centers is often directed toward programming in which graduate students assist undergraduate clients. This scholarship is most useful when it is applied to SU’s writing center in ways that address the particular needs of an undergraduate only institution. SU benefits most from theory surrounding peer tutoring and cross disciplinary collaboration that has been adjusted with attentiveness to the needs of such a small community. The practical experience of observing and participating in the DEWC has helped me to gain a sense of what students in a small liberal arts college expect from their

peer consultants as well as the ways in which theory focused upon graduate consultants can be usefully channeled into the undergraduate consultant atmosphere.

The role of an assistant student director at an undergraduate institution involves increased responsibility at the same level of hourly pay, a choice that reflects the dedication and commitment of the students who elect to fulfill the role. It is the undergraduate assistant student director’s duty to structure writing center programming while supervising staff members, performing consultations, facilitating successful issue management, and maintaining scheduling as well as advertising for the writing center. The opportunities for change that are available to undergraduate assistant student directors, with the support of their faculty supervisors, are informed by the guidelines of the IWCA Position Statement of Graduate Student Writing Center Administration. I would like to highlight the importance of number five on the list, which states, “Graduate assistant directors should be given responsibilities that are vital to the work and vision of the writing center; assistant directorships should not be primarily clerical” (IWCA). Assistant student directors at undergraduate institutions must do more than paperwork. At SU, small size is a vital factor of consideration in writing center programming, and assistant student directors have to be conscious that this small size means the separation between the roles of student and consultant can be ambiguously defined.

The DEWC is situated in an environment in which the size of the community is advantageous for students. However, the size also reinforces the importance of making sure that the role of the student as a consultant and the role of the student as a peer are distinct. At times, lines of authority can be unclear because both the consultants and clients are undergraduates. Issues of balance can be common sources of conflict, and as Michael Mattison remarks, “It’s not a matter of switching positions so much as acknowledging the multiplicity of positions and noticing the overlaps and connections—and disconnections” (16). The positive aspects are that students may be able to better relate to their

consultants, thus creating a better space for gentle guidance. Because they are receiving help from peers, students may be less intimidated and more forthcoming; they view the consultant as someone who is on the same side of academia—that is, coming from the undergraduate perspective. This is a significant plus of working with undergraduate clients as an undergraduate consultant. However, undergraduate students must take care to uphold the integrity of their positions as consultants, and undergraduate assistant directors must ensure that lines of authority are maintained in these instances. It is helpful to view the consultant as a student with similar academic goals plus the added advantage of special training that qualifies him or her to work as a writing center staff member; this benefits both the student consultant and client, creating opportunities for strengthened communication and successful consultations. One important responsibility of an assistant student director is to keep this community scope in mind when addressing shifting student issues. In terms of pedagogy, the ways in which composition and rhetoric studies predict and theorize about writing center activities do not always most accurately portray what actually happens when graduate students are removed from the equation.

In order to effectively help writers at undergraduate only institutions, student administrators must focus on tailoring methodologies that encompass issues of authority and visibility within such a close-knit community. Leslie Lube, class of 2010, and Graham Oliver, class of 2011, chose to focus on two different issues within the DEWC before graduating from SU. Remodeling existing writing center theory to fit within the parameters of SU's undergraduate only culture, Leslie chose to focus on students' perceptions of how the DEWC could help them, and Graham worked on making the DEWC more accessible to a diverse and busy student body. When I asked Leslie about the biggest issues that she faced during her time as an assistant student director, she noted that "the most difficult consultations were with students who expected all of our corrections or suggestions to be black and white—a grammatical error or a problematic citation. These students seemed uncomfortable with and sometimes even resistant to addressing deeper issues with their writing style. It seemed as if many students preferred tangible proofreading marks as opposed to a discussion about the flow of a paragraph or the structure of a sentence." During her administration, Leslie spent time publicizing that the DEWC was more than simply a spelling or grammar check station.

This is very much in tune with Stephen North's call for a "pedagogy of direct intervention" with a specific application to the undergraduate-centered environment of the DEWC (39). By working to increase the comfort levels of clients with mutual dialogue and to portray the DEWC as a place where all student writers could receive guidance from specially trained undergraduates, Leslie focused on encouraging consultants to be more engaging which effectively transformed clients' attitudes about visiting SU's writing center. The DEWC's practices embody North's suggested strategy, emphasizing that "[w]hereas in the 'old' center instruction tends to take place after or apart from writing, and tends to focus on the correction of textual problems, in the 'new' center the teaching takes place as much as possible during writing, during the activity being learned, and tends to focus upon the activity itself" (39). Each semester, the DEWC continues to remind undergraduates that the consultants at the writing center can help students at all stages of the writing and researching process.

Graham elected to address problems of visibility and accessibility on campus in order to reach more clientele. With a background in information technology, he instituted a scheduling system that allowed students to make appointments outside of traditional writing center hours, thus increasing the DEWC's availability and offering more opportunities for students to receive writing guidance. This system is still in place today and partially accounts for increases in writing center visits.

When I asked what else he would have liked to have done as an assistant student director, Graham remarked, "In a perfect world, at a small undergraduate college, I would have had the writing center integrate with the campus lit[erary] mag[azine], the English honor society, and maybe the campus newspaper. By pooling those resources, we could have offered a significantly better experience for each group and each group's 'customers.'" Graham's plan highlights the importance of Andrea Lunsford's collaboration ideology. An intra-campus dialogue would invite conversations and negotiations while supporting Lunsford's well-researched claims that "[c]ollaboration aids in problem finding as well as problem solving [...] collaboration promotes excellence" (49).

Leslie's and Graham's approaches both involved increasing interest in the DEWC through the development and emphasis of services that directly responded to students' needs. They kept the conversation open beyond the span of the consultation so that the students could communicate

their wishes. Graham and Leslie's actions reiterated the following: the role of a student administrator at a small liberal arts college entails finding creative ways to harness the closeness of the undergraduate community in order to identify and work through significant issues. The DEWC benefited from its position within the small community of SU because questions of perception and accessibility were easily unraveled and effectively addressed through the concentrated application of traditional writing center methodologies. Leslie and Graham's work provided a steady background that allowed the DEWC to thrive despite a major change in curriculum that took place during my time as an assistant student director.

In 2012, the SU academic community experienced a significant curriculum shift when the entry level first year writing course, "College Writing," was eliminated in favor of a new, multi-disciplinary approach to teaching writing. Students began actively seeking more assistance in the writing process and visits to the writing center increased as adjustments made by the DEWC addressed an updated set of academic strategies and requirements. The DEWC's adjustments provided an avenue to reach a wider audience in ways that were more useful to a diverse array of changing student needs. In particular, three retooled and updated services that the DEWC began to provide during my time as an assistant student director further integrated the DEWC into the refashioned SU community; these changes were intended to bolster the modifications instituted by Leslie and Graham and were geared toward current and future issues that might arise in a curriculum that now featured a significant amount of writing and no entry level guidance class.

First, the DEWC began offering writing center presentations to first year and advanced entry seminar classes. The purpose of these presentations was not only to inform students about DEWC basics, such as location and services, but also to show students that they did not have to make the transition from high school writing to college writing alone. Despite the discontinuation of the traditional entry level writing course at SU, the DEWC stepped up to provide students with the tools and guidance that would help them gain a foothold in academic rhetoric. Second, given the writing intensive nature of courses at a small liberal arts college like SU, the DEWC administration began to see more students across a variety of disciplines and therefore decided to meet these students' needs by expanding the DEWC consultant expertise base. Aside from hiring students who excelled in "The Teaching of Writing," the DEWC recruited an International Studies major, students with

Art History backgrounds, and a Science-specific consultant in order to provide specialized help to clients from disciplines other than English. These specialized consultants quickly became essential elements of what the DEWC offered to clients; the well-roundedness of SU's writing center consultants has proven to be highly beneficial and encouraging to students with assignments from a range of disciplines. A third and final new DEWC feature entailed collaborating specifically with faculty to help them develop prompts, and exercises that helped students to better understand what professors sought in their writing. Through these collaborations, consultants were more fully equipped to provide guidance that was in line with professors' expectations.

Some of these steps are certainly possible in writing center environments at larger institutions, but both the speed and success of the DEWC's adaptations highlights how the small liberal arts college atmosphere is highly conducive to restructuring programming when large curriculum changes occur. The elimination of "College Writing" meant that the DEWC had to have an updated function at SU, and it was up to undergraduate assistant student directors to make the necessary changes. Several years of assistant student directors reinforced the DEWC in such a way that it could handle an influx of first year writers while maintaining an organic learning environment that was true to applied writing center theory as well as the comprehensive small liberal arts college mission. Additionally, DEWC's location within such a small community meant relying on the backing of students, faculty, and staff within that sphere, and indeed, the DEWC changes flourished with the support of the SU network.

Whether the writing center is run by graduate or undergraduate assistant student directors, Melissa Nicolas' astute observation that "traditional academic roles become blurred because writing centers' existence outside of the traditional classroom yet still within the institution mark them as liminal spaces" still holds true (2). Through my experiences with the Debby Ellis Writing Center at Southwestern University, I have had the opportunity to contribute to a collaborative effort of past, present, and future assistant student directors. Such strong frameworks enable writing centers at small liberal arts colleges to create comprehensive rhetoric and composition programming that provides a solid foundation of methodology and applied theory that future administrators will continue to develop with new twists of innovation.

Works Cited

- “IWCA Graduate Student Position Statement.” *Writing Center Journal* 23.1 (2002): 59-61.
- Lunsford, Andrea. “Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center.” *The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. 2nd ed. Ed. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2003: 47-53.
- Mattison, Michael. *Centered: A Year in the Life of a Writing Center Director*. Raleigh: Lulu, 2008. Print.
- Nicolas, Melissa. *(E)Merging Identities: Graduate Students in the Writing Center*. New York: Fountainhead Press, 2008. Print.
- North, Stephen M. “The Idea of a Writing Center.” *The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. 2nd ed. Ed. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2003:31-45.

WRITING CENTERS IN ATHLETICS, A NEW CONTACT ZONE

Alanna Bitzel

The University of Texas at Austin

alanna.bitzel@athletics.utexas.edu

When I meet someone for the first time and explain what I do, I commonly hear some version of the question “So, what? You write papers for football players?” It was in the spirit of combating this disheartening and marginalizing view of student athletes and athletics support services that I wrote my initial *Praxis* column, “Supporting Student Athletes.” There, I describe the Writing Lab (Lab) at The University of Texas at Austin’s (UT’s) Football Academics Center and our approach to working with student athlete football players. In beginning this conversation, my intent was to disavow notions that our writing tutors are doing more than they should for our student athletes and highlight writing center work happening in unconventional environments.

In his response to my column, J. Michael Rifenburg advocates for “greater awareness of how student-athletes are a unique subset of our student population.” I support increased scholarship on student athletes and writing, of course, and I absolutely agree that we, as writing center practitioners, must continually examine how we can adapt to student athletes’ unique circumstances.¹ As Rifenburg suggests, we must develop strategies that promote a “clearer understanding of the cognitive processes” associated with sports that may be applicable to writing² and demonstrate how “student-athletes operate within a complex discursive community.”

In calling for more research centered on student athletes, Rifenburg describes the strategies I suggest as being “strikingly similar to strategies the typical campus writing center would espouse.” Writing centers have supported student writing for decades, and I believe this expertise can prove invaluable in supporting student athlete success. Rifenburg argues, however, that NCAA guidelines impinge upon athletics academics centers to such a degree that “tutoring methods cannot mimic what occurs in a traditional campus writing center.”

Rifenburg refers to “strict NCAA academic compliance mandates, which, for example, disallow a tutor writing on a student-athlete’s paper or collaboratively brainstorming.” Neither a prohibition on writing on a student’s paper nor on collaboration appears in the *2012-2013 NCAA Division 1 Manual*.

The NCAA only addresses the broader issue of “unethical conduct,” in Bylaw 10.1, which includes academic fraud: “Knowing involvement in arranging for fraudulent academic credit or false transcripts for a prospective or an enrolled student-athlete” (10.1-(b)). The “2000 Official Interpretation” of Bylaw 10.1-(b) clarifies reporting requirements but does not include these prohibitions.³

Rifenburg also asserts that NCAA guidelines foster an environment in which athletics writing support “cannot tolerate tutor error” or “chaos.”⁴ He identifies logistical requirements that impede chaostutors working in designated spaces, students signing in for writing sessions, and administrators observing tutoring sessions. Such requirements, common in many workplaces and writing centers, are not NCAA-specific and do not necessarily prevent creativity in sessions.

Adopting a writing center approach that embraces collaboration and chaos during writing sessions does not violate NCAA guidelines. The NCAA recently amended Bylaw 16.3.1.1, which describes academic services. Effective August 2013, the bylaw will read:

Member institutions shall make general academic counseling and tutoring services available to all student-athletes. Such counseling and tutoring services may be provided by the department of athletics or the institution’s nonathletics student support services. In addition, an institution, conference or the NCAA may finance other academic support, career counseling or personal development services that support the success of student-athletes.

This amended bylaw eliminates specific limitations on support services and grants an institution greater latitude in implementing academic services to “support the success of student-athletes,” as long as they are in accordance with the institution’s academic integrity policies.

At UT, students, including student athletes, can visit the Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC) for their writing support needs. Since the UWC provides writing support services in keeping with our institution’s academic integrity policies,⁵ our Lab should certainly be able to apply writing center practices and principles with student athletes to foster

their success. The extra benefit language I raise in my initial column supports this possibility. Bylaw 16.03.02 states that:

An extra benefit is any special arrangement by an institutional employee or a representative of the institution's athletics interests to provide a student-athlete or the student-athlete's relative or friend a benefit *not expressly authorized by NCAA legislation*. Receipt of a benefit by student-athletes or their relatives or friends is not a violation of NCAA legislation if it is demonstrated that the same benefit is generally available to the institution's students or their relatives or friends or to a particular segment of the student body (e.g., foreign students, minority students) determined on a basis unrelated to athletics ability. (emphasis added)

Bylaw 16.01.1 reinforces that an extra benefit is one “not authorized by NCAA legislation.” Tutoring services, as indicated in Bylaw 16.3.1.1, are authorized, so they do not constitute an “extra benefit.” But in calling attention to services that are “generally available” to non-athlete students, Bylaw 16.03.02 provides some context for using the writing center as a basis for thinking about writing support services in athletics.

Writing center work is collaborative by nature—tutors engage students in conversations that promote reflection, learning, and writing development. So, if we use the writing center as a model for our Lab, then collaboration will be a key component of our writing sessions with student athletes. Productive moments of chaos can and do occur in writing sessions with student athletes as part of this collaboration. Students have different personalities and ways of learning and must respond to diverse types of assignments in various disciplines. Because tutors do not follow a script, some chaos is inevitable, and often beneficial, in writing sessions; it is only fitting that tutors tailor their pedagogical strategies to each session.

While tutors writing on papers and collaborating with students are not actions verboten by the NCAA, institutions should nevertheless develop best practices to reduce the heightened risk associated with tutoring student athletes. To that end, as writing program administrators in athletics, we should create tutor handbooks and writing policies in keeping with both NCAA guidelines and our institutions' academic integrity policies. For example, to help ensure student ownership of and responsibility during the writing process, our Lab adheres to even stricter policies than some writing centers with regard to feedback—our tutors will only give feedback in person, not electronically.

We must also manage expectations of writing tutors and writing sessions and provide ongoing tutor education, prompting tutors to be mindful of their role in students' learning and writing. In our Lab, I meet weekly with our tutors to discuss writing center literature and theories and reflect on their applicability to our particular tutoring environment. Tutors talk about writing sessions they have had with students and share strategies they have used.

Moreover, we must communicate with athletics compliance professionals on campus when developing best practices. Our Lab does this every semester when a representative meets with our tutors to review pertinent guidelines and discuss cases involving academic integrity violations. Maintaining open communication with our compliance office helps ensure that we are familiar with and understand how NCAA guidelines impact tutors' work at the Lab. And it gives tutors an opportunity to share what work in our Lab looks like on a daily basis and demonstrate how writing center methods can support student athletes' learning.

Rifenburg and I agree on the need for “qualitative research into...how best to tutor” student athletes. An advantage of working in athletics is the ability to work with the same students throughout the semester, enabling tutors to build rapport with students and get to know their writing, find effective ways to motivate students toward success, and help students create plans of action for improving their writing over the semester.⁶ We should look for ways to leverage this advantage in service to research. Yet student athletes have special obligations, such as workouts, practices, and treatments, which limit the amount of time they can spend on academics. Even though we see our students often at the Football Academics Center, they must divide their time during study hall among their academic obligations. So, at our Lab, we allow variable writing session lengths, and we permit students to step away to work on other assignments while a tutor reads their writing and return once the tutor has finished reading to discuss feedback.

I am thrilled to contribute to this ongoing conversation regarding student athlete writing. I believe that writing center work, with its combination of order and chaos, art and artisanship,⁷ or mundane versus trickster moments,⁸ does not present a problem within athletics. Rather, it is an opportunity to generate best practices for working with student athletes on writing—practices that build on NCAA guidelines to support, effectively and ethically, a student population deserving of greater acknowledgement in academic discourses.

Notes

1. At last year's IWCA Conference, Tom Philipose at St. John's University and I collaborated on a panel entitled "Creating a Winning Team: Writing Centers, Instructors, and Student-Athlete Writers" in which we discuss writing centers that work with student athletes. See also: Broussard, William. "Collaborative Work, Competitive Students, Counter-Narrative: A Tale from Out of (the Academy's) Bounds." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 28.1 (2003): 1-5. Print.; Broussard, William and Nahal Rodieck. "One for the Gipper (and One for the Tutor): On Writing Center Tutorials with College Student-Athletes." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 28.7 (2004): 1-5. Print.
2. See: Cheville, Julie. *Minding the Body: What Student Athletes Know About Learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 2001. Print.; Kent, Richard. *Writing on the Bus: Using Athletic Team Notebooks and Journals to Advance Learning and Performance in Sports*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2012. Print.
3. I want to thank Blake Barlow, Director-Risk Management and Compliance Services at UT's Athletics Department, for lending his insight into the NCAA and Bylaws I discuss in this column.
4. Rifenburg references: Boquet, Elizabeth. *Noise from the Writing Center*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2002. Print.; Boquet, Elizabeth and Michele Eodice. "Creativity in the Writing Center: A Terrifying Conundrum." *Creative Approaches to Writing Center Work*. Eds. Kevin Dvorak and Shanti Bruce. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2008: 3-20. Print.
5. For more information on UT's academic integrity policies, visit: "Academic Integrity." *The Office of the Dean of Students*. 15 Aug. 2012. The University of Texas at Austin. Web. 24 Feb. 2013.
6. See: Thompson, Isabelle. "Scaffolding in the Writing Center: A Microanalysis of an Experienced Tutor's Verbal and Nonverbal Tutoring Strategies." *Written Communication* 26.4 (2009): 417-485. Print. Thompson examines "motivational" strategies and "ongoing diagnosis" in student writing development, which are important in working with student athletes.
7. Sherwood, Steve. "Portrait of the Tutor as an Artist: Lessons No One Can Teach." *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. Eds. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001: 97-111. Print.
8. Geller, et al. "Trickster at Your Table." *Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2007: 15-31. Print.

THE BALANCING ACT: CREATING NEW ACADEMIC SUPPORT IN WRITING WHILE HONORING THE OLD

Jennifer Good
Auburn University at Montgomery
jgood@aum.edu

Susan Barganier
Auburn University at Montgomery
sbargani@aum.edu

In 2009, our university launched a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program in response to an accreditation core requirement to focus a university-wide initiative on student learning, often referred to as the Quality Enhancement Plan. The campus committee that envisioned and documented this plan, which fortifies students' writing skills in their future professions and disciplines, requires all undergraduate students to complete five writing-intensive courses, including the two courses in the composition sequence and two program-required, content-area courses in their major prior to graduation.

This influx of discipline-specific writing-intensive courses strained the existing resources available through the university's only academic support service, the Learning Center (the university's writing center). Because Learning Center tutors have always strived to meet the needs of students in the two courses of the composition series, the Director of the Learning Center and I, as the Director of the WAC Program, realized that the new academic support program associated with the WAC Program would have to emphasize writing growth in upper division content-specific courses. To meet the needs of all undergraduates at our university as they progressed through the WAC Program, we knew it was imperative to focus on developing discipline-specific writing skills. We were determined to build upon the work and growth in writing that tutors already provided through the Learning Center without causing unnecessary competition between the academic support programs.

Because discipline-based definitions of good writing vary according to the writing's context, purpose, and audience, the thinking and writing skills necessary to produce effective writing in a discipline vary as well. Communication and thinking skills are often taught through indirect modeling to provide acculturation into a professional community (Carter); we recognized that we needed to make the most of strong veteran undergraduate writers who instructors already identified as members of their discipline-specific communities and who could model expected writing skills with other students. Like the instructional strategies related to the teaching of general writing

skills that tutors in the Learning Center have honed, we believed that the academic support required to assist emerging writers in content areas could possibly differ too. Appropriate support for a writer may be difficult for the course instructor to provide (Chanock), depending on the student's academic background and instructional needs. Thus, in order to meet these content-specific expectations in writing, such as understandings of audience, tone, style, or appropriate content selection, the Learning Center Director and I developed the Writing in the Disciplines (WID) internship program, as we valued that definitions of effective writing vary per discipline.

The WID internship program exists as the academic support component of the WAC Program, and as such, it is housed within the Office of the Provost and Academic Affairs. WID interns work only with designated content-area writing-intensive classes, and each intern is matched to a particular course by major. In contrast, the Learning Center is housed in the Student Affairs division of the university, and although the Learning Center tutors work with students from any university course on an appointment basis, the majority of their work focuses on support in composition and English courses. Whereas Learning Center tutors provide feedback through traditional writing conferences, WID interns' tasks vary. In addition to tutoring, WID interns provide workshops, both during and outside of scheduled class time, and organize peer review sessions. WID interns seek and compile resources and materials to support writing instruction for the faculty in their designated areas (e.g., notes on discipline-specific style guides, samples of various writing genres, etc.), review writing assignment instructions, and engage in assessment norming sessions.

Both writing tutors in the Learning Center and WID interns work approximately ten hours per week; however, the type of work completed during those ten hours varies greatly. A writing tutor with the Learning Center follows an invariant/constant weekly schedule, whereas a WID intern's workday includes more variety in activities and responsibilities. For instance, in addition to attending their own courses toward

completion of their undergraduate degree, WID interns typically spend approximately two hours per day completing the following tasks: sending e-mails that include time management, writing process, or assignment-specific writing tips to all students in their designated courses; working in individual tutoring sessions as designated faculty and/or students in their assigned courses request; preparing workshop handouts and materials for group sessions; and meeting with designated faculty members to discuss upcoming writing assignments or co-review the current performance of students in their courses. Although both a WID intern and a writing tutor work the same number of hours per week, the WID intern's daily responsibilities demonstrate a wider range of tasks, looking quite different from those of the writing tutors who are expected to show up at regularly assigned times and work with individual students, providing feedback on potentially unfamiliar assignments.

How did this unique form of assistance develop? The WID internship program borrows its practices from many philosophical tenets. We blended theories and research regarding traditional tutors (Barnett & Rosen), writing fellows programs (Pemberton), and supplemental instruction theory (Blanc, DeBuhr, & Martin) to create the WID internship program. Like writing fellows programs, the WID internship program draws from the belief that the WID interns who have completed content-based courses can contextualize the discipline-specific support to other students (Pemberton). Zawacki asserts that writing fellows, when matched with content-area faculty, can change the culture of teaching and learning in a writing-intensive course, thus improving students' writing achievement. To embed content knowledge and discipline-specific focus within writing support, the WID internship program also borrows from tenets of supplemental instruction, which uses undergraduate peers who have succeeded in a course in order to provide "quality instruction in the reading, writing, and thinking skills necessary for content mastery" (Blanc, DeBuhr & Martin 82). Supplemental instruction provides a mechanism that allows for an upper division student to provide aid in learning strategies and course content simultaneously (Ning & Downing). Through the WID internship, we wanted to maintain the best of the tutoring pedagogy while also expanding our definition of academic support to contextualized and discipline-specific experiences by allowing students to interact with peers who were knowledgeable about content and assignment expectations.

As the literature regarding supplemental instruction suggests, a WAC-trained faculty member can nominate students who have successfully completed a writing-intensive content-area course to become a WID intern. Faculty members are requested to base their nominations on both content knowledge in the student's major and proficiency in discipline-specific writing skills. Academic achievement and upper-division status are also considered, and those students who meet all criteria are asked to complete an application and interview. When candidates progress through the WID intern application and selection process, we prefer to assign them to the specific course and faculty member who nominated them.

Considerations: Collaboration over Competition

With the formation of the WID internship to support the WAC program, honoring the skills and experience of the Learning Center's tutors became imperative. As directors of the Learning Center and the WAC Program, we did not want to work at cross purposes. Rather, we each wanted to build on the unique strengths and offerings of our respective academic support programs, which required ongoing communication and deliberate collaboration between the two of us to initiate the WID internship program's development and design.

We faced several obstacles that could have diminished each program's success. For instance, the WAC Program (which includes the WID internship) and the Learning Center are housed in completely different administrative areas of the campus. The WAC Program is housed in Academic Affairs, whereas the Learning Center is housed in Student Affairs. Many Writing Centers are housed within English Departments only (Threatt); as such, our Learning Center tutors are primarily English and English Education students or professionals. When considering expanding support into courses outside of the English department for the WAC Program, we benefitted from the help of strong undergraduate writers who were non-English majors. In addition to the physical separation of the buildings, collaboration on travel, research, and training that required university funding had to be approved through two separate hierarchical administrative lines.

Another consideration during program development focused on the potential competition that could occur between the interns and the tutors; rather than set our programs against each other, we hoped to establish an appreciation for each program's distinct strengths and skills. For instance, the Learning

Center writing tutors possess experience in forming relationships quickly—within a half-hour tutoring session—with tutees. They also have expertise in writing pedagogy and English language conventions that WID interns may lack. In contrast, WID interns possess a level of content-area expertise and the program's emphasis on communicating directly and frequently with faculty administering writing-intensive courses, due to the structure of assigning interns to specific faculty and courses. These benefits needed to be explored, explained, and respected among personnel in each academic support program.

In addition to helping the WID interns and Learning Center tutors understand their unique roles and academic support offerings, we communicated these same distinct programmatic purposes and benefits to the faculty members who teach writing-intensive courses. Because the WID internship program was developed to ease the workload of the Learning Center tutors, the faculty needed to accept this new form of academic support as viable and beneficial to improving student learning. Yet when conflicting course schedules arose between the WID interns and students in their designated writing-intensive courses, the faculty members needed to feel confident sending their students to the Learning Center. Most importantly, we publicized and assured faculty members that both academic support programs, funded by the university, were options for their students, and that both enhanced the WAC Program's student learning goals. Thus, it was essential to embed and interweave opportunities for the interaction and sharing of expertise among the WID interns, Learning Center tutors, and faculty members in order to increase the WAC Program's probability of success. The points of collaboration and program intersection are provided and referenced as a possible model for other university administrators to follow when developing academic support for a university-wide WAC Program.

Collaboration

The WAC Program's and the Learning Center's staffs collaborate from the first screening of WID intern candidates. Writing-intensive faculty nominate WID intern candidates, and if a student who already serves as a tutor in the Learning Center is nominated, the student has the choice to pursue either the WID internship or continue as a Learning Center tutor. We selected from different pools of applicants for each program. In one case, a WID intern candidate who already tutored for the Learning Center indicated that she felt more comfortable with a traditional and

structured tutoring environment as compared to the more open-ended, self-paced work environment of the WID internship. WAC staff and the Learning Center Director participate together in screening WID intern applications and interviewing final candidates.

Collaboration between the Learning Center's and WAC Program's staffs continues throughout all phases of WID intern preparation and program participation. Specifically, the WID intern training calls upon the Learning Center tutors' writing expertise. Because training for the writing tutors had been established prior to the university's WAC Program, it made more sense for us to build upon this training. Prior to the WAC Program, writing tutors were trained via a series of workshops that continued throughout the semester and that covered topics regarding tutoring responsibilities, FERPA, tutoring policies and a handbook with tutoring tips and strategies. The establishment of the WAC Program necessitated minor changes in writing tutor training. Most notably, with the introduction of the WAC Program, the Learning Center Director required tutors to come back to campus prior to the opening of the semester for a day to complete "Get to Know the Tutors" sessions followed by a "Wrap It Up" session at the semester's end. Thus, she formalized definite beginning and end points to the tutors' ongoing training. In addition, she would not allow tutors to facilitate sessions alone until they had observed at least eight hours (16 different half-hour tutoring sessions) with veteran tutors. Because of the already established training program and structure provided to the writing tutors, they became essential facilitators of portions of WID intern training, which we first offered in the fall of 2011 with our pilot program.

WID interns' training begins in late summer of each academic year and consists of five sessions; members of the Learning Center staff facilitate two of the five sessions. During the second session, the Learning Center Director provides an overview of available open resources, from books to websites, that will help the WID interns better understand tutoring techniques, writing theory and pedagogy—areas they have never studied despite their strong content knowledge. During the fourth session, tutors from the Learning Center provide WID interns with mock tutorials, role playing the part of some of the difficult students they have encountered in their experiences, ranging from students who expect tutors to edit papers to students who are reticent and hesitant to engage in a writing conference. The tutors also pose additional questions and problem scenarios to the WID interns to discuss the best methods of support and successful tutoring techniques, and they conclude

with an open Q&A session. In essence, these sessions give WID interns an understanding of general definitions of good writing, as opposed to the discipline-specific expectations they later glean from experience in their majors and interactions with content-area faculty. The Learning Center tutors expose the WID interns to real-world tutoring dilemmas and solutions so they have sound pedagogical approaches to providing feedback in individual writing conferences.

During the year, the WID interns' training becomes ongoing and job-embedded. For example, during their first semester, WID interns must observe two hours (four half-hour sessions) of tutoring provided by the Learning Center. These observations continue to hone their feedback skills for their own writing sessions with students in their designated courses. Unlike the required observation sessions for the writing tutors prior to solo tutoring sessions, the WID interns complete observations and actual tutoring sessions simultaneously during their first semester of the WID internship as their schedules permit. The Learning Center tutors and WID interns share techniques and pedagogical choices at the end of each observation. If WID interns require more general knowledge or information on topics ranging from FERPA and confidentiality issues, to interacting with varying personality types, to a better understanding of style guides, the WID interns have the option to attend Learning Center training. These training interactions provide general foundations of tutoring pedagogy and allow for relationships to form between the Learning Center tutors and the WID interns.

In order to help the faculty members teaching writing-intensive courses understand possible avenues of academic support offered at the university, both the Learning Center tutors and WID interns become actively involved in faculty development sessions. The faculty training is divided into two distinct parts. The first segment consists of four 3-hour sessions prior to writing-intensive instruction, and during one session, the Learning Center director provides information about resources, such as the WAC Clearinghouse and Purdue's Online Writing Lab, which are readily available through the Center's website. Rather than simply showing the links, the director emphasizes the integration of these resources into course instruction, just as she emphasizes them to the WID interns during their training. After her presentation, the Learning Center tutors provide an actual tutoring session, giving feedback on a written product to an authentic tutee, for the faculty members. The discussion following the actual tutoring session focuses on the use of techniques to support revision

and higher-order concerns in writing, such as purpose, content, and organization, as opposed to emphasis on editing and lower-order concerns, such as grammar and mechanics. The faculty members see the theory discussed in training enacted in practice during the tutoring session.

The second segment of faculty training consists of an additional six sessions during the faculty member's first semester of writing-intensive instruction. This is when the WID interns become involved in the faculty professional development program. Because the second segment of training is provided in a hybrid format, with four sessions completed online, the WID interns first meet their designated faculty prior to training, during an orientation. This orientation affords an informal opportunity for faculty and WID interns to discuss course goals, content, writing expectations of students, and the role of the WID intern, and it provides the first opportunity to discuss discipline-specific writing expectations with designated content-area faculty members. They also agree upon meeting times to talk about the alignment of course objectives to specific writing assignments and the stylistic expectations appropriate to their discipline. During the semester, faculty members ask WID interns for assistance in seeking writing resources, discussing writing assignments, critiquing the clarity of their expectations for the assignments, and engaging in assessment norming activities to ensure that the WID interns are providing students with feedback meeting the expectations of the faculty members during individual writing conferences.

Conclusions and Additional Points of Intersection with Resources

The points of collaboration and intersection between the WAC Program and the Learning Center do not end with WID intern selection nor with intern and faculty training. For instance, finances are shared between the two programs, in that Learning Center tutors are paid for the time they dedicate in WID intern and faculty training through the WAC Program budget. Monies are transferred between budgets to support the Learning Center staff for their allocated work time. Also, when the WID internship was initially being developed, the WAC Program helped to support the Learning Center by providing partial funding for tutors until the WID internship program was able to ease the load and student demand for academic support on the campus.

Space has also been a consideration. As with many universities, the physical facilities are in high demand, and office and tutoring space are stretched thin at this

institution. The university administration provided office space for the full-time WAC Program staff; however, they did not include consideration for the space needs of the WID interns. Hence, to answer that need, the Learning Center, housed in the library, shares individual tutoring space with the WID interns. Because the university's library is perceived symbolically as the hub of the university's academic mission, the provision of library space for WID interns is both central and convenient.

Finally, the two unit directors deliberately collaborate on most academic support areas that connect their operations. For instance, the Learning Center director serves as an ex-officio member of the WAC Committee, which is chaired by the WAC director. The WAC director has also served on search committees for Learning Center staff, such as the selection of a Learning Center program coordinator, and the WAC director has served on *ad hoc* space allocation and design committees. The two directors understand that the success of each program is somewhat dependent upon their interactions, and the ability to provide varied, quality academic support enhances the WAC Program, the university's quality enhancement plan.

Collaboration doesn't always happen naturally. Sometimes, it has to be deliberate and planned. In order to enhance the university's mission to improve writing skills among all undergraduate students on campus, the Learning Center and WAC Program staff communicate, collaborate, and share. Rather than creating a competitive environment between the existing academic support for writing and the newly created academic support for content-area writing-intensive courses, we minimized competition and honored our unique contributions. It is through the fostering of ideas that successful academic programs and the support needed to sustain the WAC Program can occur, and only with the help of the Learning Center could this university-wide program flourish.

Works Cited

- Barnett, Robert W., and Rosen, Lois M. "The WAC/Writing Center Partnership: Creating a Campus-wide Writing Environment." *Writing Centers and Writing Across the Curriculum Programs: Building Interdisciplinary Partnerships*. Eds. Robert W. Barnett and Jacob S. Blummer. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999. 1-12. Print.
- Blanc, Robert A., DeBuhr, Larry E., and Martin, Deanna C. "Breaking the Attrition Cycle: The Effects of Supplemental Instruction on Undergraduate Performance and Attrition." *The Journal of Higher Education* 54.1 (1983): 80-90. Print.
- Carter, Michael. "Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines." *College Composition and Communication* 58 (2007): 358-418. Print.
- Chanock, Kate. "A Shared Focus for WAC, Writing Tutors and EAP: Identifying the 'Academic Purposes' in Writing Across the Curriculum." *The WAC Journal* 15 (2004): 19-32. Print.
- Ning, Hoi Kwan, and Downing, Kevin. "The Impact of Supplemental Instruction on Learning Competence and Academic Performance." *Studies in Higher Education* 35 (2010): 921-939. Print.
- Pemberton, Michael. "Rethinking the WAC/Writing Center Connection." *Writing Center Journal* 15 (1995): 116-133. Print.
- Severino, Carol, and Traschel, Mary. "Theories of Specialized Discourses and Writing Fellows Programs." Spec. issue of *Across the Disciplines*, 5 (2008): Web. 7 Jul. 2012.
- Threatt, Tiffany. "Implementing Writing Across the Curriculum Principles into Departmental Writing Centers." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, 6.2 (2009): Web. 7 Jul. 2012.
- Zawacki, Terry M. "Writing Fellows as WAC Change Agents." Spec. issue of *Across the Disciplines*, 5 (2008): Web. 7 Jul. 2012.

THE CATEGORIES WE KEEP: WRITING CENTER FORMS AND THE *TOPOI* OF WRITING

Christopher LeCluyse
Westminster College
clecluyse@westminstercollege.edu

At the writing center where I began my career, every session ended with a conundrum. Our database required us to complete the record for the consultation by checking one of some two dozen checkboxes indicating the topics covered during the session. Because most of the tutors were graduate students concurrently teaching first-year composition, some of these topics were drawn from the standardized curriculum for that course, including a tripartite division of the revision process into the separate stages of revising, editing, and proofreading. These categories were inherently redundant, since the tutor then had to check whatever other aspects of writing revising at each of these levels entailed. As time went on, we added additional categories to reflect the kind of language novice writers brought with them to the writing center, including “flow.” Now covering a single topic like organization might involve checking three boxes, one for revision, one for organization, and one for flow, if the writer’s concept of that ambiguous category included organization.

The conflicting categories on our database form reflected in miniature the many conceptions of writing that come together in any writing center. Administrators had defined these categories based on their experience teaching writing in the classroom and one-on-one in the center. Tutors absorbed these categories as they engaged with these forms after every session and echoed this language to student writers, whose own less-developed concepts of writing were also given voice through categories like flow. This mundane set of checkboxes, then, recorded an ongoing process of articulating and learning what we talk about when we talk about writing (cf. Corbett and Eberly 23).

Rather than merely recording data, such forms reveal how writing center practitioners conceive of writing and pass those conceptions on to others. Precisely because they are designed with everyday purposes in mind, these artifacts reveal our basic assumptions, the most basic of which is that writing can indeed be broken down into various categories, which can then be sorted hierarchically (for example, into higher- and lower-order concerns—see Reigstad and McAndrew 11). These categories amount to the *topoi* of writing instruction, rhetorical commonplaces

that writing center administrators have inherited and which they use to shape their own practice, that of their tutors, and that of the writers who visit the center. After describing such forms in greater detail, I will draw on Aristotelian rhetorical theory to explain how such forms reflect and contribute to disciplinary consensus by continuously passing on administrators’ conceptions of writing to tutors and writers, and thereby reinforcing the *topoi* of writing studies. As analysis of the forms will show, writing center practitioners share a general consensus on which categories they most commonly address. Consideration of the pedagogy underlying those categories, however, suggests that our day-to-day classification of writing is nowhere near as innovative as our lore would have us believe. Examining the categories on these forms as disciplinary *topoi* underscores their important role in helping tutors and developing writers conceptualize writing and suggests that we must approach even the most seemingly trivial artifacts of our practice with pedagogical care.

The Form of Forms

Figure 1 illustrates a typical set of categories included on the writing center forms I surveyed. It comprehensively lists various aspects of writing and organizes those aspects into both a hierarchy and a chronology. Categories appear more or less in the order that a writer encounters them during the writing process—understanding the assignment before imagining an audience, for example. In this case, the list is not divided into additional groupings such as stages of the writing process but takes the form of a single uninterrupted string of categories (see Fig. 1).

While the list in Figure 1 includes, at the end, different stages of the writing process, such as “Editing strategies” and “Proofreading strategies,” other forms offer only a short list of such stages without more specific categories. The most thorough forms, such as that in Figure 2, divide the list into sections under various headings. In this case, the writer completes the first half of the form before the session, and the tutor completes the form afterward (see Fig. 2 on p. 6).

Figure 1: Undivided List of Categories
(Bucknell University)

- _____ Understanding the assignment/
thinking about course material
- _____ Reading strategies
- _____ Imagining/accommodating audience
- _____ Conventions of academic
discipline/genre
- _____ Clarifying/focusing thesis statement
- _____ Rhetorical strategies
- _____ Argumentation
- _____ Organization
- _____ Development
- _____ Use of evidence
- _____ Paragraphs (structure, topic sentences,
coherence, unity)
- _____ Word choice
- _____ Transitions
- _____ Grammar
- _____ Punctuation
- _____ Sentence style
- _____ Spelling
- _____ Summarizing and paraphrasing
source materials
- _____ Integrating source materials
- _____ Citing sources
- _____ ESL assistance
- _____ Study strategies/time management
- _____ Editing strategies
- _____ Proofreading strategies
- _____ Oral presentation practice
- _____ Other

As in many forms of this kind, the use of headings and layout clearly articulates a process-based approach to writing. Both forms also generally arrange topics according to a hierarchy of concerns, placing large-scale issues like “Understanding the assignment” (Fig. 1) or “Discussed ideas/selected evidence” (Fig. 2) above finer points like “Word choice” (Fig. 1) or “Punctuation” (Fig. 2). Writing center practitioners in general are so used to taking a process approach and prioritizing “higher-order” over “lower-order” concerns (see Reigstad and McAndrew) that such arrangement may seem intuitive—not even a matter of choice. In the heat of practice, we forget that these ideas did indeed come from somewhere and that they constrain the decisions we make. The forms themselves have been designed for pragmatic purposes—to record information, not to take a stand

on writing pedagogy. Nevertheless, such forms argue for a particular conception of writing and construct that conception through the terms that they use. Writing center practitioners shape their practice to these categories and reinforce them by using such terminology in tutorials. Looking at record-keeping forms critically therefore allows us to characterize the *topoi* of writing center praxis.

Learning from Check-Box *Topoi*

In ancient Greek rhetoric a *topos* (*topoi*, plural) is a figurative “place” that a rhetor visits to find material for argumentation. This spatial metaphor, of argument as the territory and these categories as demarcated areas of that territory, continues an association between ideas and place that predates Aristotle (Kennedy 45; Miller, “The Aristotelian *Topos*” 134). Discussions of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* distinguish two kinds of *topoi*: the so-called “common” *topoi*, modes of argumentation such as cause and effect or greater and lesser common to many different fields, and the “special” *topoi*, topics specific to particular fields. As modern rhetoricians like George A. Kennedy and Carolyn Miller note, Aristotle himself never defines these terms (Kennedy 45; Miller, “The Aristotelian *Topos*” 134). In fact, he frequently uses different words to denote the two, reserving *topoi* or *koima* for common topics and *idia* (“specificities” or “species”) for special topics. He even explicitly distinguishes one kind of *topos* from the other, stating, “By ‘species’ I mean the premises specific to each genus [of knowledge], and by *topoi* those common to all” (Kennedy 46). Nevertheless, in other places Aristotle does use *topos* to indicate topics specific to a field, for example those *topoi* particular to law (Kennedy 106). Such inconsistencies of terminology prompt Michael C. Leff to dismiss the *topos* as a “confused notion” with “a bewildering diversity of meanings” (23, qtd in Miller, “Aristotle’s ‘Special’ Topics” 64). Over the past four decades, however, rhetoricians invested in the dynamic and generative properties of rhetoric have sought to clarify (and improve upon) an Aristotelian notion of invention, imposing consistency where they have found little by using the term *topos* for both common and special topics.

The categories listed on writing center forms by and large name special topics particular to the field of composition studies. Each check box represents an individual *topos*, an area of writing collectively defined over time by composition theorists, handbook writers, and teachers. As Carolyn Miller explains, “such [special] topics have three sources: conventional expectation in rhetorical situations, knowledge and

issues available in the institutions and organizations in which those situations occur, and concepts available in specific networks of knowledge (or disciplines)” (“Aristotle’s ‘Special’ Topics” 66). When writing center administrators select which *topoi* to list on such forms, they therefore draw on and in some cases react against conventional expectations of composition studies as well as the field’s collective knowledge and disciplinary debates—a blend of pedagogical orientations that I will later demonstrate in the forms themselves.

While the origins of special topics in the expectations and conventions of entire discourse communities would seem to limit their utility for producing new knowledge, recall that Aristotle presents them as means of invention. Others may have demarcated the “places” one may visit, but these predefined topics inspire new contributions to the discourse. As Miller observes, “the *topoi* serve both managerial and generative functions” (“The Aristotelian *Topos*” 132), constraining the discourse even as they provide grounds for new arguments. For those analyzing the work of others rather than generating their own, *topoi* can serve “as an aid to pattern recognition,” facilitating “the connection between the abstract and the concrete, between a pattern and the material in which it is instantiated . . .” (Miller, “The Aristotelian *Topos*” 142). Tutors working in centers that utilize check-box forms make such connections twice over: first, like all writing instructors, as they detect patterns in the writer’s work and later as they indicate on the form the topics covered in their sessions.

Seen as *topoi*, the categories on writing center forms engage tutors and writers alike in an educational exchange. Consider first that tutors—not writing center administrators or writers—are the primary audience of such forms. The tutor arguably experiences the most contact with them as he or she reflects on a just-finished session and completes the record. Indeed some forms, like the one reproduced as Figure 2, seem primarily intended to help tutors reflect on the session after the fact. The expert-defined categories used on such forms model a nuanced, complex concept of writing that tutors must engage with every time they complete a record. Each check mark reinforces received knowledge from one’s disciplinary forbears, affirming, “We do writing thus and so.” In some cases, writers also check boxes to indicate what they would like to work on. Even when writers do not have access to the forms, tutors model these categories as they identify and articulate writers’ concerns and help writers address them.

Acquiring these special *topoi* takes time, however. Experts in the discourse community assume that those

working their way into the community share their understanding, but such is not necessarily the case. As Thomas Newkirk finds in his study of student and instructor roles in writing conferences,

Terminology plays an ambiguous role in the performance of teachers and students. Terms like “detail,” or “specifics,” or “organization” are often used by instructors as if the term itself defined or explained the writing operation or criterion being referenced. It is more likely that these terms serve to index, or point to, tacit understandings that capable writers develop from their experiences working with texts. (200)

As a result, such *topoi* “are useful [only] if the writer possesses a grounded tacit sense of how the term functions in the discourse community” (Newkirk 200). Studying the *topoi* on a range of these forms provides a snapshot of that “grounded tacit sense” within the writing center community: what aspects of writing are considered most salient and what pedagogies underlie writing centers’ hybrid practice.

Check Box *Topoi* as Disciplinary Consensus

To characterize how writing center practitioners divide writing into various *topoi*, I surveyed check-box forms from writing centers at twenty-two colleges and universities across the country, provided in response to several requests on the WCENTER e-mail list.[1] While this sample is not, properly speaking, random, it does cover a wide geographical distribution of schools of different types: public and private; two- and four-year colleges; comprehensive and research universities; and professional schools as well as those focused on liberal arts and sciences. I will first tally and characterize the categories that appear most frequently on these forms.

Determining the frequency of *topoi* gives a sense of which topics the writing center administrators who typically create them agree are most fundamental to writing and writing instruction. Figure 3 tallies all of the *topoi* included on the forms and groups them according to a hierarchy of concerns—substantive issues like thesis, evidence, and large-scale organization over sentence-level issues, word choice, grammar, and mechanics. Since the actual wording may vary across forms (“citing sources” vs. “citation,” for example) I have considered similarly worded category labels to cover the same topic. In some cases, however, labels include more than one domain: while one form may treat spelling as its own category, another may group spelling and punctuation. I have tallied these combined *topoi* on their own if they are presented as a

single domain (linked by an understood *and*) but included *topoi* in separate tallies if they are presented as distinct (linked by an understood *or*, as in a list separated by commas). In other instances, ambiguous wording has led me to err on the side of caution and tally a category on its own (is “topic management” about selecting a topic, for example, or focusing a discussion?). In cases where *topoi* were named differently but cover similar domains, I have grouped them under a single heading but not totaled them since some forms include redundant *topoi* and would therefore inflate the total. Arrows indicate those *topoi* that appeared on at least half of the forms ($n \geq 11$) (see Fig. 3 on pp. 7-8).

Searching for the largest numbers (marked with arrows), we can find some areas of consensus, not only in specific domains of writing but in the wording used to identify them. The most common category, reflected on 20 of the 22 forms, is “Thesis.” “Organization” comes close behind it at 19, followed by “Understanding Assignment” (15), “Punctuation” (13), and “Transitions” (12). “Sentence Structure,” “Wording/Word Choice,” and “Grammar” appear on 11 of the forms. No other category appears on at least half of the forms, though we can see that differently named *topoi* cover similar domains, and some like “Audience” and “Paragraphs” appear in almost half. All of the forms feature *topoi* that indicate various approaches to invention, including “Brainstorming” and “Prewriting,” which can be grouped together under “Invention.” If we include “Revision,” “Final Draft,” and “Rewrite” together under the assumption that they all indicate revising a previously written draft, this combined “Revision” grouping would also make it into the majority.

Taken together, these most common *topoi* provide a snapshot of how writing center practitioners at a wide range of institutions and geographical locations focus their attention within the general domain of writing. The *topoi* are distributed across the hierarchy of writing concerns—and the frequency of each category is almost in direct proportion to how substantive that issue is. “Thesis,” “Organization,” and “Understanding argument” are macro-level issues, vs. the more specific “Punctuation,” “Wording/Word Choice,” “Sentence Structure,” “Grammar,” and “Transitions.” Combined with the “Invention” and “Revision” groupings, this short list covers most of the stops on the way from receiving an assignment to turning in a finished paper. If a writing center director were exiled to a desert island and could choose only ten *topoi* to include on his or her forms, these ten would about cover it.

The most frequently represented *topoi* reflect the hybridity of writing center praxis, a combination of process, expressivist, and current-traditional approaches. While the “Revision” grouping draws on process theory, the various terms used to describe what happens before students start writing—“Prewriting,” “Brainstorming,” and “Invention”—are drawn respectively from process, expressivist, and (in rare cases) rhetorical pedagogies.^[2] “Thesis” may show a rhetorical focus, though the notion of supporting a central claim is so fundamental to American academic writing that the concept rises above pedagogical preference. Most of the remaining *topoi*—“Punctuation,” “Wording/Word Choice,” “Sentence Structure,” “Grammar,” and “Transitions”—reflect a current-traditional focus on conventions of academic writing and micro-level correctness. And “Understanding Assignment,” it could be argued, is simply pragmatic, though some forms put a rhetorical spin on the idea by indicating the purpose and goals of the writer. Half of the most common *topoi*, therefore, do not reflect the expressivist and process-based pedagogies that informed the development of the modern writing center (North 438; Murphy and Sherwood 2–4; Boquet 476). Explicitly rhetorical *topoi* are almost missing, and none of the most common *topoi* reflect a collaborative or social constructionist approach—perhaps because we see collaboration more as a means to an end than an explicit topic to address.

Just as interesting are the *topoi* and attendant pedagogies that are *underrepresented*. Terms related to literary analysis, rhetoric, and a corrective response to writing receive short shrift. The ambiguous *topoi* of “Tone” and “Style,” characteristic of literary studies, each turn up on only four and five of the twenty-two forms, respectively. Despite the reorientation of composition toward rhetoric over the past three decades and writing centers’ wholehearted adoption of rhetorical approaches, only three of the forms include “Rhetoric” as a category—though the rhetorical category of “Audience” is represented on almost half the forms. The relative infrequency of *topoi* like “Editing,” “Proofreading,” and “Corrections” may more accurately reflect the predispositions of writing center practitioners away from micro-level concerns, however often writers themselves seek help in these areas (see, for example, Beason).

A certain class of *topoi* seen on the forms reflect no particular pedagogical orientation at all but rather attempt to accommodate the conceptions that students bring to the writing center. The term “Flow,” for example, appears on three forms. Writing center practitioners may joke about the ambiguity of this

term and attempt to identify just what *topoi* in their own expert lexicon map onto it: Organization? Transitions? Conciseness? Including “Flow” or other broad terms like “Polish” on the forms, however, creates a space for more impressionistic views of writing in an otherwise technical context, bridging novice and expert vocabularies. The use of student-defined terms in writing instruction is occasionally advocated by instructors like Dave Waddell, who notes that first-year composition students asked to define “good” writing on their first day of class employ terms like “flowing.”

There is a drawback to including such terms alongside more specialized vocabulary, however, since they necessarily clash with expert-defined terms. If other choices are available, anyone checking “Flow” must also check “Organization” or “Transitions” or “Conciseness” or other *topoi*, sacrificing descriptive accuracy for accommodation. Perhaps because they give rise to such problems, impressionistic terms appear only on a minority of forms, suggesting that most writing center practitioners are more interested in supplanting novice views with their own more fully developed conceptions, rather than meeting student writers where they are. As Newkirk argues, however, we consider these *topoi* more accurate and developed precisely because we inhabit the discourse community that uses them. Perhaps for this reason writing center practitioners use such specialized *topoi* on their “private” record-keeping forms, often translating student-defined concepts into the expert *topoi* they themselves use and value: the student writer asks whether the paper “sounds good,” and we check “coherence.”

Seen in this light, writing center records play an important role in an educational exchange. When a tutor meets with a writer, the two exchange not only observations about or suggestions for a particular piece of writing but the *topoi* of writing that the tutor has acquired. The tutor models to the writer the many different areas of focus that experts bring to writing—like all writing instructors encountering the gap between expert and novice understandings of concepts and terminology. With sufficient experience and reflection, the writer’s conception of writing may develop from having few *topoi* (the stereotypical “Grammar,” “Flow,” and “Sounds Good”) to having all the complexity, hierarchy, and detail reflected on the forms. That process, however, requires the writer to “use terms she does not yet own—and act as if they are hers. She must use terms, saturated with tacit institutional meanings she does not yet understand” (Newkirk 201). By paying closer attention to how we

categorize writing on these most mundane artifacts of our daily business, we may facilitate that transfer of *topoi* and enhance the writing center as a place of learning.

Notes

1. Special thanks to the writing center administrators who provided these forms: Deaver Traywick, Black Hills State University (Spearfish, SD); Stephanie K. Carter, Bryant University (Smithfield, RI); Deirdre O’Connor, Bucknell University (Lewisburg, PA); Kathy J. Evertz, Carleton College (Northfield, MN); Diane Gruenberg, College of New Jersey (Trenton, NJ); Vicki Russell, Duke University (Durham, NC); Wendy Menefee-Libey, Harvey Mudd College (Claremont, CA); Haydie Le Corbeiller, Idaho State University (Pocatello, ID); Neal Lerner, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy Health Sciences (Boston, MA); Robert Pickford, San Diego Mesa College (San Diego, CA); Jane DeTullio, Monmouth University (West Long Branch, NJ); Jane Kokernak, Mount Ida College (Newton Center, MA); Paul Ellis, Northern Kentucky University (Highland Heights, KY); Jon Olson, Penn State University (University Park, PA); Diane Dowdey, Sam Houston State University (Huntsville, TX); Shannin Schroeder, Southern Arkansas University (Magnolia, AK); Joan Mullin, University of Texas at Austin, Writing Mentors Program; Vicente Lozano, University of Texas at Austin, Undergraduate Writing Center; Susan Hays Bussey, University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (Chickasha, OK); Jackie Grutsch McKinney, Ball State University (Muncie, IN); Deanna Odney, University of Southern Indiana (Evansville, IN); and the staff of the Julia N. Visor Academic Center at Illinois State University (Normal, IL).

2. For definitions of these various pedagogical approaches and in-depth literature reviews, see Tate, Rupiper, and Schick. Fulkerson offers a more comprehensive survey of current composition pedagogies, taking Tate et al. to task for not including more recently developed approaches.

Figure 2: List of Categories Divided by Headings (Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences)

I. Before the Session

A. Which assignment are you currently working on? Number _____

- * In what stage of writing is this assignment?
 - understanding directions/goals stage
 - planning/brainstorming/notetaking stage
 - rough draft
 - revised draft
 - final draft/completed assignment
- * As I work on this assignment, I am focusing on _____

B. Today, what would you like to do with this assignment? Check all that apply:

- * **Get Started**
 - understand goals
 - understand directions
 - brainstorm
- * **Develop a draft**
 - work on introduction
 - work on conclusion
 - work on quotes/paraphrases
- * **Edit a draft**
 - improve style/wording
 - grammar
 - punctuation
 - citation format
- * **Other** _____
- * **Plan/Organize**
 - discuss ideas/select evidence
 - identify a target audience
 - make an outline/choose a structure
 - clarify purpose/thesis
- * **Revise a draft**
 - reorganize ideas
 - sharpen purpose
 - strengthen examples
 - achieve clarity

II. After the Session [...]

- * **Student brought to session:**
 - nothing
 - rough draft
 - assignment sheet, no writing
 - revised draft
 - notes/outline
 - completed assignment

* **What did you work on? (check all that apply)**

- Got Started**
 - focused on understanding goals
 - focused on understanding directions
 - brainstormed
- Developed a draft**
 - worked on introduction
 - worked on conclusion
 - worked on quotes/paraphrases
- Edited a draft**
 - improved style/wording
 - grammar
 - punctuation
 - citation format
- Other** _____
- Planned/Organized**
 - discussed ideas/selected evidence
 - identified a target audience
 - made an outline/chose a structure
 - clarified purpose/thesis
- Revised a draft**
 - reorganized ideas
 - sharpened purpose
 - strengthened examples
 - achieved clarity

* **Does the student seem to be making satisfactory progress towards completing the assignments in a timely manner?** yes no (explain: _____)

- * **Does the student seem to need specific help in any of the following areas?**
 - Accurately summarizing
 - Focusing an argument
 - Structuring arguments
 - Avoiding plagiarism
 - Making arguments convincing
 - Accurately paraphrasing
 - Supporting arguments with evidence

Other _____

Figure 3: Categories on Forms from Twenty-Two Writing Centers

Stages of Writing Process		Other Topics	
Process	1	Instructor Comments	5
INVENTION		ORGANIZATION	
Prewriting	4	Organization	19 ←
Prewriting + Brainstorming	1	Outlining	5
Brainstorming	9		
Planning/Brainstorming/Note-taking stage	1	Format/Genre	4
Planning/Idea development /Thesis Statement	1	Disciplinary/Academic Conventions	3
Generating/Developing Ideas	5	Audience	10
Invention	2	Rhetoric	3
Getting started	1	Visual Design	2
ASSIGNMENT/GOALS		INTRO/CONCLUSION	
Understanding assignment	15 ←	Introduction/Conclusion	6
Understanding directions/goals stage	1	Introduction and Conclusion separate	6
Purpose/Goals	3		
Research	5	SUPPORT	
(Rough) Draft	3	Support	6
REVISION		Evidence	5
Revising/Revision	7	Examples	1
Final Draft/Rewrite	4	Development	5
EDITING/PROOFREADING		Development, support, research	1
Editing	4	USING SOURCES	
Editing & Proofreading	3	Sources	6
Proofreading	3	Paraphrasing	2
Sentence-level/surface features	1	Summarizing	2
		Paraphrasing + Summarizing	1
		Quoting	2
		Quoting + Paraphrasing	3
		Using a reference	1

Figure 3 (continued): Categories on Forms from Twenty-Two Writing Centers

IDEAS/CONTENT/TOPIC		VOCABULARY/WORD CHOICE	
Ideas	3	Vocabulary	3
Discussed w/o Reading	1	Wording/Word Choice	11 ←
Content	3	Idiomatc Expressions	1
Topic	3	Style + Wording	3
Topic management	1		
Topic, thesis, main ideas, overall argument	1	GRAMMAR/USAGE	
Indirectly responding to question or assignment	1	Grammar	11 ←
Focusing topic	1	Grammar + Usage	2
Focus	4	Grammar + Punctuation/Mechanics	4
		Grammar, sentence structure, word choice	1
		Usage	2
THESIS/ARGUMENT			
Thesis	20 ←	VERBS	
Argument	5	Voice (active/passive)	2
		Mood	1
		Tense	2
		Verb Agreement	1
SOURCE CITATION		Verb + Pronoun Agreement	1
Citation	8	Pronouns	2
Documentation	7	Prepositions	1
Citation/Documentation	1	Articles	2
Bibliography/Citation	1	MECHANICS	
Sub-boxes for diff citation styles	6	Punctuation	13 ←
		Mechanics	1
		Mechanics + Spelling	1
		Spelling	6
PARAGRAPHS		Corrections	1
Paragraphs	9	ESL	6
Cohesion/Coherence	2	Writer differs substantially from U.S. standard edited academic English	1
Transitions	12 ←	Understanding rules of standard written English	1
Topic sentences	1	Other	6
Flow	3		
SENTENCES			
Sentence Structure	11 ←		
Clarity	9		
Brevity/Conciseness	2		
Tone	4		
Polish	1		
Style	5		

Works Cited

- Beason, Larry. "Ethos and Error: How Business People React to Errors." *College Composition and Communication* 53.1 (2001): 33-64.
- Blau, Susan, and John Hall. "Guilt-Free Tutoring: Rethinking How We Tutor Non-Native-English-Speaking Students." *Writing Center Journal* 23.1 (2002): 23-44.
- Boquet, Elizabeth H. "Our Little Secret: A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions." *College Composition and Communication* 50.3 (Feb. 1999): 463-82.
- Corbett, Edward P. J., and Rosa A. Eberly. *The Elements of Reasoning*. 2nd ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.
- Fulkerson, Richard. "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century." *College Composition and Communication* 56.4 (2005): 654-87.
- Kennedy, George A., ed. *Aristotle, on Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2006.
- Miller, Carolyn R. "The Aristotelian *Topos*: Hunting for Novelty." *Rereading Aristotle's Rhetoric*. Ed. Alan G. Gross and Arthur E. Walzer. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000. 130-146.
- . "Aristotle's 'Special Topics' in Rhetorical Practice and Pedagogy." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 17.1 (1987): 61-70.
- Murphy, Christina, and Steve Sherwood, eds. *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford-St. Martin's, 2011.
- Myers, Sharon A. "Reassessing the 'Proofreading Trap': ESL Tutoring and Writing Center Instruction." *The Writing Center Journal* 24.1 (2003): 51-70.
- Newkirk, Thomas. "The Writing Conference as Performance." *Research in the Teaching of English* 29.2 (1995): 193-215.
- North, Stephen M. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *College English* 46.5 (Sept. 1984): 443-446.
- Reigstad, Thomas J., and Donald A. McAndrew. "Training Tutors for Writing Conferences." ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1984.
- Tate, Gary, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick, eds. *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Waddell, Dave. "Have Students Define and Describe Good Writing." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 26.4 (1999): 433.

REVISING TRIMBUR'S DICHOTOMY: TUTORS AND CLIENTS SHARING KNOWLEDGE, SHARING POWER

Leanne Michelle Moore
Abilene Christian University
lmm10b@acu.edu

In the twenty-five years since John Trimbur's 1987 article, "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?" was published, writing center personnel have found it necessary to emphasize the dichotomy in the term "peer tutor." Trimbur's influential article has continually appeared in the literature used to train tutors and introduce them to writing center theory. For example, *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring* (1998) and *The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Praxis* (2008) both include Trimbur's article. It is also cited in three essays collected in *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*: Cynthia Haynes-Burton's "Thirty-something' Students: Concerning Transitions in the Writing Center," originally published in 1990, Jay Jacoby's "The Use of Force': Medical Ethics and Center Practice," and Julie Bokser's "Peer Tutoring and Gorgias: Acknowledging Aggression in the Writing Center," originally published in 2001. Each of the articles within *The St. Martin's Sourcebook* takes Trimbur's assertion of the peer-tutor dichotomy as fundamentally true. Training, then, has focused on the task of switching deftly between peer and tutor during a session because it is believed that tutors cannot inhabit both roles simultaneously. Trimbur points out that many tutors feel a loyalty to both the institution that has awarded them the label of "writing expert" as well as to their own peers who share their concerns as students (290-291). Beginning tutors especially will feel pressure from both sides, wanting to please the institution (by passing down knowledge) and their clients (by being co-learners). His solution is to help tutors learn to negotiate conflicting social allegiances through a sequential training module. Toward the end of his article, he worries that "the conception of tutoring as an apprenticeship treats students as extensions of our profession and can reinforce their dependence on faculty authority" (295). To avoid this situation, Trimbur advocates a developmental tutor training program that would begin by emphasizing the tutor's role as co-learner in order to de-emphasize the tutor's belief in the traditional academic paradigm of passing down knowledge from expert to novice.

Trimbur asserts that tutors feel cognitive dissonance in their roles in the writing center, "pulled, on one hand, by their loyalty to their fellow students and, on the other hand, by loyalty to the academic system that has rewarded them and whose values they

have internalized" (290). He is especially concerned that focus on tutors' expertise, demonstrated in advanced courses in writing theory and pedagogy, will "reinforce their dependence on faculty authority" (295). Trimbur's solution is to train tutors not to shift roles but rather to negotiate social allegiances, and, as a result, his training method is characterized by an emphasis on the power dynamic between tutor and client (292).

I disagree with Trimbur. Where he maintains that peer tutors must negotiate power dynamics at all times during a writing center session, I would argue that the consideration of power is not a necessary condition for a full and free exchange of ideas. While both Trimbur and I agree that the tutor/peer dichotomy should not play a role in a given session, Trimbur believes this is because training programs should teach tutors how to be a co-learner, not a tutor. He suggests that "expertise in teaching writing is not so much dangerous as it is premature because it takes peer tutors out of student culture, the social medium of co-learning" (Trimbur 294). I, conversely, believe a training program that teaches tutors writing pedagogy or otherwise emphasizes expertise can only increase the effectiveness of writing center sessions. Contrary to Trimbur, I argue that expertise improves the effectiveness of the rhetorical choices that can be made in a writing center session, and that it does so without collapsing the co-learning environment that is essential to any writing center.

The problem with the kind of training Trimbur suggests is that it inhibits tutors' ability to provide both the nondirective and directive aid that writing centers profess to provide. Trimbur's emphasis on the conflict between the words "peer" and "tutor" sets up false expectations for the writing center experience: it either discourages the tutor from sharing crucial expertise or discourages the client from coming to his or her own conclusions about the paper. If writing center personnel try to act as a tutor, they risk taking ownership of another's paper; if they try to act as peer, they risk letting teachable moments slip by. The writing tutor can and should strive to simultaneously inhabit both the peer and tutor realms, a stance which allows the tutor to provide the right kind of aid to writers—aid which both speak and listens. Although knowledge is certainly power, the maxim does not

carry over into the writing center session in deleterious ways between tutor and client because both are students. Their shared social status in the university context allows for a knowledge swap, so to speak, without swapping power along with it.

An experience I had with language learning serves as a useful illustration of the kind of fluid knowledge sharing and stable power dynamics I am advocating. Several years ago, I committed two years to working in the Peace Corps in Nicaragua. Because I would be living in a foreign context rather than merely traveling through the country for a short duration, I was understandably invested in learning a second language. In that sense, I was like the first-year student who has committed herself to academia for several years but knows she does not understand what teachers expect for her first college paper; like that student, I recognized I needed help. While student writers will have had high school training, it is often the case with first-year students that their previous training is sometimes insufficient for the demands of college writing. Similarly, I also had previous language training, but it was not adequate to meet the demands for the higher language level I needed. Thus, I sought out the teacher of English as a foreign language in the local high school and entreated her to help me practice Spanish, much as a student would seek out the university's writing center. In return for helping me with my language needs, I helped the teacher practice English. I brought her questions about what I had heard and didn't understand during the week, and she asked me questions about the English in her textbooks. We spent about half our tutoring time speaking in Spanish and the other half speaking in English. Through reciprocal tutoring sessions, speaking and questioning in both our languages, we served each other as both peer and tutor.

Several years later, while tutoring at the Abilene Christian University writing center, I began to make connections between the language learning I had undertaken in Nicaragua and my writing tutoring in a more formal context. At first it might seem that any comparison between these two situations was forced. After all, in the writing center I was an employee of the University, which lent me formal investiture of my writing expertise. Students presumably saw me as someone with a certain amount of authority over them and their writing—someone who held the answers. Furthermore, students ostensibly came to hear what I had to say about their paper rather than to share anything with me. Or at least that is what Trimbur fears. Indeed, this is the sort of attitude that Trimbur says short-circuits the dynamics of collaboration, the

sort that situates the writing tutor as expert only and ignores the nuances of her status as peer.

On closer inspection, however, I began to wonder if these assumptions are really true of writing center sessions. Do students come to writing centers unwilling to discuss their papers? Do they really want someone to simply fix their mistakes and say no more about it? Certainly some do. Some new clients may not understand what the writing center is about, and they may be unaware that the tutors are also students with professors of their own. As a result, students who do not recognize the nuance of the tutors' status may place themselves in a position of subservience to the tutors' perceived power. But I have found that the majority of returning clients want something different, something I found while learning another language. The more I tutored clients, the more I began to notice the ways in which my experience abroad had changed my view of the writing center session. In my language tutoring, I was a peer and a tutor at the same time without experiencing any contradictions between the two personas. My friend and I were both "experts" in our own fields—Spanish and English, respectively. Both of us appreciated the knowledge offered by the other, but neither felt superior because of the knowledge we were able to provide. We were simply having a conversation in which both sides contributed equally; neither assumed power over the other when sharing new information.

This is what happens in the best writing center sessions, those that produce better writers, not just better writing (North 76). This is also what happens, as Kenneth Bruffee notes in his article, "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" in the simultaneous peer/tutor role. He asserts that knowledge is a "social artifact" created by communities and that learning happens when people collaborate, much as they do in a writing center session. Bruffee argues, for example, that "Knowledge is the product of human beings in a state of continual negotiation or conversation" (214). If that is true, then it is ineffectual to try and separate or negotiate the expert and peer roles. That is, if we agree that knowledge is created among peers, then one *cannot* separate expertise from equal status. And indeed, we can observe this kind of peer tutoring in many different situations even outside of writing centers. Bruffee notes that in fields such as business, medicine, law, and engineering, colleagues teaching colleagues is the norm. Educated people are teaching and learning alongside other educated people without encountering the power struggle that Trimbur fears will undermine the writing session.

Unfortunately, when trainers emphasize the peer persona in their tutors and downplay the tutor persona in response to that fear, it limits sessions' potential by preventing the tutor from being able to make choices about when to be direct or indirect or other theory-based decisions during the session. Eric Sentell, in his article "Caught Between a Teacher and a Tutor," highlights how limiting a position attempting to be a peer and not a tutor can be. He found himself caught in the unenviable position of having to choose between his peer self and his tutor self during several sessions with a student. The client's professor seemed to look only for the errors in the student's paper, while Sentell understood the intentional rhetoric of the essay. But as a tutor, Sentell was forced to choose between encouraging the client to write what he wanted to say and advising him to write merely what the evaluator wanted to read. Neither option provided an ideal solution. In the end, Sentell observed, "Perhaps the best option [for effective tutoring] is to break out of limiting dichotomies: assimilation vs. resistance, instructor authority vs. student authority, product vs. person" (13). He might well have included peer vs. tutor in his list. The co-production of knowledge that Bruffee calls the "conversation of mankind" had to be abandoned so that Sentell could fulfill either the peer or tutor role.

As Sentell suggests, more effective conversations will happen when tutors have the freedom to see themselves as equals sharing power with their clients. Tutors must "break out of limiting dichotomies" in order to see themselves as peers who are tutoring or tutors who also inhabit the role of peers. Let me illustrate a bit further. As a writing tutor, I am in just the right position to help students the way a writing center should (increasing clients' level of rhetorical effectiveness) since I am not their teacher, but rather their peer. But I have been trained in giving feedback, so I can serve as an informed peer. In my capacity as writing center tutor, just as in my language learning experience, I do not feel that I have to negotiate those two roles. Students using the writing center can expect, to use Peter Elbow's term, an *ally reader*—the reciprocity of friendship on a professional level (*On Writing*). They are free to explain what they mean, to express their writing insecurities, to know what they're doing right. More than once, I have seen a look of relief cross students' faces when they learned that they were not about to hear a list of everything wrong with the paper. Students become more animated and invested in the session when I ask them to have a conversation with me. Certainly, by the end of the session they still hope to have the makings of a better paper, but their improvement is the result of a

conversation with an informed and invested professional friend, not through a sort of informal teacher-student conference. Tutor and client have created both the knowledge and the power together.

In an article published in the November/December 2011 issue of *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, authors Rita Malenczyk and Lauren Rosenberg do, in fact, see the roles of peer and tutor as non-contradictory and celebrate the unique position of the writing center tutor. In their piece, "Dialogic for 'Their Own Ends': Increasing the Pedagogical Independence of Peer Tutors in the Writing Center and the First-Year Writing Classroom," they write:

While our tutors, then, certainly serve the needs of faculty and support the courses we teach, they are also—and perhaps more importantly—autonomous agents who are thinking about learning in different ways from [faculty]. Because of their hybrid role as mentors and students, tutors are able to make connections with students from both of those identities . . . Because they stand, to paraphrase Muriel Harris, in a middle place, they are particularly aware of the complexities and implications of the discourse negotiations they arrange. (7, 8)

The program Malenczyk and Rosenberg have developed at Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU) attempts to give tutors more independence as writing specialists in their own right, endowing them with more ethos as experts. As a part of their writing program, they gather classroom writing teachers together for workshops four times a year, to which writing center tutors are also invited. Together, professors and tutors discuss writing issues pertinent to the classroom. Malenczyk and Rosenberg's inclusion of these tutors in faculty workshops is an important acknowledgement that peer tutoring is not the "blind leading the blind," since selected tutors are, in fact, peers with a certain amount of writing expertise to offer to their clients (and, as Malenczyk and Rosenberg suggest, to the faculty).

And yet, part of the reason the tutors' participation in faculty workshops is so helpful is that tutors are, at the same time, students who can contribute information about student culture to the faculty. Malenczyk and Rosenberg understand the richness that both roles bring to the writing center. By bringing faculty and tutors together for mutually edifying discussions, they hope to cultivate both the expert and peer personas within the tutors. Similarly, an important characteristic of these workshops is that they place faculty in the position of student and tutors in the position of teacher. Certainly we would agree that faculty have more knowledge, experience, and

power than the tutors, yet, during these workshops, teachers become the recipients of the tutors' knowledge and unique observations about composition issues.

If these interactions can happen between faculty and students, then why should they not also occur during writing center sessions? I believe interactions like those at ECSU can happen in the writing center, with each participant both sharing knowledge and being a co-learner (someone who walks alongside another as he or she reaches new ideas and conclusions). To do this, however, requires re-thinking Trimbur's dichotomy. This is where Malencyk and Rosenberg's argument falls short. The authors have implicitly accepted the idea that tutors are obligated both to the institution and to the student body, and that, in reality, tutors hold power that threatens to sabotage what the writing center does. However, a writing center session, at its core, is simply a time when two writers can talk together about their writing. As Kenneth Bruffee argued so well in his 1984 article, "[w]hat peer tutor and tutee do together is not write or edit, or least of all proofread. What they do together is converse" (213). If this is really true, then the most important part of a writing center session is the interaction between the student and the tutor, not the subtext of the interaction between the tutor and the university or between the tutor and the rest of the student body. Certainly, those kinds of subtexts pose challenges for a university writing center, but they are distractions from its real work. The real work of the writing center is to promote conversations and empowerment between equals—an informed tutor and client.

Trimbur does not disagree that tutors and clients can create knowledge together outside of an institutional hierarchy. He does, after all, quote Bruffee when he notes that "peer tutoring replaces the hierarchical model of teachers and students with a collaborative model of co-learners engaged in the shared activity of intellectual work" (Trimbur 290). But when Trimbur proposes to train tutors to be peers rather than experts, even at the beginning stages, it problematizes the very mission of a writing center. Certainly, tutors must be peers and co-learners so that clients retain ownership of their papers; but to neglect writing expertise during training is to "short-circuit," to use Trimbur's language, the task of creating better writers.

A peer tutor possesses two fluid personas that are advantageous to the goals of the writing center. Since clients visit the writing center seeking the benefits of interacting with a peer who can also tutor, tutor trainers would do well to embrace the confluence of

the two roles rather than to impose artificial dichotomies on them. While Malencyk and Rosenberg are right to avoid downplaying the tutor's expertise, they hold on to the idea that peer tutoring involves negotiating two dichotomous roles. I would argue, however, that a successful tutor is, in fact, one who combines aspects of both a peer and a tutor. Rather than focusing on the negotiation between conflicting roles, then, tutor training should focus on developing the singular role of informed peer or professional friend—a role akin to Elbow's concept of the "ally reader." In this way, tutors can be prepared to provide nondirective or directive tutoring depending upon the client's needs. Tutors can encounter each client as an individual person with unique needs and respond accordingly, rather than limit themselves to being either a peer or a tutor. A tutor who has the expertise to implement the best writing center methodologies and yet is a peer of writing center clients can provide a non-threatening session in which the clients' writing improves and the client herself becomes a better writer. Knowledge can be created through collaboration between two people who share power.

Trimbur's assertion that tutors must negotiate conflicting roles, I would argue, places an unnecessary hardship on both trainers and tutors. As Trimbur rightly suggested, when trainers situate the session in a paradigm that pits tutor and peer against one another, the needs of the clients suffer. This does not mean, however, that tutors can best meet clients' needs by minimizing their role as experts. Rather, if writing tutors see themselves as *both* experts *and* peers, the clients' needs come to the forefront. When that happens, tutors find the freedom to help clients through dialogue, and clients leave having become more prepared and better-equipped writers.

Works Cited

- Barnett, Robert W., and Jacob S. Blumner, eds. *The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2008. Print.
- Bokser, Julie. "Peer Tutoring and Gorgias: Acknowledging Aggression in the Writing Center." *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. Eds. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2003. 117-129. Print.
- Bruffee, Kenneth. "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" *The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*. Eds. Robert W. Barnett and Jacob S. Blumner. New York: Pearson Education, Inc. 2008. 206-217. Print.
- Capossela, Toni-Lee, ed. *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring*. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998. Print.

- Haynes-Burton, Cynthia. "‘Thirty-something’ Students: Concerning Transitions in the Writing Center." *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. Eds. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2003. 117-129. Print.
- Jacoby, Jay. "‘The Use of Force’: Medical Ethics and Center Practice." *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. Eds. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2003. 117-129. Print.
- Malenczyk, Rita, and Lauren Rosenberg. "Dialogic for ‘Their Own Ends’: Increasing the Pedagogical Independence of Peer Tutors in the Writing Center and the First-Year Writing Classroom." *Writing Lab Newsletter*. 36.3-4 (2011): 6-9. Print.
- North, Stephen. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *Landmark Essays on Writing Centers*. Eds. Christina Murphy and Joe Law. Davis, California: Hermagoras Press. 1995. 71-85. Print.
- On Writing*. Dir. Sut Jhally. Media Education Foundation, 1995. VHS.
- Sentell, Eric. "Caught Between a Teacher and a Tutor." *Writing Lab Newsletter*. 36.3-4 (2011): 10-13. Print.
- Trimbur, John. "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?" *The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*. Eds. Robert W. Barnett and Jacob S. Blumner. New York: Pearson Education, Inc. 2008. 288-295. Print.

ARE WE REALLY STUDENT-CENTERED? RECONSIDERING THE NATURE OF STUDENT “NEED”

Philip J. Sloan
Kent State University
psloan@kent.edu

Any plan of action the tutor follows is going to be student-centered in the strictest sense of that term. That is, it will not derive from a generalized model of composing [...] but will begin where the student is and move where the student moves. —Stephen North, “The Idea of a Writing Center”

Introduction

Writing centers stand resolutely as the very embodiment of student-centered learning, dedicated — unflinchingly — to Stephen North’s enduring “idea:” that “writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction” (“Idea” 438). Indeed, the “concept of a writing center” explicated on the IWCA website positions the student in the center of our world: “Each student’s individual needs are the focus of the tutorial” (Harris). One would be hard-pressed to find anyone in the writing center community who disagrees with this statement. The writing center is widely regarded as “the ultimate point-of-need pedagogical scene” (Boquet and Lerner 174).

But who or what determines the nature of this need? According to the IWCA “concept,” student “needs” — which frame the “starting point” and “agenda” of a tutorial — are established through tutor-student collaboration:

The starting point of every tutorial is to find out what that particular student needs or wants. To set the agenda for the tutorial, tutors assess the student’s present situation, class requirements, past writing history, general composing habits and approaches to learning, attitudes, motivation, and whatever else is needed to determine how the tutor and student should proceed. Students are encouraged to participate actively in setting the agenda for how the tutor and student will spend their time together. (Harris)

Again, these are assertions with which few of us would disagree. But because students and tutors often enter a tutorial with drastically different priorities, they rarely view “need” in the same way. Students often expect — even demand — something quite different from what we offer them. When a student asks for line editing, extensive hands-on direction, or micro-level grammatical instruction, the tutor is thrust into the unenviable position of balancing these requests with

our process-driven, facilitative ideals. Tutors who choose to attend to these requests must willfully step outside their (our) prescribed boundaries — something with which they are not always comfortable. Conversely (and more importantly), those tutors who adhere to the order of concerns and our non-directive principles risk ignoring the desires of the student — who, ironically, is supposed to be at the very center of our practice. In this sense, tutors must reconcile demands and expectations that are not just divergent, but paradoxical. Can we prioritize higher-order concerns and a holistic, nondirective approach — even as students explicitly request something else — and rightly call ourselves “student-centered”? We conceptualize our work in terms of student “need,” but can we be student-centered if we do not do what the student *wants*?

In this article, I draw on written reflections from writing center tutors to critically examine our needs-based philosophy, suggesting that our pedagogy may have colonialist implications that can be linked directly to our claims of student-centeredness. These reflections constitute but one part of the data set from a large-scale empirical study comparing writing center theory and practice in North American universities.¹ This triangulated inquiry combined written reflections of 23 tutors and seven directors (obtained via e-mail interviews), direct observation of five tutorial sessions, and an online survey of 210 writing center professionals in order to identify and examine the shared epistemological assumptions underlying writing center instruction. My particular interest was in pedagogical situations that challenged tutors to break our own self-imposed rules, as well our “tendency to go off-task” (Boquet 478). I wanted to know the extent to which our words and actions are (in)consistent with our intent — whether the philosophy espoused by our tutoring manuals and literature manifested itself in writing center reality. As Jeanne Simpson observes, “The boundaries between what should happen in a writing center and what does happen and what might happen are porous to say the least” (4).

The reflections were written e-mail responses to open-ended questions about tutoring and writing centers, provided by tutors and directors from a wide

variety of institutional settings and cultural backgrounds. For purposes of this essay, I focus specifically on reflections of tutors, in the interest of foregrounding *their* perspective in our scholarly conversations. A perennial issue with writing center scholarship is that the voices of tutors – the very people who actually implement our pedagogy on a daily basis – remain conspicuously absent. Dinitz and Kiedaisch assert:

Writing center theory can be enriched by including tutor voices and perspectives. As the folks at the boundary of theory and practice, tutors are well-positioned to explore the connections between them, to tease out the subtleties, the complications, the assumptions, the omissions in our theory and our practice, and to see how one might shed light on the other. (75)

This article answers their call by privileging the words of the tutors themselves in my discussion; collectively, their cogent articulations say more about writing center reality than one researcher ever could.

Direct quotations are anonymous, and are attributed to participants based on an arbitrary number (1-23). The numbers, which were randomly assigned during the data analysis, are meant only to separate tutor comments from one another. Pronouns (she/he) are also dispersed randomly, and may not reflect the actual gender of the participant. I use the tutor reflections as a launching point for my discussion of student “need,” as well as a means of exploring the compatibility of our epistemological assumptions with our pedagogical practices. The tutors in this study talk about what they do in particular way, reflecting, to varying degrees, the reductive potential of our disciplinary narratives. Please note that in culling together these examples, I do not wish to frame tutors or their methods in a wholly negative light; rather, my concern is that our discourses may push us further away from the students we purport to serve. Even well-intentioned actions can *appear* hegemonic – especially to a confused student who isn't familiar with our world.

Whose needs?

Our teaching philosophy presupposes certain pedagogical goals and objectives. When we in the writing center community endeavor to make “better writers” rather than “better writing,” we define tutorial success *vis-à-vis* *our* goal for students. This complicates our professed student-centeredness because, while our intention is to empower the student, we are not always doing what s/he actually wants. Consider this reflection by Tutor 7: “The

writing they've brought in with them is writing they've already done, and I'm more interested in the writing they will do in the future.” He was not the only participant to construe our process-based approach so narrowly; virtually all of the tutors categorically reject product-based instruction in their reflections. Tutor 18 asserts (*italics mine*), “I want to tutor a writer, *not* a piece of writing. *My goal isn't to help them with one assignment*, but to give clients skills to apply to all the writing they do.” The language used by these tutors belies the contextual flexibility that tutoring necessitates. They are probably just articulating a desire to prioritize process-based concerns, but to a distraught student with deadlines to meet, they may as well have said, “I'm not really interested in working with this paper you brought me.” Such articulations are understandable, given the tendency of students, the institution, and the culture-at-large to fixate on form, mechanics, and the more immediate matter of grades. However, these statements bear a striking resemblance to our own discourses, many of which are steeped in such sharp distinctions. Process and product are presented here as diametric opposites – not, I think, because tutors ignore the writing itself, but perhaps because our conversations have so definitively separated it from “writers.” While there are good reasons not to focus exclusively on external issues, *appearing* to prioritize personal growth at their expense risks trivializing the importance of not only students' papers (the product), but also *their* conception of what they “need.” Here is another representative example:

Least important in my tutoring session is grades and/or pleasing the teacher [...] Writing in college is to benefit the student – it's not about the final product. Of course, I want students to get good grades, but I'd much rather them be excited about writing than agonize over getting every bullet point of a teacher's writing prompt taken care of. (Tutor 17)

This tutor has also prioritized process over product, the writer over the writing, this time at the expense of context and audience (in this case, the teacher). Certainly, we all love to see students “excited about writing,” and we've all had to bite our tongue when our students bring us poorly worded assignments. That said, interpreting and addressing a teacher's writing prompt is an integral part of academic writing – even if it may not seem to “benefit the student” in an immediate way. And whether or not we like it, grades matter – especially to students. Like the previous reflections, these appear to be informed by a dogmatic construal of writing as a “process;” this is process *in lieu of* product, as if the “final product” or

“grades” are somehow insignificant in light of process-based concerns. Again, I am led to wonder whether our own conversations can have a delimiting effect on the way tutors talk about their own practice. As non-evaluative sites of learning, writing centers can afford to prioritize being “excited about writing” over grades. However, if and when we voice these priorities, will students still feel that they are receiving what they “need”?

Our reticence to engage certain topics can leave students feeling understandably bemused. Several of the tutors recall bitter exchanges with irate students, often following an attempt to “redirect” (a word that occurs repeatedly in the reflections) the tutorial away from sentence-level mechanics and towards higher-order concerns. Tutor 7 reflects on such a session; his student was “uninterested in talking about writing in any holistic way [...] became irritated [and] repeatedly insisted that the writing center was here to ‘make it right’, and pointed to the paper over and over again.” This frustrating scenario is probably, at least in part, attributable to a misunderstanding about the nature of writing center instruction. But such tense situations also remind us just how difficult it can be for students to embrace *our* ideas, i.e. discussing writing in a “holistic way.” Tutor 20 emphasizes the need to maintain our priorities in the face of such angry demands: “I don’t think the tutor should ignore problem areas just because the writer didn’t specifically say to work on it.” Certainly, there is a lot of truth to her statement. How often, though, does the *tutor* establish “problem areas,” effectively determining what students *really* need? What concerns me is not *that* we do this, but how it might look to a student. I don’t mean to suggest that we should “ignore” major issues, but in our haste to do what we do, we may forget that students often visit the writing center for a different kind of “help” than what we provide.

Granted, students often do not know what they want. Many lack the vocabulary to spell out exactly what they “need.” They don’t speak our language or know how to characterize their writing problems. Proofreading, for example, is all some students know, and the oft-heard entreaty, “I need help proofreading” simply means “I need *help*.” It is perhaps precisely this lack of student awareness that leads tutors to “redirect” a session. However, such actions may leave students feeling like our discourses of empowerment are somewhat insincere.

Getting defensive

The tutors in this study report feeling conflicted, compromised, even threatened by students who

wanted editing or proofreading. While these lingering misconceptions of a tutor’s role have existed as long as writing centers have, they led many of these tutors to retreat into a defensive mindset:

In cases where it was, ‘Dude, proofread this for me’ [...] well, then it’s a question of boundaries. I don’t do that. You can’t make me. It’s disrespectful of you to insist on it after I told you it’s not part of my work and not what I can do for you. (Tutor 4)

A number of other tutors report being similarly annoyed by student requests for proofreading and editing (*italics are mine*):

Being big on collaboration, I am *insulted* when a student asks to drop off a paper for me to edit for him/her. (Tutor 17)

I had one of the most *horrific* sessions with a freshman male student who kept pushing his paper in front of me and telling me to write out what I had just talked about with him. (Tutor 8)

Occasionally, I have a student who just wants a proofreading service. That expectation absolutely has to be *combated*. (Tutor 16)

It’s certainly understandable why tutors feel compromised; the aforementioned circumstances would frustrate anyone trying to sustain a holistic, facilitative approach. However, the words they use are very revealing. They are “insulted” by requests for editing; proofreading and authoritative instruction are described as “horrific” experiences that must be “combated”. The word “combated” is a particularly interesting choice, as it implies vigorous, militant opposition, which flies in the face of our student-centeredness, and seems completely antithetical to the supportive reassurance that most tutors purport to give.

These statements reflect the tendency of some writing centers to define themselves in starkly negative terms. It bears mentioning that North takes an extremely uncompromising position in his landmark essay, pitting *us*, the writing center community, against *them*, those in the academy who have misconstrued our mission, insisting that writing centers be accepted only “on their own terms” (“Idea” 446). Writing centers have since adopted a somewhat defensive, even defiant, stance. For example, Jeff Brooks offers specific strategies to “fight back” against “uncooperative students” who do not embrace our ideal of “minimalist tutoring” (4). The participants in this study continue to lament the lingering “fix-it shop” perception that North railed against over 20 years ago. Due in no small part due to North’s enduring influence, writing centers are still often

defined first and foremost in terms of what they are *not*. We do *not* proofread. We are *not* fix-it shops.

It is not so striking that these students did not want to proofread and spoon-feed ideas, but the extent to which they were apoplectic about it gives us pause. Tutor 8 asserts (*italics mine*), “I have to continually talk to myself when working with such students, and tell myself that *what this student wants is not what I should be doing*.” Perhaps our approach has been so deeply entrenched that tutors sometimes have difficulty accepting other methods as appropriate or effective. As these examples show, some tutors are not only uncomfortable but outwardly irritated when pushed to do something outside their own prescribed boundaries. “These writers,” says Tutor 20, “don’t understand the writing center philosophy of collaborative learning.” Indeed. Our relationship with students, far from an equal collaboration, is predicated on what *we* believe they need.

I use these examples not to illustrate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of these tutors, but to demonstrate the covert ways that our epistemological assumptions may affect the trajectory and outcome of a tutorial session. We mean well – but those of us who insist that the tutorial session is entirely in the hands of the student may be at odds with our own actions.

Conclusion

One of the more difficult things for teachers to learn is, in the words of Stephen Brookfield, that “the sincerity of their intention does not guarantee the purity of their practice” (1). Julie Bokser argues that “aggression” is an unavoidable aspect of our ostensibly collaborative exchanges, and that “with only a slight shift in perspective, what appears to be help (‘charity’) might be understood as the violence of imposition and self aggrandizement” (23). The discourses surrounding writing centers can have a quasi-evangelical air about them, making it difficult to see that our altruism is a product of our own positioning. Bawarshi and Pelkowski take this a step further; they worry that we may be “imposing academic discourse on marginalized writers and calling it a ‘service’” (51). While I don’t see us involved in quite so hegemonic a relationship, I do think that our benevolent motives can hide the ways in which our “help” may be interpreted as self-serving and dominant. Historically, writing center pedagogy has taken on a liberatory tone, but like any other teachers, we run the risk of adhering too rigidly to our own assumptions. We need make our students aware of the ways in which *our* discourses construct *their* reality. Jeanne Simpson reminds us that “our community’s

definitions, like everyone’s, have been filtered through our own value systems” (1). In our ongoing, laborious attempts to define and re-define ourselves and the nature of the service(s) we provide, we must remember that our students were not there when we established the rules.

My concern is not with tutors or our pedagogies, but how we *talk* about them. I don’t necessarily believe that writing center orthodoxy has been embraced uncritically. However, our collective discourses can make some of these issues appear more cut-and-dried than they actually are. North’s revisions to his own position (“Revisiting”) have not had the staying power of his original maxims. Our conversations still tend towards tried and true aphorisms (e.g. “making better writers”) that don’t entirely capture the nuance of what our tutors actually do. Lerner and Boquet suggest that the “wide and uncritical invocation” of our core ideas “have become a kind of verbal shorthand, a special handshake for the initiated, an endpoint rather than an origin” (171). Certainly, this is not a new issue, but these discourses have enjoyed an amazing durability within writing center circles. I worry that our shared ideals continue to coalesce into what Shamon and Burns once called a “writing center bible,” the components of which function “like articles of faith that serve to validate a tutoring approach which ‘feels right’” (135). Have our definitions of our own practice expanded beyond Angela Petit’s “purified space,” where the “discourses presented to tutors seem as impermeable as the walls of the center itself?” (114). As Simpson notes, the way we characterize our own practice is critically important: “Inflexibility causes writing center folk to be unnecessarily defensive about our work and to be offensive to others when we tell them their ideas are wrong. We need to understand that we can only influence, not control, the way others see or missions, goals, and methods.” (4).

Simpson rightly points out that the “core issue is one of perceptions” (3). What do we *look* like – our centers, our tutors, our practices – to an outsider? Visitors to the writing center are often newcomers to a unique world, a world in which *we* have determined the means and ends, the purpose and nature of instruction, the parameters and goals. As Harry Denny observes, our “educational rituals” (“collaborative writing, active learning, and recursive process”) are unfamiliar and uncomfortable for many students (58). Suddenly, the priorities these students hold dear (e.g. external text characteristics, grades) cease to be the focal point of their learning. Throughout all of this, we tell them we are “student-centered.” Is it any surprise that some of them are confused? Our claims to

student-centeredness have been vexing me for quite some time, not because they are anything but well-meaning, but because they may *appear* to be disingenuous. All of the tutors in my study said they would adapt their session based on “student need,” but by and large it was the *tutors* – not the students – who determined the nature of that need. It’s vitally important that we not only listen to our students, but that we send “a clear signal that we [are] indeed listening” (Simpson 2). This means acknowledging that we exist in a fairly unique learning environment, essential and meaningful to us, but frequently baffling to those unfamiliar with it. In a culture fixated on outcomes, where an increasingly pervasive model of education positions students as consumers rather than learners, *we* are the peculiar ones. This is undoubtedly a good thing, but such an environment obliges us to be especially transparent about our expectations. More than that, we need to actively promote the very idea of what we do, even if its benefits are self-evident to us. Frustrating as it may be (and no doubt is), our job is to bridge what Simpson terms “perceptual gaps;” to explain ourselves, consistently and explicitly, helping our institutions and our students understand and appreciate what *we* value (4). The alternative may be a growing disconnect between our stated pedagogical philosophy and the students we purport to serve.

Value conflict is a virtual inevitability in a tutorial, and it’s not unthinkable that our student-centered pedagogy could be misinterpreted as an act of imposition. Bawarshi and Pelkowski argue that our well-meaning rhetoric can have “unmistakably colonialist” ramifications (45). At times, the reflections of these tutors smack of a “*we* know what’s best for *you*” mentality that borders on parental. Admittedly, some students truly do not know what they want, and more often than not tutors do know better – but when we steer students away from their own initial desires, can we rightly call ourselves student-centered? There is a difference here, between what a student *wants* and what a student *needs*. And we may have to qualify our student-centeredness, because while our intention is to cater to the latter, we don’t always act in accordance with the former. It is thus incumbent on writing centers to reflect upon this issue – to consider and reconsider the ways that our practice relentlessly challenges the nurturing, student-centered philosophy that informs it.

Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion of methodology and findings, please see *Contextualizing Writing Centres: Theory vs. Practice*, a Master’s thesis available via ProQuest

Dissertations and Theses and Library and Archives Canada. Contact Philip J. Sloan (psloan@kent.edu) for more information.

Works Cited

- Bawarshi, Anis and Stephanie Pelkowski. “Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center.” *Writing Center Journal* 19.2 (1999): 41-58. Print.
- Bokser, Julie A. “Peer Tutoring and Gorgias: Acknowledging Aggression in the Writing Center.” *Writing Center Journal* 21.2 (2001): 21-34. Print.
- Boquet, Elizabeth. “Our Little Secret: A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions.” *College Composition and Communication* 50.3 (1999): 463-482. Print.
- Boquet, Elizabeth and Neal Lerner. “Reconsiderations: After ‘The Idea of a Writing Center.’” *College English* 71.2 (2008): 170-189. Print.
- Brookfield, Stephen D. “What It Means to be a Critically Reflective Teacher.” *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995. 1-27. Print.
- Brooks, Jeff. “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work.” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 15.6 (1991): 1-4. Print.
- Denny, Harry. “Queering the Writing Center.” *Writing Center Journal* 25.2 (2005): 39-62. Print.
- Dinitz, Sue and Jean Kiedaisch. “Creating Theory: Moving Tutors to the Center.” *Writing Center Journal* 23.2, (2003): 63-76. Print.
- Harris, Muriel. “The Concept of a Writing Center.” International Writing Centers Association, 2011. Web. 3 Nov. 2011. <<http://writingcenters.org/resources/writing-center-concept/>>.
- North, Stephen A. “The Idea of a Writing Center.” *College English* 46.5 (1984): 433-446. Print.
- North, Stephen A. “Revisiting the idea of a Writing Center.” *Writing Center Journal* 15.1 (1994): 7-19. Print.
- Petit, Angela. “The Writing Center as ‘Purified Space’: Competing Discourses and the Dangers of Definition.” *Writing Center Journal* 17.2 (1997): 111-123. Print.
- Shamoon, Linda K. and Deborah H. Burns. “A Critique of Pure Tutoring.” *Writing Center Journal* 15.2 (1995): 134-151. Print.
- Simpson, Jeanne. “Whose Idea of a Writing Center is This, Anyway?” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 35.1 (2010): 1-4. Print.

THE MESSAGE IS THE MEDIUM: ELECTRONICALLY HELPING WRITING TUTORS HELP ELECTRONICALLY

Jesse Kavadlo
Maryville University
jkavadlo@maryville.edu

Skepticism

The history of online writing centers is a history of doubt. I experienced those reservations in 2009, when, in addition to traditional face-to-face peer tutoring, I launched my own online peer tutoring program and began training undergraduates to respond to student submissions. Online writing centers were already common, but the decision to begin tutoring online was not all mine—the university administration was encouraging faculty to create online and web-assisted courses, and it expected its academic support keep up with the pace of technology, distance learning, and even fears that a future pandemic could hinder face to face learning. After consulting with tutors and instructional technology staff, I decided on asynchronous peer tutoring: students would fill out an intake form and questionnaire about their assignment and writing process, and then they would upload what they had written; tutors would then respond via email within 24 hours, even on weekends. This system allowed us to help as many students as quickly as possible, particularly non-traditional, commuting, and working students unable to meet face to face.

Still, I was skeptical. How would tutors, even those experienced with face-to-face sessions, adapt to the new medium? The writing center literature about online tutorials I consulted was mostly critical, ambivalent, or, at best, philosophical. In 1998, Neal Lerner had already concluded that “writing center professionals can be a skeptical lot, experienced in carefully reading texts and uncovering hidden agendas; when it comes to our future with technology, that skepticism is perhaps our greatest asset” (136). In 2000, James Inman and Donna Sewell began *Taking Flight with OWLS: Examining Electronic Writing Center Work* began by couching skepticism in the language of overwork, lamenting that “the move to computer technology has occurred so rapidly that center staff and administration...have not had much opportunity to study how and when to infuse computer technology” (xix). More recently, in *Virtual Peer Review*—less about writing centers but pertaining to online peer tutoring practices—Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch warned that “the transition among classroom instructors [and, I will add, writing tutors] is not as

easy as it may seem. Deep-seated notions of peer review as an exercise of oral communication—rather than written communication—complicate the transition, for virtual peer review reverses the primacy of oral over written communication so that written communication is king. Consequently, dialogue strategies that are typically employed for peer review change when placed online, and they are not as effective” (2).¹ And literature about teaching writing online, as opposed to tutoring online, is not easily applicable. *Teaching Writing Online*, for example, suggests that “creating the written global comment isn’t much of a worry in the [online writing] course. You can do what you normally have done, except now you can do it in an e-environment using electronic tools” (129). Unlike online instructor grading, online peer writing tutorials do not allow tutors to do what they “normally have done.”

As more students and, by necessity, tutors move online, however, directors must move beyond doubt. We must foster appropriate and effective electronic tutoring, even as we acknowledge that the strategies, and potential dangers, are not what face to face tutors are customarily trained to handle. And while different ways to create online writing centers have received critical attention, less has been written about training online tutors. How, then, can tutors emphasize process when many of the sessions may be, in Joanna Castner’s words, “a two way stab in the dark” (119)? That is, they are limited to the submission and the reply; as Castner puts it, “Why do few dialogues?” (120). How can students see tutors as allies? Finally, how can tutors respond to student writing in ways that preclude editing or directive revision of any kind? This last question is for me the most important, since editing takes the power, and responsibility, of revision away from the student and most directly violates the idea of the writing center.

Online tutorials are also more permanent. As I explain to tutors, once they send their responses, it is potentially available for anyone to interpret, unlike the unrecorded, plausible deniability of the face to face session. Tutors, then, must be especially vigilant online, never writing anything to a student that they would not want that student’s instructor, mother, or university administrator to see. (Thankfully, I have

never received a complaint about an online session from a professor, parent, or president.)

Instead, tutor training can emphasize the relationship between our goals and the technology. Writing center directors may be skeptical about whether tutors are prepared to conduct online tutorials and whether traditional tutor training is applicable to online tutorials, and tutors may worry that face to face professionalism and cordiality no longer apply. In this essay, I hope to provide an alternate tutoring model that updates the mission of the writing center, thus challenging both the skepticism surrounding online tutorials as well as our assumptions about what a writing center is and how it may operate in the future.

The Idea of an Online Writing Center

In 1984, Stephen North published “The Idea of a Writing Center.” And while it predates online tutoring, in some ways the purpose of his essay is more relevant than ever. North meant to counteract entrenched notions that tutoring should be a remedial lab focused on papers and not people. How, then, can we sustain the idea of the writing center, in Stephen North’s famous phrase, “Better writers, not necessarily—or immediately—better texts” (73), when we do not see writers, only texts? This particular doubt was already well articulated by J. A. Jackson in 2000: “At its foundation, the tutorial is writer-centered, and the tutor’s job is to facilitate the writer’s discovery of his or her writing self. But online, where is the tutor? Perhaps more importantly, where is the writer? The most frightening prospect of the online tutorial is that all one is left with is the writing and not the writer, the product and not the process” (2). Putting the writer above the writing was refreshing in 1984 and still relevant in 2000, and I still operate under the notion that tutors need to reach their students.

However, for all the potential drawbacks, the possibilities of seeing only screens and never faces, online tutoring allows tutors to achieve goals that can be difficult face to face, analogous to the ways in which speech and writing themselves are vastly different. For some tutors, and students, online sessions may even be preferable. As David Coogan realized in 1998, “as sensibilities [and, I will add, students’ general comfort with technology] change, tutors might find other ways to express themselves with students online. We have a chance...to do something different with students in the writing center” (29). The inexperienced tutor, since she is almost always looking at a paper for the first time and starting at the beginning, may treat a face to face session as a list of disconnected difficulties, articulated

as they arise. Yet the session may never discover a larger purpose, a way in which the multiple concerns coalesce into a lesson or specific, cohesive revision strategy. Other tutors may treat the session as a scavenger hunt: where is the thesis? Where is the support? Where are the problems? (Or worse, *these are* the problems.) Electronically and asynchronously, the tutor may read and determine potential concerns linearly, but her final response, unlike the face to face session, allows for the possibility of reflection and revision, taking advantage of the written word and medium.

Templates and Tutor Training

The best online responses, then, can be like the best student essays, allowing the peer tutor to take advantage of the skills that probably earned her the job in the first place.

- A written response allows the tutor to solidify her purpose and provide a single main point—just as a student essay should.
- The tutor can focus the entire response, as opposed to, say, the last ten minutes of a face to face session, providing questions and strategies for the writer to consider upon revising the paper or beginning the next one.
- The tutor can correct or direct if it helps her to formulate her response, but then she can and should revise those corrections into questions and supportive commentary. Unlike face to face sessions, asynchronous writing allows for behind-the-scenes retrospection and improvement.
- Online responses allow tutors to amplify the writer’s best points and demonstrate genuine engagement with the topic, responding as a good reader, not just as a critic and certainly not as an editor.
- Yet students often do write that they want help with errors. Online responses, then, perhaps more than face to face sessions, allow tutors to indicate where stylistic problems occur, even as they resist the urge to correct. When they do comment on grammatical errors, tutors may more easily connect those errors to larger issues of purpose, clarity, and content, citing specific passages from the student’s text. The response, then, becomes a form of literary criticism and close reading, with frequent use of quotation for support and evidence.

Since even the best writers have trouble beginning or focusing, I start their training with a template.² From there, they develop their own approach.

Dear [student's name],

Paragraph 1: Support and amplify the writer's ideas; state what works about the essay, even if it's just a single sentence, idea, or example. Wherever possible, cut and paste/quote the paper's actual language for example.

Paragraph 2: Then, raise a problem for the writer to address for the revision; possible language: *However, the* [weakest Higher Order Concern: thesis, particular supporting paragraph, development, etc.] *could be* [stronger, clearer, more specific, more personal, etc.]—[then, rephrase your concern and as a question]?

Paragraph 3 (as needed): Quote a sentence from the writer's own paper that you feel gives the writer some direction, then use it to make a suggestion: *The essay could also account for* [a reasonable

suggestion/counterargument/additional avenue of research/concern]—[then, rephrase as question]?

Paragraph 4: Boilerplate conclusion:

I would encourage you to bring the paper in for a face-to-face session, where we can usually accomplish much more. Please feel free to make an appointment through the Peer Tutor office in the Academic Success Center. If the deadline for this paper is too soon for an appointment, try to schedule a session with a writing tutor for your next paper. We look forward to seeing you in person.

[Signature and contact information]

This format has several advantages: it allows for the possibility of a genuine reader-response from the tutor and limits the possibility of inadvertent disparagement, since tutors sometimes struggle to convey tone electronically. It precludes the possibility that the inexperienced tutor may lapse into editing. And it provides the tutor with a specific, comfortable structure, as opposed to the frightening blankness of the fresh page. Obviously the template alone provides only organization; it cannot, of course, determine the substance, the questions, and the possibilities. For that, we need the tutors themselves.

Online Dialogue: Rebecca's Year of Electronic Tutoring

How can peer tutors learn to respond electrically? With practice. But like all good practice, improved tutoring demands consideration and reflection; repetition alone cannot lead to progress. And so as director, I tutor the tutors. Since the student papers

were electronic, my replies to tutors' responses are electronic as well.

I would like to use examples from the year-long development of one particular tutor. A strong writer with a kind demeanor, "Rebecca" nevertheless, as she later wrote, "didn't feel particularly effective at in-person writing sessions, so I certainly didn't want to have my incompetence recorded in electronic format for all eternity." She explained further, echoing the doubts of earlier critics: "how would I get students to think about the big picture issues through an email response? Talking about issues like organization, transitions, and concept development were hard enough and lengthy enough discussions in person, plus I could make sure I was smiling and looking friendly so that the student didn't think I was being hard on them." Yet she, and the other tutors, learned by doing.

Rebecca's first online response.

Here is how Rebecca handled an online student paper analyzing a speech by President Truman for an introductory class in Organizational Leadership. I have omitted her inserted in-text comments for concision and to focus on the end comment, although the marginal comments do provide greater specificity and clarification than the conclusion alone suggests.

Dear K-,

Thank you for your submission to the Online Writing Center.

First, I really enjoyed reading your paper and learning about Transformational Leadership. Your paper was very informative and I definitely learned new things about President Truman through his inaugural speech!

I have attached your paper with a few additional comments boxes to the side. Your paper is well-formatted and easy to follow, so I only had a few comments on the actual structure of the paper. One thing I would recommend would be to provide a more detail about how the portions of President Truman's inaugural speech you selected represent each of the four "I"s - each of your explanations seemed very reasonable examples of the four "I"s but many could have benefited from more detail so that your reader understands the point you are making.

One more thing I would recommend doing is to cite the website or web page that you used to obtain President Truman's speech. You have in-text references to specific paragraphs but have not cited the website that the teacher wanted you to use as your source. It is unclear from the assignment description if your professor expects

you to cite the website in a reference list, but it is usually considered an important step to writing college and graduate-level papers.

Overall, you answered the prompts in your assignment description and kept the content relevant.

[boilerplate conclusion]

After each of Rebecca's online responses, I sent her an electronic reply:

Rebecca,

Like everything else I've seen from you, this is a strong initial response.

First, it is thorough, so I again want to caution you against spending more than an hour on your reply, and even better, try to limit yourself to 30 minutes. I'll also continue to caution tutors against over-exuberance, which is a little sad, since I like enthusiasm in the face to face sessions. Here, though, watch out for eager adverbs and punctuation: "I **really** enjoyed reading your paper and learning about Transformational Leadership. Your paper was **very** informative and I **definitely** learned new things about President Truman through his inaugural speech!" [my bold]

I'll also recommend in-text comments in the direction of these two:

<<How is he using that to change the people's point of view? I think your point is a good one, but it may help to elaborate on this point to help your reader understand it more clearly.>>

And

<<Could you explain this more? How is President Truman using the concept of democracy to inspire his listeners? Further explanation may help your readers understand your meaning.>>

The other comments are fine, of course. But these two ask the writer to go deeper and think harder about the paper. In other words, if the writer can begin to think more about what these questions are asking, he will be a better student and a better writer; he won't just have a more-correct paper.

Thanks for all you do, and stay enthusiastic at our meetings despite anything I might say here.

Later, Rebecca suggested that "My first few submissions were all over the place, with long comments in the sidebars that explained why something was incorrect as well as some direct solutions to fix the problem. And I always made sure to tell the student how much I enjoyed their paper, even if it was actually really painful to read and I

obviously didn't enjoy it. It was important that students felt good about themselves and their papers though!" She's right. That balance—between criticism and support—is difficult to achieve, both face to face and electronically. Yet interestingly, it may be easier virtually, with no need to hide any pained expression or continually, and perhaps insincerely, reassure.

Rebecca's online tutoring response, a few months later, to an Art History paper analyzing a museum artifact:

Dear J--,

Thank you for your submission to the Online Writing Center.

First, the content of your paper seemed solid, and it appears to meet the assignment requirements for format and organization. After reading your paper I was well-informed on the importance of the hippopotamus to Egyptian culture and how the piece from the St. Louis Art Museum fit into Egyptian artistic depictions of the animal.

I have made a few comments to the side of your paper, which I have attached to this email. Most of the comments focus on continuity of your topic and helping your reader follow the flow of the paper more easily.

For your concern about whether your wording is strange, my biggest suggestion would be for you to read your paper out loud. By reading your paper out loud, you may catch phrases or sentences that are not written the way you would say them. I have highlighted a few instances where I believe this is the case in your paper. While reading your paper out loud, make sure to pay attention to the times that you don't say the words that are on the page - perhaps you said what you meant rather than what is actually written, or perhaps you said it more clearly than the way it is written. When you find a phrase or sentence like that, try to rewrite it to match what you said, or in a way that you think someone would understand your meaning if they could not see your paper and only could listen to you read it to them.

[Boilerplate conclusion]

And my electronic reply to Rebecca's response:

Rebecca,

I'm beginning to see how having previously responded to papers online may now be speeding up the process—I hope that the body of this response didn't take too much time, since you nicely customized it for this paper. By now I hope

that the basic approach you've developed—thanks, read aloud, custom comment, make a face to face appt—holds up.

The comments in the margins are good as well, in part because they convey some nuts and bolts ideas that students really should know and follow; in 2010, we're still reminding students to spell-check! But I prefer the comments that ask questions—"Can you transition or connect the idea of mummification and Egyptian burial rituals to your topic further?" and to a lesser extent this one—"Is this referring to the hippopotamus?" (lesser because the question seems rhetorical; still I like the phrasing) to this one: "This is a rather abrupt ending to your paper." You are certainly right—the last sentence of a paper almost certainly should not begin with "also"! But is there a way to phrase it so that the person has a question rather than an instruction to consider?

Overall, great job. Continue.

My own response, in retrospect, is not perfect. While Rebecca did ask whether the writer could "transition or connect the idea of mummification and Egyptian burial rituals to your topic further," the writer could still wonder how, or why, a transition would be necessary. It is difficult in an online session for tutors to anticipate or answer such questions in their responses, and in the last year, tutors have attempted to convey their questions to writers as genuine rather than rhetorical, creating a back and forth stream of responses.

Still, at the time, Rebecca handled my comments well. Later, she wrote the following:

After receiving feedback on my feedback—that I was spending too long on each writing submission and that I really shouldn't be so effervescent with my praise of the writer's paper—I took some time to rethink my strategy for replying to online submissions. My new strategy consisted of pointing out issues in a student's paper by forcing the student to reflect on his or her own writing [...], turning the locus of control back to the student. [...] The student can learn how to find resources for him or herself. (my ellipses)

By now, Rebecca's philosophy—if not quite her practices—were in keeping with the idea of the writing center, online or not.

Rebecca's online response near the end of the year to a Composition research paper arguing for the legalization of marijuana:

Hi A--,

Thank you for your submission to the Online Writing Center.

First, your paper appears to meet most of the assignment requirements for format and organization. Also, after reading it I was better informed about the history of cannabis use.

I have made a few comments to the side of your paper, which I have attached to this email. Most of the comments focus on clarity and helping your reader understand your meaning.

My biggest suggestion would be for you to read your paper out loud. By reading your paper out loud, you may catch phrases or sentences that are not written the way you would say them. While reading your paper out loud, make sure to pay attention to the times that you don't say the words that are on the page - perhaps you said what you meant rather than what is actually written, or perhaps you said it more clearly than the way it is written. When you find a phrase or sentence like that, try to rewrite it to match what you said, or in a way that you think someone would understand your meaning if they could not see your paper and only could listen to you read it to them.

My other suggestions would be to utilize your professor's comments as much as possible, since the comments are an indication of what he or she is looking for and would like to see revised. Based off of your assignment description, the points that would appear to benefit the most from further work are the following:

- The essay includes a clear thesis that is developed throughout the paper.

(I was unsure of your thesis after reading your paper).

- Include strong verbs as much as possible.

(Many times your sentences have extra verbs, such as your sentence: "Cannabis also aids in relieving the side effects of radiation..." - in this case your sentence uses "aids" and "relieving" together, where if you used one strong verb the sentence may flow better).

- Proofread your work carefully to eliminate careless errors. Use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Write in complete sentences.

(This can be addressed through using SpellCheck and looking for the squiggly underlining, as well as reading your paper out loud).

[Conclusion]

I want to emphasize again that Rebecca did attach a document with in-text comments to point out specific issues with grammar and punctuation that came up in the writer's essays, including resources that the writer might use to address certain errors.

My electronic reply to Rebecca's response:

Rebecca,

This is another thorough and helpful response to the student. It also seems to have taken my comments to you last time into account—the end comments consistently refer back to a specific aspect of the student's paper, and the inserted/in-text comments are carefully phrased in order to give the student more to consider. This was even a tricky submission because the paper was, on the one hand, reasonably strong (compared to the examples I keep giving during meetings, anyway) and because there are so many variables: online, of course, but also research, citations, stated student concerns, and detailed instructor requirements. That means a lot of discrete decisions on your part.

I may have to make this paper, and your response, required reading for the other tutors. And yes, I'm using the superlatives that I told tutors not to use.

Conclusion

Reflecting at the end of her first year, Rebecca felt more secure in her tutoring: "This new method is helping students to become better writers rather than creating immediately better papers, since that is the overall mission of the writing center." But it is impossible, and even undesirable, to dispel all doubt. Indeed, it remains difficult to determine whether student writers agree that they have indeed improved. But Rebecca's sentiments have been echoed many times in emails from and surveys of our students. This year, about half of the students who submitted papers electronically replied to their tutor, revised and resubmitted the same paper based on the tutor's comments, or submitted another paper later in the semester. Over the past three years, the number of electronic submissions has increased more than threefold. Finally, learning from Jessica, newer tutors have begun cultivating online correspondences with individual students in much the same way that students choose recurring face-to-face appointments with the same tutor throughout the year, allowing tutors to gauge whether their online students have improved over several months' time.

But peer tutors' own, personal sentiments are crucial, since they themselves are students and learners as well. "In the meantime," as Rebecca concluded, "I know that my responses have grown with me as I have grown personally as a writing tutor, and I hope that giving (and receiving!) feedback is a skill I will continue to develop throughout my entire life." As a

peer tutor trainer, I find her development, and reaction, crucial. While I want my tutors to help as many students as possible as well as possible, they themselves are also undergraduates with lessons to learn and lives ahead of them to lead. Rebecca continued to tutor for another year, until she graduated. She is now a graduate student in Occupational Therapy and a skilled communicator and rhetorician. And my new tutors are learning from her groundwork, with each year's Rebeccas learning from the last. Skeptics abound in the literature of online writing centers, but I, for now, am a cautious convert.

Notes

1. Also see Breuch, "Developing Sound Tutor Training for Online Writing Centers: Creating Productive Peer Reviewers."
2. Although I am using the word "template," I was influenced by Atul Gawande's *Checklist Manifesto*; the template also functions as a kind of checklist for tutors against omission or failure.

Works Cited

- Breuch, Lee-Ann. "Developing Sound Tutor Training for Online Writing Centers: Creating Productive Peer Reviewers." *Computers and Composition*, 17: 3, December 2000, 245–263.
- . (2004). *Virtual Peer Review: Teaching and Learning about Writing in Online Environments*. New York: SUNY Press, 2004.
- Carino, Peter. "Computers in the Writing Center: A Cautionary History." *Wiring the Writing Center*. Ed. Eric Hobson. Logan: Utah State UP, 1998. 171-193.
- Castner, Joanna. "The Asynchronous, Online Writing Session: A Two-Way Stab in the Dark?" *Taking Flight with OWLs: Examining Electronic Writing Center Work*. Eds. James Inman and Donna Sewell. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000. 119-128.
- Coogan, David. "Email 'Tutoring' as Collaborative Writing." *Wiring the Writing Center* Logan: Utah State UP. 25-43.
- Gawande, Atul, *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*. New York: Picador, 2009.
- Inman, James and Donna Sewell. Preface. *Taking Flight with OWLs: Examining Electronic Writing Center Work*. Eds. Inman and Sewell. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000. xix-xxiii.
- Jackson, J.A. "Interfacing the Faceless: Maximizing the Advantages of Online Tutoring." *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, 28:2, 2000, 1-7.
- Lerner, Neal. "Drill Pads, Teaching Machines, and Programmed Texts: Origins of Instructional Technology on Writing Centers." *Wiring the Writing Center*. Ed. Eric Hobson. Logan: Utah State UP, 1998. 119-136.

- North, Stephen M. "The Idea of a Writing Center." 1984.
The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice. Eds. Robert W Barnett and Jacob Blumner.
Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001. 63-78.
- Warnock, Scott. *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why*.
Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English,
2009.

CREATING VERBAL IMMEDIACY—THE USE OF IMMEDIACY AND AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUES IN ONLINE TUTORIALS

Kathryn Rosser Raign
University of North Texas
kathryn.raign@unt.edu

Like many writing center directors, I was hesitant to introduce online tutoring. However, because of limited physical space on campus, the internet provides the only room for growth available to us—a problem faced by many writing centers (Carpenter 2). The inevitability of online growth is also supported by the increase of tertiary-level online and blended courses being offered at most post-secondary schools. I was hesitant to begin online tutoring because [of] the “complexities introduced by online tutoring: the increased potential for directive tutoring instead of nondirective tutoring . . . the lack of sustained dialogue in asynchronous tutorials, and technological problems of accessibility and compatibility” (Kastman Breuch 21). In a conscious effort to avoid some of these issues, when the writing lab I direct began providing online tutorials in spring 2010. Our staff chose to use a software product called ShowDocument.com that allows students to upload their drafts and then share an interactive white board with the tutor to annotate the paper being discussed while synchronously chatting. The program does not have an audio or video function, so participants type their messages. We considered using a program such as Skype that would allow the tutor and student to see each other as they speak. However, technology is never completely trustworthy, and the ongoing issues of poor, broken, or failed transmission made Skype and similar programs an unreliable choice. Second, the close confines in which we work make the noise level in our lab high, and students themselves often login to video conferences from their dorms, or apartments, where background distractions can greatly impede the tutorial. Finally, as Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch suggests, we learned that we could not assume that all of our students who use the online service have access to equipment that enables them to use Skype or similar programs (21).

Although using ShowDocument.com provides the lab with a method of offering synchronous tutorials, which are more effective than asynchronous tutorials¹, it also creates a problem. My tutors find using ShowDocument.com cumbersome. They claim that the technology actually creates an uncomfortable distance between themselves and the students being tutored. Specifically, they find that their inability to use nonverbal communication lessens their ability to gauge

how well a student understands what they share, and especially if the student is engaged. Given that providing online tutorials is a necessity, the problem is finding a practical way for tutors to create verbal immediacy and avoid alienating students when tutoring online with no audio or visual interface. My research suggests that the distance caused by technology in online tutorials can be lessened by training tutors to use specific linguistic techniques shown to create immediacy—immediacy being the sense of closeness or shared purpose—between two people attempting to communicate, while refraining from the use of specific avoidance techniques shown to damage immediacy. This article suggests methods for training tutors to use immediacy techniques while limiting the use of avoidance techniques when engaging in online synchronous chat based tutorials.

Timothy Mottet and Virginia Richmond argue, “humans do not have a linguistic schema for closeness and instead take verbal cues from the context [of the conversation] to construct verbal techniques that cultivate closeness/distance” (32). Consequently, we cannot assume tutors, by virtue of having been trained to effectively interact with students, will use immediacy or avoidance techniques because a chat-based conversation lacks the nonverbal cues present in a face-to-face conversation. The original study of verbal immediacy was conducted by A. Mehrabian, a linguist, who defines immediacy as the “degree of directness and intensity of interaction between communicator and inferent in a communicator’s linguistic message” (28). However “... evidence suggests that Mehrabian’s linguistic nuances of verbal immediacy are undetectable to an untrained ear” (Mottet and Patterson). Mehrabian’s study was extended by Joan Gorham and Diane Christophel who identified 17 behaviors shown to increase immediacy between students and teachers when used in the classroom, thus positively affecting students’ perceptions of how much they learned (50). Mottet and Richmond next conjectured that if people use “verbal immediate behaviors to *accelerate* relationship formation,” (2) they may also use non-immediate or avoidance behaviors to “*retard* relationship formation” (emphasis added) (2). When communicators use these avoidance techniques, they create a sense of distance between themselves and their recipient. This can cause

the receiver of the message to feel excluded or unwanted. While Mottet and Richmond's data suggested that when people want to retard relationship formation, they will simply stop communicating, this option does not exist for tutors who are obligated to tutor any student who seeks help (38). In the context of this study, which looks at methods for improving the quality of online text-based tutorials by creating immediacy, we must ask if, for most people, "the goal is ... immediacy through contact," can specific verbal immediacy techniques be used to create immediacy through contact when there is no contact? (Bolter and Grusin 29). First, we must determine whether the use of immediacy techniques will improve a student's satisfaction with a tutoring session, and whether the use of avoidance techniques will lessen a student's satisfaction. If so, how do we train our tutors use verbal immediacy techniques to consciously create immediacy with the students they tutor while limiting their use of avoidance techniques that damage immediacy?

I began my study by developing a list of "immediacy" techniques and "verbal avoidance" techniques based on the work of Mottet and Richmond (31). However, because Gorham and Christophel based their study on the identification of verbal immediacy techniques used by a teacher in a classroom, oral usages, and Mottet and Richmond looked at the use of avoidance techniques in "everyday conversation," I have adapted the list of immediacy and avoidance techniques to reflect the fact that my study uses written transcripts of written, online conversations between the tutor and student (27). Again, I looked first at tutors' use of six techniques to create immediacy when engaging in synchronous text-based chat with students: humor, praise, personal examples, comments/questions that show willingness to communicate, accessible responses, and uses of "we" and "us." Next, I looked at their use of four techniques to avoid immediacy: condescending language, communication that is unresponsive, discourteous or abrupt communication, and exclusionary language.

Methodology

To see whether the use of immediacy techniques by tutors could lessen the technological distance between tutors and their students and the use of avoidance techniques could increase distance, I coded 14 written transcripts of 45 minute online tutorials for the tutors' use of 6 linguistic techniques identified by Gorham and Christophel shown to create immediacy (a positive attribute) (50), and 4 avoidance techniques (a negative attribute) identified by Mottet and

Richmond (27) shown to disrupt immediacy. Next, I asked each of the 14 students tutored to complete a satisfaction survey at the end of their online tutorials. I used a 5-point Likert scale and asked each student 8 questions. The highest possible score on any question was a 2, and the lowest possible score was a -2. The highest possible total score for the survey as a whole was 16, and the lowest was -16. (See Appendix for a copy of the survey.)

This strategic analysis of tutoring transcripts for the use of positive and negative verbal techniques has never been done, and should offer insight into whether the use of specifically chosen communication techniques can improve students' perceptions of the success of a tutoring session.

Immediacy Techniques

Each immediacy technique below is followed by examples from the 14 coded transcripts I collected in my writing lab. Because each technique I coded for is equally important, I have listed them in order of most-used to least-used.

Comments/Questions That Show Willingness to Communicate

The tutor "uses communication in a way that reveals that [he or she] is willing to communicate and wants to continue communicating" (Mottet and Richmond 30). Examples could include: "What prompt did your teacher give you?" Questions with the intention of the student to answer "yes" or "no" are not counted because they often result in one-word responses and therefore stop communication, or result in an "I don't know" response that also stops communication:

- What do you think you should do to the rest of this list?
- What are your primary concerns about this document?
- What do you have trouble with when writing?

30% of the immediacy techniques used were in this category.

Uses "We" and "Us"

The tutor uses "communication that includes [the student]" by talking about what "we" or "us" share (Mottet and Richmond 30); for example, "We need to work on that."

Given the already dehumanizing nature of technology, we must attempt to use the student's name, or inclusive pronouns such as "we" whenever possible:

- Shall we get started?
- Let's look at the next sentence.

- We don't want to move on until we get it sorted out.

This technique accounts for 27% of the total number of immediacy techniques used. However, while tutors frequently used "we," no one used a student's name.

Praise

The use of "complimentary, and encouraging statements" (Mottet and Richmond 30). Tutors can use praise to build the students' confidence:

- Awesome!!!
- Exactly right.
- Looks like you've done good work.

Of the total number of immediacy techniques used, praise accounts for 17%, making praise the third most-used technique.

Accessible Responses to Student Initiated Questions

The tutor uses "language that [the student] understands—language that does not sound superior, over [the student's] head, or language that is condescending" (Mottet and Richmond 30).

Tutors work with an incredibly diverse body of students, so they must be careful to tailor their responses to the individual student:

- Student asks, "Should I have the running head on the first page only?" Tutor replies, "Yes and the running head itself after the colon."
- Student asks, "Did I write a critique?" Tutor replies, "I see more summary than critique."
- Student asks, "How do you know when to hyphenate?" Tutor replies, "Ok—you hyphenate two words if they are before a noun and are all working together to describe the noun."

Of the total number of immediacy techniques used, accessible responses account for 13% of the sample.

Personal Examples

Tutors can "use self-disclosive statements" that begin with "I" to create a sense of equality (Mottet and Richmond 30). For example, the tutor uses "I" to relate an experience similar to the student's:

- I'm not familiar with that field.
- I see what you mean by "tricky."
- That's exactly what I would have done.

Of the total number of immediacy techniques used, personal examples account for 8%.

Humor

"Laughter and humor are . . . like an invitation..." (Gorham and Christophel 47):

- Ha Ha.
- LOL.
- ☺.

Of the total number of immediacy techniques used, only 5 % involved the use of humor. Table 1 shows the total number of usages for each immediacy techniques that I coded in the 14 transcripts in order from least to greatest.

Table 1: Total Number of Immediacy Techniques Used By Tutors

Technique	Number of Usages	Percentage of Total Usages
Comments/Questions That Show Willingness to Communicate	60	30%
Uses of We/Us	52	27%
Praise	35	17%
Accessible Answers	26	13%
Personal Examples	17	8%
Humor	11	5%
Total	201	100%

Verbal Avoidance Techniques

Next I include examples of avoidance technique I identified in the 14 coded transcripts I collected. Again, I have listed them in order of most-used to least-used because they are equally important.

Exclusionary Language (jargon or tech-talk the student in question would not understand)

We must determine whether a tutor's response is exclusionary based on the context in which it occurs. When tutors use language that students do not understand, they create a division that prevents learning:

- Tutor types, "You will cite the PRINT version." Student responds, "What do you mean by print version?"
- Tutor types, "Because it is an afactual statement ..." students respond "not understanding"
- In response to an international student's question regarding hyphenation, the tutor types, "This is the case with all multi-adjectival expressions which function as a unit."

Discourteous or Abrupt Communication

When tutors use inappropriately short answers or visual cues that indicate impatience, the student may feel the tutor is being rude:

- Tutor types, “It’s a HUGE problem.” (textual shouting)
- In response to a student’s question, the tutor types, “?”
- The tutor types, “a thesis should be an arguable point.” The student responds, “I guess that’s were im stuck.” The tutor types, “What can we ARGUE about it?”

In a face-to-face tutorial, tone of voice could make examples such as these either positive or negative, but because tutors can’t indicate a tone of voice when sending written messages to students, such comments tend to have a negative effect.

Communication That Is Unresponsive

Unresponsive communication clearly indicates that the tutor has other more important things to do than communicate with the student. Each of the tutor responses below clearly indicates that he or she does not wish to engage with student:

- I have not given it a close read.
- That’s all I have.
- We’re out of time.

These sorts of comments might seem appropriate at the end of a session, but even then such an abrupt cut off can leave students with a negative impression of the session as a whole.

Condescending Language

When tutors indicate that they doubt the student’s ability to understand a concept, the tone of the message is often condescending, which can cause the student to quit actively participating in the session:

- Student asks, “Should that be my new thesis?” Tutor replies, “There is no right answer to that question.”
- Tutor types, “Here is what we call a misplaced modifier” (“we” is meant to exclude the student and establish the tutor as an expert)
- Student asks for help citing an article. Tutor types, “FYI—I’m amazed her paper [the published author] was published.”

Table 2 shows the total number of usages for each avoidance techniques that I coded in the 14 transcripts in order from least to greatest.

Table 2: Total Number of Avoidance Techniques Used By Tutors

Technique	Number of Usages	Percentage of Total Usages
Exclusionary Language	47	47%
Discourteous Communication	31	31%
Communication That Is Unresponsive	15	15%
Condescending Language	7	7%
Total	100	100%

Results

To determine the effect of the use of both immediacy and avoidance techniques on student satisfaction scores, I totaled the number of immediacy and avoidance strategies for each tutor, and then determined what percentage of the total was made up of immediacy techniques and what percentage of the total was made up of avoidance techniques. I listed this in order of highest uses of immediacy techniques to lowest, and compared them to the student satisfaction score for that tutorial. As Table 3 illustrates, the higher the percentage of immediacy techniques (which indicates a lower percentage of avoidance techniques) the tutor used, the higher the satisfaction score of the student.

Table 3: Percentages of Immediacy and Satisfaction

Tutor	% of Immediacy Techniques Used	% of Avoidance Techniques Used	Student Satisfaction Score
2	100%	0%	15
4	100%	0%	16
9	97%	3%	16
6	90%	10%	16
3	88%	13%	11
7	84%	16%	10
10	70%	30%	8
11	68%	32%	8
8	56%	44%	8
13	50%	50%	8
1	46%	54%	6
5	33%	67%	6
14	26%	74%	-3
12	15%	88%	6

Implications

If, as my study suggests, a tutor's conscious use of these immediacy techniques has the potential to improve the satisfaction level of the students being tutored by creating a sense of closeness between tutors and students, we must consciously train our tutors to use them, while also training them not to use the identified avoidance techniques because student satisfaction indicates a positive learning experience. Clearly Mottet and Richmond were correct when they argued that "humans do not have a linguistic schema for closeness and instead take verbal cues from the context [of the conversation] to construct verbal techniques that cultivate closeness/distance" (32) because, although each of the immediacy techniques studied has the potential to improve the quality of student learning by creating an atmosphere of closeness and cooperation, tutors did not use any more than 30% of the time:

<i>Comments/Questions That Show</i>	
Willingness to Communicate	30%
Uses of We/Us	27%
Praise	17%
Accessible Answers	13%
Personal Examples	8%
Humor	5%

After completing my study, I met with each of the tutors who participated and shared my copies of their coded tutoring transcripts. In every case, they were surprised (sometimes dismayed) at what was revealed. None of my tutors intentionally set out to alienate the students they tutored, and they were all eager to begin attempting to use the immediacy techniques I shared with them. I now provide my tutors with a list of these techniques (approach and avoidance), and the likely effect their use will have on student satisfaction, and I plan to duplicate my study after all of my current tutors have had a semester to finish their training. I hope that my research will show a marked increase in the satisfaction level of all students being tutored, both virtually and face-to-face. Finally, I suggest that other writing center directors also begin training their tutors to use the six immediacy techniques outlined in this article while avoiding the four avoidance strategies, both online, and in face-to-face environments. Sharing the use of both the immediacy and avoidance techniques discussed in this article with our tutors will

help their awareness of their own communication patterns. And with awareness, may come positive change.

Note

1. See Kastman Breuch. Because of "the lack of sustained dialogue in asynchronous tutorials" tutoring sessions tend to become a method of offering prescriptive advice rather than a non-prescriptive discussion of writing.

Works Cited

- Braeutigam, Andrea M. "What I Hear You Writing Is...Issues in ODR: Trust and Rapport in the Text-Based Environment." *University of Toledo Law Review* 38 (2006): 1-28. Lexis Nexis. Web. 9 Apr. 2012.
- Bolter, David J. and Richard A. Grusin. "Remediation." *Configurations* 4.3 (1996): 311-358. Print.
- Carnegie, Teena A.M. "Interface as Exordium: The Rhetoric of Interactivity." *Computers and Composition* 26.3 (2009): 164-173. Print.
- Carpenter, Russell. "Consulting Without Bodies: Technology, Virtual Space, and the Writing Center." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 6.1 (2008): 1-5. Print.
- Gorham, Joan, and Diane M. Christophel. "The Relationship of Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom to Immediacy and Student Learning." *Communication Education* 39 (1990): 46-62. Print.
- Kastman Breuch, Lee-Ann. "The Idea(s) of an Online Writing Center: The Search for a Conceptual Model." *The Writing Center Journal* 25.2 (2005): 21-38. Print.
- Mehrabian A. *Silent Messages*. Belmont: Wadsworth, 1996. Print.
- Mottet, T.P. and Patterson, B.R. "A Conceptualization and Measure of Teacher Verbal Effectiveness." Annual Convention of the Speech Association. San Diego, Nov. 1996. Address.
- Mottet, Timothy, and Virginia P. Richmond. "An Inductive Analysis of Verbal Immediacy: An Alternative Conceptualization of Relational Verbal Approach/Avoidance Strategies." *Communication Quarterly* 46.1 (1998): 25-41. Proquest. Web. 9 Apr. 2012.
- Neadarheiser, Stephen, and Joanna Wolfe. "Between Technological Endorsement and Resistance: The State of Online Writing Centers." *The Writing Center Journal* 29.1 (2009): 49-75. Print.

Appendix: Student Satisfaction Survey

1. My online tutoring session was very useful
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
2. I received valuable information.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
3. The tutor was responsive to my needs.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
4. The tutor treated me like an individual.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
5. The tutor encouraged me to participate in the session.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
6. The tutor made an effort to establish rapport with me.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
7. I would schedule another online tutorial with this tutor.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
8. I would schedule another online tutorial but not with this tutor.
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABILITY: DISSERTATION BOOT CAMP AS A NEXUS OF GRADUATE WRITING SUPPORT

Steve Simpson

New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (New Mexico Tech)
ssimpson@nmt.edu

Researchers in graduate education and writing studies have expressed concern over the quality of the graduate student experience (Golde and Walker; Kamler and Thomson). Several factors fuel these concerns. Dismal academic job markets and high graduate student attrition rates (40-50 percent in US institutions) have prompted numerous programs to reform graduate education. Given the central role of communication in one's progress toward a graduate degree—and to one's professional life in science and academia—this appeal for graduate education reform has accompanied calls for graduate level writing support (Simpson, "Problem"; Starke-Meyerring).

At many universities, writing centers have taken a central role in meeting this need for graduate writing support, whether through graduate writing center hours or writing groups (Gillespie; Phillips) or through events such as dissertation boot camps (Lee and Golde). A perennial issue in writing center work, however, is providing these services without confirming notions of the writing center as the "fix-it" or "triage" center. This perception has been discussed in two special issues of *Praxis* (*From Triage; Raising*) and is particularly important when working with graduate students. The heft of graduate-level projects can quickly exhaust writing center resources. Further, the complexity of graduate students' writing necessitates fluid partnerships between writing centers and other university departments. Graduate-level writing programs must be strategic, balancing students' short-term needs while building infrastructure within campus departments for sustainable graduate support. As Claire Aitchison and Anthony Paré argue in "Writing as Craft and Practice in the Doctoral Curriculum," "[I]t takes more than one-off courses or writing retreats to create the sort of nurturing and challenging environment that develops writing abilities." Instead of being sequestered to writing centers, "universities need to suffuse the doctoral curriculum with writing" (20).

Dissertation boot camps—short, intensive thesis writing workshops—have grown popular as a form of graduate writing support. While serving the immediate goal of helping doctoral students finish degrees, they can also serve as quick, low-cost first steps in developing larger networks of campus graduate support. In this article, I discuss a thesis/dissertation

boot camp developed recently at New Mexico Tech as a partnership between the writing center and the Center for Graduate Studies. After outlining the program's goals and structure, I draw from surveys and follow-up interviews with graduate students from an Earth sciences program to describe their experiences and the resulting incremental changes in attitudes toward graduate writing support in their home department. I finish with recommendations for writing centers developing similar graduate-level programs or looking to be more strategic with existing programs.

Boot Camp Fever

The increasing popularity of dissertation boot camps is due in part to universities' concerns about graduate completion rates. Recent statistics released by the Council of Graduate Schools indicate that many doctoral students can take up to ten years to complete their degrees (Council). At many universities, boot camps are seen as an effective way to help graduate students muscle through the often-frustrating dissertation stage.

Another factor in the growing popularity of boot camps is a high demand among graduate students for writing support. Mastroieni and Cheung from University of Pennsylvania's Graduate Student Center, often credited for creating the first dissertation boot camp, indicate that the impetus for boot camp came from a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article describing "desperate doctoral students spending thousands of dollars for private dissertation coaches," a service they felt "should be supplied by universities" (4). Thesis retreats did exist at some universities, such as the University of Colorado at Denver's Scholar's retreat (Smallwood). However, U Penn's boot camp model, started in 2005, spread quickly to other institutions. Today, a Google search for "Dissertation Boot Camp" easily yields 30 to 40 programs across the US and Canada.

The simplicity of U Penn's boot camp model has much to do with its popularity. Boot camp provides graduate students with large chunks of uninterrupted, distraction-free time to work on theses or dissertations. Individual programs vary in duration (one, two, or three weeks) and time of day. Most offer

brief workshops on time management and the writing process, and many provide writing consultations. Boot camps also vary in their departmental affiliations. While some are run exclusively by either writing centers or graduate schools, most boot camps have formed from partnerships between these entities. This approach allows these boot camps to distribute program costs. At the bare minimum, however, one needs only quiet work spaces, plenty of outlets for plugging in laptops, table space for spreading out research, and a full pot of coffee.

Despite similarities across boot camp models, numerous key strategic differences exist. In “Completing the Dissertation and Beyond: Writing Centers and Dissertation Boot Camps,” Sohui Lee and Chris Golde distinguish between “Just Write” boot camps and “Writing Process” boot camps. The “Just Write” model, Lee and Golde argue, “presumes that students will write productively, if they are given space, food, and monitored time” (2). Conversely, the “Writing Process” model encourages sustained discussion about writing—that is, this model extends the boot camp experience beyond the 1- to 2-week event and encourages long-term changes in writing behavior.

In this article, I build on Lee and Golde’s distinction and delineate between “inward-focused” boot camps—i.e., boot camps that function as *the* place to go for writing support on campus—and “outward-focused” boot camps—i.e., those that work toward better writing support across the university. In theory, this distinction seems clear, though it is admittedly murky in practice. No boot camp would ever intend to be “inward-focused,” but boot camps naturally gravitate toward this approach if they lack strategic planning and explicit discussions of program goals with students and university stakeholders. Because writing centers already struggle with popular perceptions of the “fix-it” station, those who also operate boot camps can find this gravitational pull particularly frustrating.

In the following sections, I describe the boot camp model developed at the New Mexico Tech Writing and Oral Presentation Center and our efforts to become a more outward-focused program. While smaller writing centers might find these strategies more directly applicable, even larger centers might find useful talking points for engaging other university entities and departments when building similar programs on their campuses.

Program-Building at New Mexico Tech

New Mexico Tech (NMT) is a small science and engineering research university in south-central New

Mexico. While small (540 graduate students), NMT has strong programs in astro- and atmospheric physics, Earth sciences, and petroleum engineering. Like other universities across the United States and abroad, NMT is concerned with graduate students’ completion rates. Time to degree rates can be high at NMT. According to data provided by NMT’s institutional research office, NMT awarded 92 master’s degree and 16 doctoral degrees in 2012. The average time to degree was 3.8 years for master’s students and 6.26 years for doctoral students. While programs vary in their expected time to degree, these numbers are striking. The data include graduate students at both the master’s and doctoral level taking 8 to 10 years to complete degrees.

In 2009, NMT secured a Department of Education grant for graduate students.¹ This grant included writing and oral communication support for graduate students, which had not existed previously at NMT (even in the writing center). Boot camp was accompanied by an array of other writing resources, including graduate writing center hours and graduate-level communication courses linked with graduate seminars in science and engineering departments. (For more on these initiatives, see Simpson, “Graduate”; “Problem”). However, boot camp was the initiative that set everything in motion—the nexus of our graduate writing support. It was easy and inexpensive to start, and it grew popular with students very quickly. This initial success caught the faculty’s attention and provided necessary leverage when talking to departments about more complicated communication initiatives.

We started boot camp during the winter 2011 break and have offered one every winter and summer since. Attendance has averaged 12 or 13 students per event from departments all across campus. The program runs for 1-week intervals, 9-5, Monday to Friday and has been staffed by a communication professor, a math professor, and a graduate writing tutor. Each day begins with a short writing or time management workshop and small “accountability” check-in groups where students report on their previous days’ accomplishments and their plans for the day. Students may also brainstorm ways to approach difficulties they anticipate in the day’s writing. Throughout the week, students may request writing consultations or attend optional writing workshops in addition to receiving information on thesis and dissertation formatting guidelines, copyright paperwork, and so on. We also provide technical support for students writing dissertations in LaTeX² and a short mid-week stretch with a campus yoga

instructor. Students write for at least six hours each day.

Beyond simply providing a good place to write, two primary boot camp goals are to leverage feedback from students' advisors and fellow students and to bridge boot camp and other communication initiatives. When registering for boot camp, students generate a writing plan for the week with their advisors. In some cases, advisors use boot camp intentionally to push advisees through more troubling parts of their research. We often have opportunities to consult with advisors on optimal ways of using the program.

More significantly, we encourage students to seek assistance from their fellow students. Many students, particularly from science and engineering disciplines, report receiving all of their feedback from advisors. While advisors are a critical source of feedback for students, advisors can become quickly overwhelmed by the amount of feedback they are asked to provide. Much of the basic feedback—general readability, organization—can (and should) be distributed among students' peers. While science tends to be very collaborative at the research stage, students often isolate themselves from peers during the writing stage. A significant body of research exists on writing groups and, more specifically, writing groups for graduate students (Aitchison; Gere; Phillips; Thomas, Smith and Barry). In her history of writing groups in educational and extracurricular settings, Anne Ruggles Gere has demonstrated the efficacy of self-sponsored writing groups—writing groups that develop organically from shared interests and are moderated by writers themselves rather than being created top-down by a teacher or professor. In theory, student-run writing groups within academic departments on campus can offer students low-stakes, comfortable spaces to share ideas and concerns and act as a middle ground between advisors and more formal writing resources such as the writing center. However, students often need to see writing groups' benefits before investing time and energy in starting them. Students also experience difficulty knowing what to comment on besides the general “flow” of the document.

To this end, we model writing groups and provide support for students wishing to start one. We distinguish among three types of writing groups: *check-in groups*, *writing groups*, and *reviewing groups*. *Check-in groups* are accountability groups—fellow writers to whom one reports writing goals and recounts writing progress. *Writing groups*, in our setting, refer to groups that meet regularly and write together. *Reviewing groups* refer to groups that provide feedback on each other's

work. In our boot camp, we offer workshops on forming writing and reviewing groups in which we discuss everything from questions one might ask to basic logistical issues (e.g., finding a space, setting deadlines and page limits, etc.). We also model reviewing through individual writing consultations and informal peer review sessions in which boot-camp staff guide the discussion around students' texts. Finally, we discuss ways of introducing writing/reviewing groups to students in their home departments and offer assistance in the initial set-up.

We also aim to bridge between boot camp and other communication initiatives to maximize students' exposure to explicit communication instruction. When possible, we encourage students to participate in more than one initiative, though students vary in how they choose to do so. Some take a graduate communication course early in their graduate careers and participate in boot camp in their final semester; others take boot camp at the beginning of their dissertation stage and then enroll in a graduate writing course to extend their experience. In some cases, as will be explained later, departments that have set up in-house communication resources have used boot camp as a target resource for their students (e.g., one department seminar helped students create research proposals for projects they work on during boot camp). Ultimately, we encourage graduate students to continue use of these resources throughout their graduate career rather than seeing boot camp as a one-stop fix-it shop.

In the next section, I describe the results of some of our boot camp assessments and share some of the experiences of students from an environmental sciences program who participated in follow-up interviews.

Assessment Procedures and Results

Our boot camp assessment procedures include time-to-degree statistics, exit surveys of boot camp participants and advisors, and 30-45 minute follow-up interviews with select boot camp participants. Time-to-degree statistics (i.e., time from first enrollment to graduation, minus semesters not enrolled) for both boot camp participants and non-participants graduating by Spring 2012 were collected from NMT's Office of Institutional Research.³ Both boot camp participants and advisors were asked to complete online exit surveys. The surveys not only measured participants' satisfaction with the resource, accommodations, staff, etc., but also assessed students' and advisors' satisfaction with work completed during boot camp and participants' likelihood of participating in writing groups or coming to the writing center. Follow-up interviews were conducted with select boot

camp participants, some of whom had recently graduated. We contacted potential interviewees in clusters by department. Interviewees were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate.

Data collection is ongoing. The results presented in this article reflect preliminary findings after offering four boot camps. We will continue collecting data on our program's effect over the next two years of our grant. I have focused on interviews conducted with students from Earth sciences, in part because it is the largest graduate program on campus and has had the most boot camp participants. Further, the interviews reflect a diversity of post-boot camp student experiences. Interviewees include three non-native English speakers and two native English speakers: Marta (Spanish, doctoral student), Jamila (Arabic, doctoral student), Ani (English, doctoral student), Gary (English, master's student), and Song (Chinese, master's student).⁴ Of the five students interviewed, two had completed their degrees and had secured either a post-doctorate or industry job, and one completed her degree shortly after the interview. One interviewee (Gary) was completing his thesis remotely while working out of state, and one (Song) had just been accepted into a doctoral program and was scurrying to finish. I also used survey data from three boot camps: summer 2011, winter 2012, and summer 2012.⁵ Thirty-two students participated in these boot camps, 26 of whom responded to our online survey.

Tentatively, our data indicate an interesting divide between boot camp's potential short term and long term effects. In the short term, most students report finishing most of their writing plans (on average, 75 percent), and report (on a 1-5 scale) satisfaction with both the quantity (mean = 4) and quality (mean = 4.16) of work completed during the week. Further, the general evaluations of boot camp are overwhelmingly positive.

Interesting divisions emerge when examining long term writing strategies. Of twenty-six survey respondents, four indicated being involved in a writing group prior to boot camp, and only one reported visiting the writing center prior to boot camp. As seen in Table 1, after completing boot camp, participants report feeling more likely to visit the writing center than to form a writing/reviewing group. This result is expected. Many boot camp alumni leave motivated to change their writing habits but prefer the writing center over forming a writing group because it does not involve coordinating with other students' schedules. Sixteen students from these three boot camps subsequently scheduled regular writing center visits to help finish their projects. Four additional

participants enrolled in a graduate communication course after boot camp. Thus, boot camp is successful in encouraging participation in other communication initiatives.

Table 1: Boot Camp Participants' Likelihood Of Visiting The Writing Center Vs. Participating In A Writing Group

	Definitely not	Maybe	Probably	Definitely
Writing Group	1	9	3	9
Writing Center	0	4	6	15

Opinions are split among students at boot camp's end for joining a writing group (12 learning toward joining a writing group, 10 leaning away from joining one). What our follow-up interviews have revealed, however, is that even a few enthusiastic students can sell the idea of a writing group to peers and faculty in their home departments.

Of the five students interviewed from Earth sciences, three participated in writing/reviewing groups after boot camp and one (Gary) found a peer at his work site to review his work. Only one student (Song) expressed hesitation about peer feedback. Most of his concerns were logistical, as he did not feel his schedule would fit well with other students'. Song was also skeptical of advice from others outside his research area (even from other Earth science students), a very common concern among graduate students.

Marta, who participated in two boot camps, was the first alum to organize a writing/reviewing group in Earth sciences. Initially, she recruited two other Earth sciences students from boot camp (not included in this interview sample) to join her for morning writing sessions. Marta described writing with others as an "addiction." "I had someone who I was writing here, writing with," she explained, "so there was this kind of motivation like any kind of addiction. [...] you have somebody who shared your feelings. They understand you and then you are going toward a similar goal." This writing group supported Marta through some difficult times with her dissertation. Like many graduate students, she encountered difficulties with her experiment and had to spend more time working on her dissertation than expected.

Eventually, she recruited more students from her department and worked reviewing into the group. Jamila, who preferred writing alone but wanted a reviewing group, joined the group for their Monday

feedback sessions. Jamila, a non-native English speaker, reported increased confidence in her reviewing skills: “From boot camp, I became a better reviewer. [...] At least, this is what my people that I reviewed for tell me. That they like it when I review for them because I give them constructive or things that they find useful.” Jamila also noted that she became more aware of the type of advice she was given from her advisor and from others and “transfer[red] it to other people.” The following year, Ani, who had participated in boot camp and a communication course, also started a writing group that eventually merged with Marta’s.

Two interesting phenomena emerged through this writing group. First, the group recruited students who had not participated in boot camp. In one case, Marta’s writing group encouraged one student to attend boot camp and helped her create a writing plan. Second, these students became outspoken advocates of writing support in the department, thus laying groundwork for other writing initiatives in Earth sciences. In her interview, Marta summarized a conversation she had with Ani and others in her writing group about why writing “had not been tackled earlier” in their graduate careers. Departmental faculty noticed this increased attention to writing and often spoke proudly (and publically) of the writing group’s effects on students.

This writing group, coupled with the advocacy of key students in Earth sciences, created fertile ground for launching a new initiative in the Earth sciences department. In summer 2012, we started a STEM communication fellows initiative (i.e., graduate fellows from science and engineering disciplines who work part time in the writing center and part time in their departments creating discipline-specific writing support). Boot camp’s success with students helped convince Earth science faculty that this new program might enjoy similar success. With help from our Earth science communication fellow, the department chair piloted a 1-credit graduate student writing seminar designed to help newer Earth sciences graduate students develop thesis proposal drafts and to prepare them for future involvement in boot camp. The pilot course was well-received. Eight graduate students participated in this seminar, several of whom planned to participate in a writing group with our writing fellow the following semester. Three participants from this class enrolled in the winter 2013 boot camp.

So far, we have experienced considerable success with writing initiatives with three departments on campus: Earth sciences, physics, and biology. While we are starting to see the potential for similar development in other departments, some departments

have still been a hard sell. Our strategy, as explained in the next section, is to use these initial successes in some university departments to help sell these initiatives elsewhere.

Recommendations for Program Design

Creating “outward-focused” boot camps that scaffold sustainable writing support within university departments takes strategic planning. Institutional contexts vary, so adaption of the model presented in this article is inevitable. Below, I provide recommendations that might help writing centers bridge these institutional differences.

Collaborate with other university entities or departments.

At NMT, we benefit from having these communication initiatives and our writing center housed in the same department. At some larger institutions, it is easy for several campus entities to create overlapping (or conflicting) initiatives. Writing centers should consider meeting with representatives from their institution’s graduate school, learning center, or writing program to identify potential partnerships. At NMT, we have even successfully approached our international student office, the IT department, and the Graduate Student Association (GSA). As discussed by Parker Palmer and others in *The Heart of Higher Education*, strategic conversations with a variety of campus stakeholders can facilitate cultural change on college campuses, and once the conversation is started, the stakeholders themselves can be surprising. For example, at NMT, we were initially surprised by the IT department’s interest in these initiatives. As it turned out, one IT staff member in particular was very interested in generating better thesis/dissertation formatting guidelines for graduate students. His involvement in our boot camp has added additional practical value to our program.

Start small, and use small successes as leverage for growth.

Boot camp was a great first program because it was easy to start and quickly grew popular with students. It also provided opportunities to develop sustained relationships with the Earth sciences, physics, and biology departments. While we understood that more work was necessary to establish similar relationships with other departments, we resisted the urge to spread ourselves too thin too quickly. We chose to focus first on developing a few relationships fully. For example, we have also built ties with the physics department at our school. Through initiatives such as boot camp and graduate writing

group workshops, we built a working relationship with one faculty member who took an interest in our programs and became an advocate in her own department. Through her own participation in these initiatives, she became more comfortable talking about her own writing and convinced her department to enhance a required graduate lab credit, recreating it as a graduate research and communication course. While she still plans to invite the writing center in for peer review workshops and to encourage students to attend boot camp, she has assumed responsibility for further writing support in her own department. As a result, as we branch out and work with other departments, we now have an advocate in the physics department who can vouch for these program's effects on her students.

Program directors at larger schools might be concerned that this approach would exclude significant portions of the school for extended periods of time. This concern is valid. However, I would still argue that writing centers in these contexts focus their efforts and build in-depth relationships with responsive departments (though writing centers in these contexts often have more staff and can sometimes manage such relationships with more departments without spreading themselves too thin). In these cases, writing centers should look to develop different tiers of support—for example, establishing as tier one a general set of resources that are available to any graduate student as needed, and developing as tier two a deeper set of resources with targeted programs on campus. Further, program directors at large schools might also need to be a little more strategic with selecting departments or programs with which to work. At my previous institution, a mid-sized Northeastern state university, I worked with an interdisciplinary graduate program in natural resources and environmental sciences. This partnership had two advantages. First, this graduate program had the highest enrollment on campus. Second, students in this program, in addition to working with faculty directly associated with the program, recruited advisors from departments across campus, including chemistry, physics, and history. Thus, working with this program allowed some indirect access to other departments on campus.

Be explicit about program goals.

This recommendation is simple but often overlooked. Writing centers can at times be hesitant to publicize their 'real' program goals, and both students and advisors can easily misinterpret boot-camp goals. Some advisors at NMT still expect students to return from boot camp as accomplished grammarians. We discuss our goals explicitly with boot camp

participants, since they have had some success articulating these goals to advisors and other students. Further, we have found it useful to discuss these goals at our university's Graduate Student Association meetings, as our GSA representatives have been extremely helpful in communicating and publicizing these goals. Writing centers at larger schools might find the most active graduate organizations to be situated in departments. While visiting these localized graduate meetings is more time-consuming, it is potentially a direct way to interface with students themselves. I have also met informally to discuss expectations with advisors sending multiple advisees to boot camp, and I have invited representatives from departments across campus and graduate students to participate in planning meetings for our communication initiatives (with some success). By doing so, I have invited key university stakeholders to have input in how our goals dovetail with their own.

Assess and publish.

Despite their popularity, remarkably little has been published on thesis boot camps. Writing centers often exchange boot camp information informally and use any assessment data only for internal review. Writing center researchers and administrators would benefit from seeing different localized boot camp models and more national data on boot camps' effectiveness. Given the national concern for graduate education, such data can also provide us with leverage when speaking with school administrators or help in securing external funding for new graduate initiatives. For example, writing centers working with graduate students from STEM fields might be very surprised by how much funding is opening up through agencies such as the National Science Foundation.

As mentioned previously, many of these strategies are most directly applicable to smaller institutions. However, many of these strategies can serve as a starting point for brainstorming program design at some larger institutions as well. For example, even writing centers at larger schools may lack the energy and resources for a large-scale school-wide initiative, so it is still wise to start small and use initial successes as leverage for future growth. Further, mobilizing graduate students as advocates of one's program might be one of the only ways to reach some research advisors at larger institutions, particularly those who rarely venture outside of disciplinary silos. One significant obstacle for writing centers at larger institutions, however, is publicity. At smaller schools such as New Mexico Tech, it is much easier to communicate successes in one department to

representatives from other departments. Writing centers at larger schools may need to be more creative in publicizing accomplishments. Naturally, building relationships with high-leverage allies (e.g., choosing to partner with the graduate school when developing a boot camp) is one step, but seeking additional means of publicity might also be necessary. Useful strategies might include working with the school's Public Information Officer on an article on a university website or publication, co-sponsoring graduate student events on campus, and so on.

Effective program design does take time and energy, and our programs at NMT are still far from complete. However, we have found this time and attention valuable not only in establishing popular, graduate student-friendly programs, but also in creating the architecture for what could become a much larger, campus-wide network of graduate student support.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Marcia Bardy for assisting with boot camp and for helping conduct follow-up interviews for this study. Additional thanks to Bill Stone for helping develop our boot camp. Funding for these initiatives was provided in part by a Department of Education Title V grant (PPOHA: Promoting Post-baccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans). However, the content of this article does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Notes

¹ Title V: Promoting Post-Baccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans (PPOHA).

² LaTeX is a code-based document preparation program often used in equation-heavy fields such as physics or computer science.

³ Time-to-degree statistics are part of an on-going project. It is still too early to see statistically significant differences in this data.

⁴ All participant names are pseudonyms.

⁵ Surveys were piloted during the winter 2011 boot camp. Winter 2011 survey data will not be used in this report, as the study had not yet been submitted to NMT's Institutional Review Board (IRB). All data reported in this paper was collected in compliance with NMT's IRB.

Works Cited

Aitchison, Claire. "Writing Groups for Doctoral Education." *Studies in Higher Education* 34.8 (2009): 905-916. *Academic Search Premiere*. Web. 17 Aug. 2012.

- Aitchison, Claire, and Anthony Paré. "Writing as Craft and Practice in Doctoral Education." *Reshaping Doctoral Education: International Approaches and Pedagogies*. London: Routledge, 2012. 12-25. Print.
- Council of Graduate Schools. "Cumulative Ten-Year Completion Rates by Program, Broad Field, STEM Vs. SSH, and Overall." *Ph.D. Completion Project*. Dec. 2007. Web. 28 Dec. 2012. http://www.phdcompletion.org/quantitative/book1_quant.asp.
- From *Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work*, spec. iss. of *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 8.2 (2011).
- Gere, Anne Ruggles. *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1987. Print.
- Gillespie, Paula. "Graduate Writing Consultants for PhD Programs." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 32.2 (2007): 1-6. Print.
- Golde, Chris M, and George E Walker. *Envisioning the Future of Doctoral Education: Preparing Stewards of the Discipline (Carnegie essays on the doctorate)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006. Print.
- Kamler, Barbara, and Pat Thomson. *Helping Doctoral Students Write: Pedagogies for Supervision*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Lee, Sohui, and Chris Golde. "Completing the Dissertation and Beyond: Writing Centers and Dissertation Boot Camps." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 37.7/8 (2013): 1-5. Print.
- Mastroieni, Anita, and Deanna Cheung. "The Few, the Proud, the Finished: Dissertation Boot Camp as a Model for Doctoral Student Support." *NASPA: Excellence in Practice* 2011: 4-6. Web. 28 Dec. 2012. <http://www.universityparent.com/mk/naspa/2012-NASPA-final.pdf>.
- Palmer, Parker J, and Arthur Zajonc. *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010. Print.
- Phillips, Talinn. "Graduate Writing Groups: Shaping Writing and Writers from Student to Scholar." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 10.1 (2012): n. pag. Web. 30 Dec. 2012. <http://praxis.uwc.utexas.edu/index.php/praxis/article/view/81/html>.
- Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work (Part 2 of 2)*, spec. iss. of *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 9.1 (2012).
- Simpson, Steve. "Graduate Learning Communities? Integrating Language Support for ESL and Native-English Speaking Graduate Students." *SLW News: The Newsletter of TESOL's Second Language Writing Interest Section* 5.3 (2011): n. pag. Web. 21 March 2013. <http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolslwis/issues/2011-02-28/1.html>.
- . "The Problem of Graduate-Level Writing Support: Building a Cross-Campus Graduate Writing Initiative." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 36.1 (2012): 95-118. Print.

- Smallwood, Scott. "A week at Camp Dissertation." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 16 July 2004: A10. Print.
- Starke-Meyerring, Doreen. "The Paradox of Writing in Doctoral Education: Student Experiences." *Supporting the Doctoral Process: Research-Based Strategies*. Ed. Lynn McAlpine & Cheryl Amundsen. New York: Springer, 2011. 73-95. Print.
- Thomas, Sharon, Leonora Smith, and Terry Trupiano Barry. "Shaping Writing Groups in the Sciences." *Writing Groups Inside and Outside the Classroom*. Ed. Beverly J. Moss, Nels P. Highberg, & Melissa Nicolas. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004. 79-94. Print.

TUTOR TRAINING AND SERVICES FOR MULTILINGUAL GRADUATE WRITERS: A RECONSIDERATION

Talinn Phillips
Ohio University
tiller@ohio.edu

Multilingual graduate writers make few appearances in writing center discussions. These students live, work, and write at the intersection of two subjectivities—graduate writer and multilingual writer—neither of which is the core population of native-English-speaking undergraduates with whom most writing centers have traditionally worked. Writers who are multilingual or “ESL”¹ have received frequent attention (e.g. Blau and Hall; Bruce and Rafoth, Myers; Harris and Silva), and a handful of scholars have considered the challenges of tutoring graduate students (e.g. Pemberton; Powers; Gillespie; Snively). However, the research tells us little about how to work effectively with students who are both multilingual and graduate writers (hereafter, MGWs). In this essay, I place interviews with MGWs in conversation with a survey of writing center practices with MGW student populations. Based on the experiences of the MGWs I interviewed, I suggest that writing centers could better meet MGWs’ needs by adopting a more holistic approach to the writing process that is more disciplinarily informed and that resists creating false dichotomies between global and sentence-level concerns. I argue that for MGWs, sentence-level problems—even those that tutors might judge to be minor or moderate—may have serious implications for their professional advancement.

I conducted a three-part study in order to better understand MGWs’ needs in the context of current writing center practice. The study began with interviews with seven of the most frequent MGW users at my writing center,² a large Midwestern university that provides approximately 4,000 sessions each year. These single interviews of 15-30 minutes each were contextualized with an analysis of their tutors’ reports. Concurrently, I also conducted one-year case studies with five other MGWs. The study

concluded with a survey of other writing centers’ practices with MGWs. I focus here on intersections between the interviews and the survey results, as the interview findings suggested that the unusual positioning of MGW participants generated a unique combination of needs. While readers’ experiences may suggest that some findings are also true of graduate students or multilingual writers more generally, such claims are beyond the scope of this study, since all participants in the study were both multilingual and graduate writers. However, I believe these are important avenues for future research.

I begin with Lan, Kurie, and Bunpot,³ three of our center’s most frequent clients. In interviews, they highlight needs for higher (and more discipline-specific) levels of tutor expertise and intensive sentence-level assistance to improve style and build vocabulary. Lan, a Taiwanese PhD candidate in Communications, had worked with tutors regularly for over a year when I asked if she had a preferred tutor. Her reply speaks to the importance of sentence-level tutoring—especially vocabulary and style building—in an MGW session:

Last year, I worked [with] Jared. He is very good. [A]fter he left, I cannot find the one [tutor] that really fits my need, so I just pick whoever. For me, my problem is not grammar and spelling mistakes. I need someone to proofread for basic grammar, but I don’t have a lot of mistakes. [...] But I hope someone can really polish my paper—polish my ideas. As a PhD student, if you want to publish, you must make it as professional as an American’s. Jared can polish my language. After he revised my paper, I would just feel very confident.

When asked what she had learned from tutoring, she said, “I will go back to read another paper and see if I

can *borrow some kind of language*” (emphasis added). Although Lan may sound as though she is looking for a drive-by editor, these comments instead revealed that she, like many other MGW writers I have encountered, actually sought style tutoring from the writing center in addition to some error correction. She was learning the more sophisticated vocabulary that Jared had taught during previous sessions and then applying it to new papers so that she would be able to publish her work and be more competitive on the job market.

Bunpot, a Thai PhD candidate in Communications, articulates a need for tutors with discipline-specific knowledge and experience with specialized genres. When asked if the tutors were qualified to help her, she replied:

Yes. I had a bad experience with some students here...there were some undergraduate students who didn't really understand research. They didn't know what they were reading. That caused a lot of problems.... I used to work with someone here and he's too young. He would just read it and have no idea. Lately, I've been working with Ira and with Erin.⁴ For Ira, his English is strong and I have been working with him for a few years. Erin is good because she knows a lot about my area of study, so sometimes when I need special things, like writing a grant proposal, I go for Erin instead of Ira because she knows the contents of the proposal.

Bunpot identifies a need for help with a grant proposal, one of the specialized genres of her profession, and then she notes, “for a PhD student, we are normally pretty strong in what we are doing.” Bunpot thus also challenges undergraduate tutor authority. She does not accept that an undergraduate can help her with anything more than sentence-level problems. Moreover, she feels that experience confirmed her belief that only those who shared her disciplinary background provided useful feedback.

Kurie, an International Studies master's candidate from Laos, also identified a lack of tutors in her discipline as problematic. She complained:

A lot of times I end up explaining what I'm talking about. The [tutor] keep telling me that is

not her field, it's not her field and she couldn't understand what I'm trying to say and I was very stressed and I was upset with her. [A]t the end I told her 'I just wasted my time with you'. Time is very important to me and when I come here and my time isn't used well [I'm very upset].

Though these quotes might suggest otherwise, none of these women were considered “problem users” by the center's staff. They were viewed as strong writers and dedicated students who used the writing center appropriately. And while each writer was reasonably satisfied with the center—each came once or twice a week—they also identified unmet needs. First, each writer preferred tutors with discipline-specific knowledge and who had also done graduate work themselves; and second, they also sought help with sentence-level composing and error correction, concerns that have often been a point of contention in writing center work with multilingual students (see Harris and Silva; Linville; Blau and Hall; Myers).

Though some undergraduates might share these needs, writing is the primary means of professional advancement for Lan, Kurie, and Bunpot. They had invested a great deal of time and emotional energy to begin mastering the knowledge and discourse of their fields. Unlike some undergraduates, these women were highly committed to their fields and needed to become full members of them quickly. As graduate writers they are also more likely to have adopted the identity of the field as their own; therefore identity is at stake for these writers as they make their way through their programs, not just success or failure. Because these graduate students are also multilingual, the ongoing development of their language abilities may mean that they are even further from achieving their professional goals and that it is precisely the remaining issues of language acquisition that will prevent them from attaining those goals.

While these may be brief snapshots, the views of these participants were also voiced by other interviewees and by many other MGWs I have tutored. These snapshots are also consistent with Judith Powers' 1995 critique that her undergraduate tutors struggled to help graduate writers because they

did not understand the writers' fields or texts. Powers writes, "more often than we liked to admit, we were unable to assist thesis and dissertation writers in substantive ways because we could not understand their material or their disciplines well enough" (13).

With the voices of Lan, Bunpot, and Kurie in mind, I conducted a survey through the WCenter listserv to understand the field's current practices toward MGWs. I received 51 responses from centers that tutored multilingual graduate students. The survey asked:

- about the tutor training that the writing center provided on multilingual issues and on graduate issues;
- about self-perceptions of the help that students sought from the writing center;
- about effectiveness in providing that help; and
- about areas of special effectiveness or ineffectiveness in work with MGWs and with native-English speaking graduate writers (hereafter, NGWs).

The findings suggested that many of these centers operated from an assumption that no specialized knowledge or skill was necessary to tutor MGWs effectively. Fifty-six percent of respondents did not provide any training for tutorials with graduate students. This finding suggests that more than half of the respondents may not recognize meaningful differences between graduate and undergraduate writing. This provides a stark contrast to the responses of my participants, who believed the complexity of their work and of their rhetorical situations was substantially different from that of most undergraduate writing projects.

The picture for multilingual tutoring training was slightly more encouraging. Sixty-four percent of respondents provided tutors with designated training on multilingual issues. These findings reveal a stronger recognition (which the broader field seems to share) that multilingual writers face unique challenges and that tutors need additional training to tutor them effectively. Yet it is surprising that this figure was not higher given the struggles surrounding many writing

centers' work with multilingual writers and the scholarly/academic attention given to those struggles. Almost one-third (32%) of respondents who tutor multilingual writers still did not provide training on multilingual issues.

Since many centers had not provided designated training, I was particularly interested in the problems writing centers had encountered while tutoring graduate students (both MGWs and NGWs). As part of the same survey, respondents were also asked about the areas in which they had been particularly ineffective. More than one-third of responding writing centers did not identify any areas of ineffectiveness. Among the problems that were identified, nearly half were perennial issues such as lack of institutional support and inappropriate faculty and student expectations (see Figure 1).

What I found most interesting were problems of unmet needs and "other," which accounted for 34% of centers' self-perceptions of ineffectiveness. There, we see clear connections between writing centers' perceptions of ineffectiveness with graduate writers and the needs my participants identified. Specifically, writing centers identified problems with:

- language development and editing support, especially for multilingual students (42%)
- "inexperienced consultants" and "undergraduates uncomfortable working on dissertations" (21%)
- major project support (e.g. dissertations) (14%)
- research methodology support (8%)
- difficulty in hiring tutors from important disciplines (8%)
- reading support (7%)

All of these problems except "reading support" were also identified by my participants. Writing centers identified problems with tutors' lack of experience in general and in negotiating sentence-level issues with multilingual writers. Further, they identified tutors' particular lack of disciplinary knowledge, an issue that even training and experience may not resolve. One respondent wrote, "the undergraduate consultants

occasionally feel unprepared to work with grad students and dissertations.” As a former dissertation tutor myself, I find it surprising that they only *occasionally* feel unprepared.

The survey also asked respondents about self-perceptions of effectiveness, distinguishing between NGWs and MGWs. The questions addressed tutoring in development, genre, style, citation, research, editing, discipline-specific issues, advisor issues, and general help. The respondents had a fairly high assessment of the help they provided to NGWs, rating themselves

4.02 out of 5 across all categories on average and rating themselves “effective” or higher in seven out of ten categories where 1 = very ineffective and 5 = very effective. They gave themselves the lowest scores on tutoring of various discipline-related issues, specifically “negotiating other demands from an authority,” “discipline-specific problems,” and “research methodology” (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Areas of Ineffectiveness with Graduate Writers

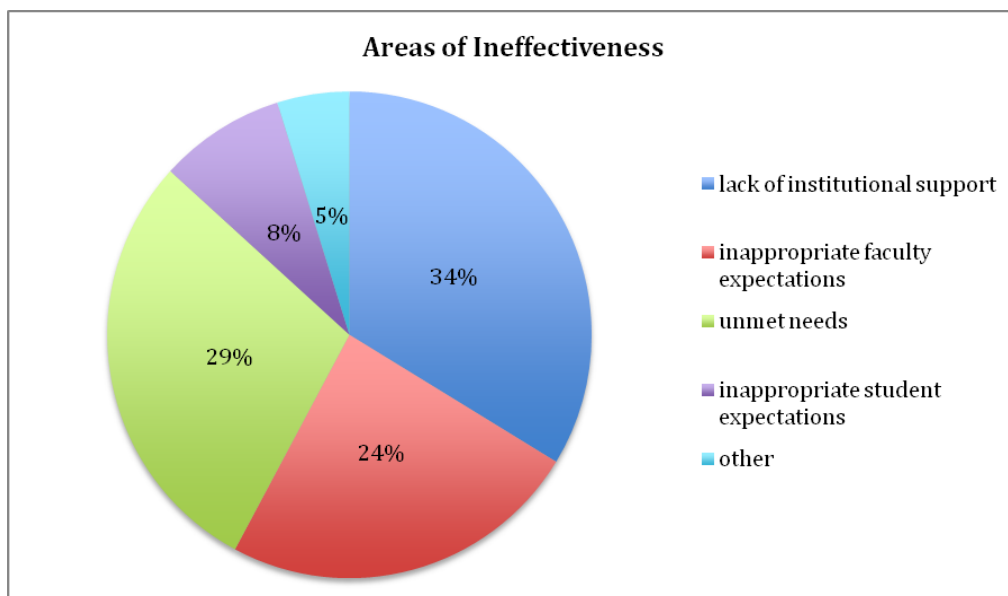


Figure 2: Perceptions of Effectiveness in NGW Tutoring

citation	4.57
general writing problems	4.41
genre	4.28
organization	4.16
editing/corrections	4.14
development	4.02
style	4.02
negotiating other demands from an authority	3.65
discipline-specific problems	3.61
research methodology	3.39

For MGWs, scores were lower, but centers still perceived themselves as very effective, giving themselves an average of 3.88 out of 5 across all categories. Again, discipline-related issues received the lowest scores, but in five out of ten categories, writing centers gave themselves scores of “effective” or higher; they never described their work as “ineffective” or “very ineffective.” They also did not identify problems with their sentence-level tutoring, even though this issue has a long history of being a problem area (see, for example, Bruce and Rafter; Blau and Hall; Myers) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Perceptions of Effectiveness in MGW Tutoring

citation	4.37
general writing problems	4.26
genre	4.09
organization	4.07
editing/corrections	4.02
style	3.88
development	3.77
negotiating other demands from an authority	3.63
discipline-specific problems	3.49
research methodology	3.23

The survey results imply that many respondents were satisfied with their work, as average scores for effectiveness in dealing with specific MGW challenges were quite high. Yet centers that did identify areas of ineffectiveness lend validity to the unmet needs that Lan, Bunpot, and Kurie voiced: needs for discipline-informed help, sentence-level help (style and correctness), and help with large writing projects.

My participants’ needs were also affirmed by centers’ responses to special areas of success. When asked to identify programs and ideas that had been especially effective, nearly every item corresponded to my participants’ stated needs for discipline-informed tutoring. These successes included:

- dissertation “Boot Camps” or tutoring;
- genre workshops (on literature reviews, grants, abstracts, prospectuses, etc.);
- citation workshops;

- graduate writing groups;
- discipline-specific dissertation workshops, tutors, and tutoring; and
- workshops on the GRE.

Other writing centers’ successes with graduate writers lend additional credibility to the needs that my participants identified. They also suggest possibilities for new or expanded services that are more disciplinarily focused.

Given these correspondences between MGWs’ needs, writing centers’ successes, and writing centers’ problems, how might writing centers work more productively with MGWs? What are the characteristics of a writing center designed to tutor MGWs effectively? The essential characteristic is *holistic*: this research suggests that writing centers must continue working to account for the unique characteristics and needs of student populations like MGWs. To do so, they need to explore ways of providing support for writers’ whole texts—from the first word to the complete paper in all of its disciplinary situatedness—and for the whole writing process, from research design to editing.

A holistic approach begins by recognizing the role of disciplinarity in MGWs’ texts. Some writers will certainly find generalist feedback useful at certain points in their writing processes, but a holistic approach must also include discipline-informed feedback to the writers who seek it. An explicit disciplinary approach is the guiding principle behind a recent pilot program that Paula Gillespie began, in which “two tutors now serve in their departments, working with their colleagues on writing in specialized genres for their disciplines” (2). Gillespie’s program reminds us that generalist feedback is valuable, but no panacea. For graduate writing, an insider’s perspective is often more valuable. Moreover, regardless of what we as practitioners think about the merits of generalist feedback, MGWs may have already determined that it is ineffective. Many MGWs whom I have encountered simply do not accept that undergraduates can provide adequate help. When centers downplay the value of discipline-informed tutoring or “disguise”

undergraduate tutors in some way, we risk damaging our ethos among MGWs.

A holistic approach also means giving consideration to research methodology, which is in essence an act of pre-writing for many graduate writing projects. While research methodology has traditionally been treated as outside the purview of writing center work, these findings encourage a reconsideration, particularly if institutions do not offer support elsewhere. Helen Snively offers a valuable example of a writing center that, recognizing the need, created a fully integrated graduate writing *and research* center. She recognized that many students who had been trained in research methodology still found undertaking a study on their own overwhelming. If the faculty advisor is unable or unwilling to provide a writer with in-depth support, then a tutor with a strong research background could offer valuable help. Writing centers could continue to take the same deferential stance towards faculty that most do now. For example, “You should talk to your advisor, but if I understand your project correctly, you may need to choose X instead of Y.” Research methodology may make us uncomfortable, but it is an inextricable part of much graduate writing.

My own institution has just opened a new Graduate Writing and Research center, inspired by the one Snively describes. We have been working to hire tutors from each of the colleges on campus. To address writers’ research needs, we have partnered with our subject-area librarians to provide students with general support, and we have also hired a doctoral candidate in psychology to provide quantitative methodology support. Our methodology tutor has been booked continuously since the new center opened, as have the rest of our tutors. Historically, approximately 50% of our clientele had been MGWs. We have not restricted graduate students from using what is now primarily our undergraduate writing center, and our new graduate center is at capacity; clearly we are tapping into unmet needs with these new services.

Developing a research component for the writing center may not be feasible for everyone, but writing centers that are unable to add an official research

mission to their work could still experiment with other means of supporting writers’ research processes. Partnering with librarians to help students find relevant databases and archives is a reasonable goal for many writing centers. Centers could also actively seek out graduate or professional tutors who had a deep understanding of research methodologies in addition to strong writing abilities. Some tutors already have strong methodology backgrounds; they simply need permission to work with the whole text and the whole writing process. Addressing MGWs’ research needs may be the stickiest of the problems identified here, but it is important enough to bear further study and experimentation.

Finally, taking a holistic approach to the writing of MGWs entails offering true support for sentence-level correction and style instead of discounting those issues as lower-order concerns. These are of concern to other student populations as well, but MGWs especially face discarded conference proposals, publication rejection, and roadblocks to dissertation completion. As Myers argues, “ignoring the sentence, which is a central feature of writing in the texts of both native and non-native speakers, is a disservice to both populations. In the case of ESL students, whose greatest and most consistent difficulties are baldly manifested in the boundaries of the sentence itself, it seems like an eerie kind of denial” (54). Further, the individual nature of the tutoring session makes it an ideal place to address a writer’s individual language-acquisition issues of vocabulary, style, usage, and correctness.

Even if a writer’s sentence-level mistakes do not create comprehension barriers for the reader, they may still represent legitimate global concerns. Correctness is tremendously important for MGWs, who are composing projects for fields where competition is high and correctness plays a larger gatekeeping role. Style is likewise a genuine concern for MGWs in disciplines like journalism or English where style is highly valued. Choices about sentence-level tutoring need to be made while also considering concerns about appropriation (Severino) and creating an unhealthy dependency, although such concerns may not always be justified. Tutors working with MGWs

need to take time to listen to writers and work with them to assess what is really at stake at the sentence level in a specific writing project. In many cases they will find that the sentence really is a lower-order concern; in others they will find that it is quite important to the text's success.

As university communities are increasingly coming to recognize, graduate writers need support too. They are under intense pressure to write with great skill in ways that their undergraduate experiences have not prepared them for. These pressures are multiplied for MGWs who are simultaneously working towards language mastery and whose understanding of genres and disciplinary conventions may be hampered by language comprehension challenges. The writing center can be a powerful resource for graduate writers who are making their way into their fields' discourse communities. But as the experiences of Lan, Bunpot, and Kurie suggest, providing that resource may require that writing centers conceive of "texts" more holistically, and move beyond undergraduate models of tutoring practice.

Notes

1. I use the term "multilingual" to describe the population historically labeled "ESL". The use of "multilingual" has spread within the field of second language writing as scholars attempt to represent students' diverse, complicated linguistic histories (much more than just English as a "second language") and to focus on those linguistic histories as resources instead of markers of deficiency.
2. I have both tutored at and directed this writing center, but I did neither during the period of research.
3. All names are pseudonyms.
4. Erin was a peer in her program, and Ira was a PhD candidate in rhetoric and composition who had completed significant course work in communications.

Works Cited

- Blau, Susan, and John Hall. "Guilt-Free Tutoring: Rethinking How We Tutor Non-Native-English-Speaking Students." *The Writing Center Journal* 23.1 (2002): 23-44. Print.
- Bruce, Shanti, and Ben Rafoth, eds. *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2004. Print.
- Gillespie, Paula. "Graduate Writing Consultants for PhD Programs Part 1: Using What We Know: Networking and Planning." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 32.2 (2007): 1-6. Print.
- Harris, Muriel, and Tony Silva. "Tutoring ESL Students: Issues and Options." *College Composition and Communication* 44.4 (1993): 525-37. Print.
- Myers, Sharon A. "Reassessing the 'Proofreading Trap': ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction." *The Writing Center Journal*. 24.1 (2003): 51-67. Print.
- Powers, Judith K. "Assisting the Graduate Thesis Writer through Faculty and Writing Center Collaboration." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 20.2 (1995): 13-16. Print.
- Severino, Carol. "Avoiding Appropriation." *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*. Ed. Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2004. 48-59. Print.
- Snively, Helen. "A Writing Center in a Graduate School of Education: Teachers as Tutors, and Still in the Middle." *(E)Merging Identities: Graduate Students in the Writing Center*. Ed. Melissa Nicolas. Fountainhead Press X Series for Professional Development. Ed. Allison D. Smith and Trixie G. Smith. Southlake: Fountainhead P, 2008. 89-102. Print.

RETHINKING OUR WORK WITH MULTILINGUAL WRITERS: THE ETHICS AND RESPONSIBILITY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE WRITING CENTER

Bobbi Olson
Grand View University
bolson@grandview.edu

Just shy of 9 AM on one of the last days of the semester, I raced into the writing center. Waiting for my first writer, I hastily checked my email where the subject line “SOS from June!” jumped out at me. June was a writer I knew well, and she was one of my former students in a writing center studio course for multilingual writers. Reading June’s email, her panic was apparent; she was extremely concerned with how a professor was grading her writing in a particular course. Though she had tried to discuss her concerns with her instructor, her account to me indicated this had been futile: “he said that this class is difficult and he cannot help me any more.”

In this moment of frustration and anxiety, June did what I’ve found many multilingual writers do: she came to the writing center. As an institutional site, the writing center often supports writers like June—both in terms of individualized feedback and attention to their writing, but also in providing a sense of community and belonging within the larger university (which can often feel strange and impersonal, particularly for multilingual writers). But in addition to offering writing instruction and comfort, the writing center has the potential to work towards changing the conditions that cause writers like June to feel displaced in the first place. Because it offers opportunities to converse individually with many writers and, often, faculty across the disciplines, the writing center is in a prime position—as John Trimbur and Bruce Horner argue about the field of composition more broadly—to “... provide crucial opportunities for rethinking writing in the academy and elsewhere: [to provide] spaces and times for students and [tutors] both to rethink what academic work might mean and be” (621).

June and I met later in the day, and she talked about how she knew she couldn’t do what the instructor expected—in this case, produce native-English-speaker-like sentences, with no trace of her accent—but she wondered what then she *could* do. Knowing she had worked to the extent of her abilities and yet extremely worried about her grade in the course and its impact on her GPA, June felt at a loss. In our conversation, it became clear that the odds were not in June’s favor (*Hunger Games*). The

expectations placed upon her were unattainable² given her status as a language learner, and even if she was willing to sacrifice herself in order to subscribe to others’ “standards,” she could not possibly succeed in the manner for which she hoped.

The writing center is a place for the sponsorship of student writers, yet I was disinclined in this moment to play the role of sponsor for June. I knew the rules to the game, and I could give them to June—that is, working together, we could “clean up” her paper so that no trace of her status as a non-native-English speaker remained, which is exactly what her instructor wanted and expected. But the costs of doing so are ones I don’t think we should take lightly. I’m not alone.

Over the last decade or so, momentum has risen for U.S. universities (particularly composition teachers) to adopt a broader, more inclusive view of multilingual writers and their writing. Horner and Trimbur, for instance, have argued against the “tacit language policy of unidirectional English monolingualism” prevalent in composition classrooms throughout the U.S. (594). In 2012, Steven Bailey extended this idea to the writing center context specifically and argues that writing centers need to push back against the “institutional expectation that writing centers should ‘fix’ the English of international ESL students” (1). Rather, Bailey argues—and I agree—we can take a “leadership role” in the writing center when we reconsider and adopt “a more multicultural and multilingual worldview” in our work with multilingual writers (1).

This move not only prompts the academy to be a more inclusive place of *all* of its students, but also, operating from a multilingual worldview makes writing centers (and the institutions in which they operate) more ethical places. At my previous large midwestern university, roughly half of the students who visit the writing center are multilingual writers—both national and international. Judging from my conversations with other writing center practitioners, as well as the frequency in which multilingual writers are addressed in the field’s scholarly conversations via publications and conference presentations, many of us in writing center studies are actively invested in working with this

frequent population of writers and are concerned about doing this work well.

Yet, we need to pay careful attention to what it *means* to do this work well. The experiences we have as a result of our frequent work with multilingual writers and the writing center's position as a point of access in U.S. universities work together to create a critical responsibility for us to consider and re-consider not only what we do and how, but also why, toward what ends, and for whose benefit. We bear, in other words, a critical responsibility for acknowledging the ethical dimensions of our work, particularly given the historical functions writing centers have been made to serve within institutions of higher education as gatekeepers of access and conservators of particular conceptions of academic Englishes. And perhaps even more importantly, we need to consider the ways in which our own privileges and institutional positioning make us susceptible to perpetuating the unequal power distributions in which multilingual writers are frequently embedded. As Bailey reminds us, we need to attend to the ways in which "we might be complicit in the maintenance of monocultural and monolingual power structures" in the writing center (1).

If we look at previous scholarship in writing center studies (see Bailey for a recent review of tutor handbooks, for instance), we find that often, the focus is on mainstreaming multilingual writers and their texts. In fact, "As they presently operate, writing centers are more often normalizing agents, performing the institutional function of erasing differences" (Grimm xvii). It seems we proceed as if the work of "erasing differences" in multilingual writers' texts, for instance, is value free. The opposite is true. Since "[l]anguage and culture are inextricably interwoven, [...] asking for the use of a different language variety also means donning the cloak of another culture" (Grill 361). While this may be exactly what a multilingual writer wants to do, I think it is a dangerous assumption—yet it is an assumption we nonetheless act upon when we operate under the idea that we must "manage [...] differences, to bring them under control, to make students with differences sound as mainstream as possible" (Grimm xii). If we heed Grimm's warning and work against automatically aiming to mainstream "difference," we instead view difference as a resource to draw from, rather than something that must be eradicated; we treat multilingual writers and our conversations with them not as a to-do list of finding and "correcting" all the "mistakes" that a native-English-speaker's text would not contain, but instead as an opportunity to discuss the rhetorical choices multilingual writers make and the possible consequences of these choices.

It's easy to see, however, how the writing center becomes complicit in functioning as the "gatekeeper of academic literacy" (Geller et al.). Writing center practitioners often feel an institutional pressure to participate in the effort to mainstream "different" sounding/looking texts. Also, we often *feel* a sense of immediacy from sitting next to writers who radiate a sense of distress (as June's email did); in these moments, we want to allay that distress. Yet writing center practitioners' worry about helping multilingual writers succeed in the university as it currently exists may have caused writing center studies to focus too much on the needs of the institution at the expense of the needs of multilingual writers—the individuals and communities with whom we actually work and to whom we are accountable. In providing tips and strategies for helping multilingual writers meet instructors' (monolingual) expectations, for instance, we have failed to help multilingual writers thrive as individuals and writers with agency.

Instead, because of the conflation between institutional expectations and the learning needs of multilingual writers, we have been drawn into the institutional practice of constructing multilingual students as "problems" because of the ways in which they interrupt efficiencies valued within university systems. Harry Denny writes, for instance, that within writing center scholarship and conversations about multilingual writers, there is an "Othering, either explicit or lurking just under the surface. *They* are a problem that requires solving, an irritant and frustration that resists resolution" (119). By constructing multilingual writers as "problems to fix" (Denny 122), we do not acknowledge the realities of our positions as language teachers, nor do we fully attend to the degree to which "language teaching is not a neutral practice but a highly political one" (Norton 7).

Taking up the calls in writing center scholarship to rethink tutor education—particularly in relation to our work with multilingual writers (see Bailey, Blau and Hall, Bokser, Denny, Grimm, Myers, and Nakamaru for examples)—and applying scholarship from composition and TESOL helps us do pedagogical work more effectively, and also to be more politically and ethically responsible in the writing center. Adopting a "translingual approach," for instance, means we "see difference in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening" (Horner et al. 303). Enacting this requires a rethinking of our prevailing habit of equating "differences" in language use with "error." We also need to reexamine what we think we know

about multilingual writers and how they use language. Multilingual writers do not have separate compartments for the various languages and discourses they know and use, but rather move between and draw from these languages and discourses. We need to recognize the ways in which multilingual writers are “multicompetent language users,” not “failed native [English] speakers” (Liu 390). A. Suresh Canagarajah suggests embracing these ideas requires the shifts in mindsets seen in Figure 13.

Applying Canagarajah’s conception of a multilingual orientation in the writing center becomes not only a more pedagogically sound approach in that it accounts more fully for how multilingual writers process and compose texts, but it is also a more ethical approach in that it positions multilingual writers as agents of their own learning. Working from within this framework, we recognize that our job as writing center practitioners is not about eliminating any “slips” where differences arise, but instead helping multilingual writers draw from their different discourses and make active decisions about utilizing various features from them⁴. When we adopt a multilingual orientation, we view writers as making distinct choices based on their multilingual status, rather than making “mistakes” because of their multilingual status. This multilingual approach also encourages writers to interlace features of their discourses—not to use one in one situation and another in a different circumstance, but instead, to draw from all discourses at any given time in order to be more “rhetorically creative” (Canagarajah

“Rhetoric” 175). It becomes our job to help multilingual writers do this well.

By having conversations about multiple discourses, tutors and multilingual writers can focus on “communicative strategies—i.e., creative ways to negotiate the norms relevant in diverse contexts” as opposed to focusing on “grammatical rules in a normative and abstract way” (Canagarajah “Place” 593). (The latter approach is often in service of the institution and at the expense of multilingual writers’ identities.) In addition to how these conversations acknowledge the reality of the fluidity of language⁵, these conversations also provide a foundation for a more thorough understanding of how multilingual writers’ home discourses and American academic discourses intersect and diverge from each other. Talking about the rhetorical moves a multilingual writer might make, based on her home language and/or other discourses of which she is a part, in connection to the conventions of the dominant discourse of the academy promotes multilingual writers becoming more fully informed users of *all* of these discourses. Being “proficient in dominant and nondominant Englishes” means “[multilingual writers] are no longer at the mercy of someone else’s definition of English. They can enjoy their language abilities and use those skills to make their own choices” (Grill 366). In short, we foster multilingual writers’ ability to make decisions rather than be circumscribed by others’ decisions.

Figure 1

*Shifts in Rhetorical Perspectives—***Monolingual Orientation**

focus on language/culture
 language = uniform discourse/genre
 repertoire of the language/culture
 texts as homogenous
 writer as passive
 writer as linguistically/culturally conditioned
 writer as coming with uniform identities

Multilingual Orientation

focus on rhetorical context
 language = multiple discourses/genres
 repertoire of the writer
 texts as hybrid
 writer as agentive
 writer as rhetorically creative
 writer as constructing multiple identities

*Pedagogical Implications (what tutors do/see)—***Monolingual Orientation**

deficiency/errors
 focus on rules/conventions
 texts as transparent/objective
 focus on text construction
 written discourse as normative
 writing as constitutive
 texts as static/discrete
 texts as context-dependent
 compartmentalization of literacy traditions
 L₁ or C₁ as a problem
 orality as a hindrance

Multilingual Orientation

choices/options
 focus on strategies
 texts as representational
 focus on rhetorical negotiation
 written discourse as changing
 writing as performative
 texts as fluid
 texts as context-transforming
 accommodation of literacy traditions
 L₁ or C₁ as a resource
 orality as an advantage (“Rhetoric” 175)

In doing this work, we don't want to restrict access for multilingual writers: it's true that we need to help "students who come from diverse linguistic backgrounds" to "become familiar with [the dominant discourse practices in U.S. academic contexts] along with their complexity and varied nature" (Matsuda 196). To do this type of work necessarily means discussing the conventions of American academic Englishes within writing center sessions, such as talking about grammatical "correctness" (including what are traditionally regarded as patterns of "error," but also things like idiomatic word choice). We also need to have conversations about things like the organizational structures American instructors generally expect in student essays. Yet if the discussions stop here, writing center practitioners miss the opportunity to talk with multilingual writers about—and to push against—the social parameters of a language use that multilingual writers feel the repercussions of violating, but which are seldom named.

Thinking of multilingual writers as "rhetorically creative" means that a tutor's job is no longer just about pointing out textual "divergences" from a singular notion of American academic English and then instructing a multilingual writer on how to "fix" that "mistake." A tutor's job rather becomes an effort to engage more consciously with multilingual writers in ways that attend to the realities of the intersections between language, power, and identity, while at the same time conversing with multilingual writers about the fluidity of language. Although we have always already been doing this work, we have not made these ideas explicit. That is, as language teachers, the politics of our work has always been present; we just haven't always acknowledged this fact. What, then, does taking up these ideas of translanguaging, code meshing, multilingual orientation, etc. actually look like in practice? Perhaps most importantly, a more concentrated effort to engage in what Norman Fairclough calls "metalanguage, a language for talking about language" (200) creates a more equitable distribution of power and agency between the multilingual writer and writing center tutor. Discussing with multilingual writers the various reasons behind a question or suggestion about language use—whether it be a grammatical rule or a discussion of the reasons informing the typical American academic essay styles and forms—allows for multilingual writers to make connections between the use of American academic Englishes and the other discourse communities of which they are a part. It also places them at the helm of control. It's important, too, that this metalanguage

be held alongside a conversation that acknowledges that no one discourse is inherently superior, otherwise we go on privileging monolingual, native-English speakers and a discourse implemented to provide advantages for those who fall in that category (despite the reality that the current university populations no longer fits neatly within these parameters).

Although sometimes it may be difficult to determine whether a writer made a choice that deviates from a discursive norm or if she made an unintentional mistake as she develops a more full command of a discourse, the great advantage of our work in the writing center is that it is always possible (and necessary, I would argue) to simply ask the writer. It is possible to move beyond instructing the writer how to "correct" the "difference." If a textual variation is the result of a conscious choice, the tutor can ask why the writer made that choice and explain the possible readings of that decision. If a writer has, in fact, made a mistake (for example, the writer wasn't aware of the connotation of a word), the tutor can talk with the writer about that decision so that the writer has an opportunity to learn that language feature. Either way, talk such as this shifts away from an approach that would have the tutor simply tell the multilingual writer how to "correct" her text. This talk also moves away from positioning the multilingual writer as a passive recipient of knowledge.

An approach based on these principles values the multiple discourse knowledge multilingual writers bring with them and helps multilingual writers make connections across discourses. A focus on the fluid nature of "standard" language means multilingual writers not only learn the dominant discourses valued in the U.S. academy, but also come to understand that there are rhetorical moves available to be made by writers to resist or subvert that dominance. Canagarajah proposes that teachers of multilingual writers, in our case tutors, teach "students strategies for rhetorical negotiation so that they can modify, resist, or reorient to the rules in a manner favorable to them" ("Rhetoric" 176). While some may argue that it is not our job to push agendas, I want to point out that we already are when working with multilingual writers in ways that mainstream their texts: this supports and fuels monolingual expectations⁶.

Teaching writers to engage with dominant conventions does not mean, however, teaching them to ignore them. It is naive to argue and advise, for instance, that multilingual writers will experience no meaningful consequences for failing to demonstrate competency in these conventions. But, like Canagarajah and others who believe in the importance

of valuing alternative discourses, world Englishes, code meshing, and other iterations of a more inclusive language policy, I believe it is not enough to simply work with multilingual writers in a way that teaches them how to adopt the dominant discourse of American academic English. Instead, I agree that “we should make students sensitive to the dominant conventions in each rhetorical context,” and “we must also teach them to critically engage with them” (Canagarajah “Rhetoric” 177). In the writing center context, this means having ongoing conversations with tutors and multilingual writers about what it means to erase difference in writing and whose interests doing so serves. By being both transparent and translanguaging, we can help writers recognize and enact their own agency, which is one of the most empowering things we can do in our work with writers.

Thinking about the ethical dimensions of working with multilingual writers becomes increasingly essential, as student populations of multilingual writers in American universities grow. But reconceiving what constitutes “error” and re-conceptualizing writing center practices does not only benefit multilingual writers and others commonly regarded as “diverse.” Examining how writing center practitioners can support student writers in their academic writing while at the same time paying attention to student writers’ lived experiences and the nuances of language teaching benefits *all* student writers. *All* student writers deserve to be heard on their own terms as they try to negotiate and understand the expectations placed on them from without. Although we cannot change the institution overnight, we can help writers exert agency. In doing so, we contribute to developing a world that is more responsive and reflective of its increasingly globalized population.

Notes

¹ Pseudonym

² Carol Severino discloses that it can take “up to seven years” for someone learning/using a second language to write and read at the academic level expected in the university (IV.2.3).

³ When using these tables in tutor education, we discuss what it means to operate from a monolingual orientation as most universities—and by extension, many writing centers—presently do, and how that positions us and multilingual writers (and whether we’re comfortable with that). Then we talk about what embracing a multilingual orientation might look like in practice by examining a text produced by a multilingual writer and role-playing what a tutor’s conversation might sound like when operating from within this framework.

⁴ Vershawn Ashanti Young and Aja Y. Martinez describe this move in this way: “teaching English prescriptively

(“These are rules from various language systems; learn to follow them!”) is replaced with models of instruction for teaching English descriptively (“These are the rules from various language systems; learn to combine them effectively”)” (xxi).

⁵ “Our language, all language, is always changing” (Grill 363).

⁶ I want to be careful here, because I also do not advocate for *demanding* students subvert the dominant discourse. I believe we can/should talk about this possibility, but it is ultimately the writer’s decision for how to use her language.

Works Cited

- Bailey, Steven. “Tutor Handbooks: Heuristic Texts for Negotiating Difference in a Globalized World.” *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 9.2 (2012): 1-8. Web. <http://praxis.uwc.utexas.edu/index.php/praxis/article/view/50/html>.
- Blau, Susan, and John Hall. “Guilt-Free Tutoring: Rethinking How We Tutor Non-Native-English-Speaking Students.” *The Writing Center Journal* 23.1 (Fall/Winter 2002): 23-44. Print.
- Bokser, Julie A. “Pedagogies of Belonging: Listening to Students and Peers.” *The Writing Center Journal* 25.1 (2005): 43-60. Print.
- Canagarajah, A. Suresh. “The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued.” *College Composition and Communication* 54.4 (June 2006): 586-619. Print.
- . “A Rhetoric of Shuttling Between Languages.” *Cross Language Relations in Composition*. Eds. Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, and Paul Kei Matsuda. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2010. 158-179. Print.
- Denny, Harry C. *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-To-One Mentoring*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2010. Print.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 2nd ed. Harlow, England: Longman, 2001. Print.
- Geller, Anne Ellen, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth H. Boquet. *The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2007. Print.
- Grill, Jennifer. “Whose English Counts? Native Speakers as English Language Learners.” *TESOL Journal* 1.3 (September 2010): 358-367. Print.
- Grimm, Nancy Maloney. *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1999. Print.
- Horner, Bruce, and John Trimbur. “English Only and U.S. College Composition.” *College Composition and Communication* 53.4 (June 2002): 594-630. Print.
- Horner, Bruce, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur. “Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach.” *College English* 73.3 (January 2011): 303-321. Print.
- Liu, Pei-Hsun Emma. “A Journey of Empowerment: What Does Better English Mean to Me?” *TESOL Journal* 1.3 (September 2010): 389-391. Web.

- Lu, Min-Zhan. "Living-English Work." *Cross-Language Relations in Composition*. Eds. Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, and Paul Kei Matsuda. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2010. 42-56. Print.
- Matsuda, Paul Kei. "Alternative Discourses: A Synthesis." *ALT DIS: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*. Eds. Christopher Schroeder, Helen Fox, and Patricia Bizzell. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2002. 191-196. Print.
- Myers, Sharon. "Reassessing the 'Proofreading Trap': ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction." *The Writing Center Journal* 24.1 (Fall/Winter 2003): 51-70. Print.
- Nakamaru, Sarah. "Theory In/To Practice: A Tale of Two Multilingual Writers: A Case-Study Approach to Tutor Education." *The Writing Center Journal* 30.2 (2010): 100-123.
- Norton, Bonny. *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2000. Print.
- Severino, Carol. "Serving ESL Students." *The Writing Center Resource Manual*. Ed. Bobbie Bayliss Silk. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2003. Web.
- Young, Vershawn Ashanti, and Aja Y. Martinez. "Introduction: Code-Meshing as World English." *Code-Meshing as World English*. Eds. Vershawn Ashanti Young and Aja Y Martinez. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2011. xix-xxxi. Print.

THE IDEA OF A WRITING CENTER IN ASIAN COUNTRIES: A PRELIMINARY SEARCH OF MODELS IN TAIWAN

Tzu-Shan Chang

Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages, Taiwan

tzushanchang@gmail.com

Writing centers in the U.S. are experiencing more diverse student populations than ever before. The increase in diversity affects the ways that centers function, in areas such as training programs, mentorships, tutoring strategies, and one-on-one interactions with students. Instead of closely examining the model of writing center adopted in the U.S., this paper investigates those centers located in Asian countries where most international students in American universities come from, in order to provide a different perspective for understanding the operation of writing centers in L2 contexts. Such a perspective helps index the methods for adjusting to a more diversified writing center, be it in the U.S. or in an L2 country, for cultivating better writers through the cooperation of L1 and L2 writing centers.

This paper starts by briefly reviewing the history of writing centers in the U.S. and discussing the effects that American writing centers have on Asian countries' higher education systems. The literature review on Asian writing centers presents the differences and similarities between American and non-American writing centers in terms of the services centers offer, the roles tutors play, and the format of one-on-one interactions. This overview of the status of the Asian writing centers is followed by a close-look at the centers at Taiwan's six traditional public universities.¹ Specifically focusing on the educational context of writing centers in Taiwan, the paper reviews these centers' development. Based on extensive web research, along with phone interviews on the status of the writing centers, these centers seem to function differently than U.S. counterparts. The Taiwanese writing centers are classified into three models according to the following criteria: purpose of founding, target students, target tutors, services offered, and centers' affiliation.

Introduction

The concept of the writing center comes mainly from the U.S. The first "writing lab," the former term used for writing centers, was established in the 1930s, and since that time, "writing labs" have experienced several transformations, from "writing clinics" to the "writing centers" of today. The mission of the writing center is widely believed to be helping students

become better writers rather than producing better papers (North). In the 1930s and 1940s, the initial purpose of establishing the writing center was to offer students extra writing instruction. Yet owing to social changes, usually affected by national government policy, American writing centers are now expected to solve a nation-wide problem—the literacy crisis—caused by "increasing enrollment, larger minority populations, and declining literacy skills" since the 1970s (Boquet 471). Associated with the image of "fixing" nation-wide problems, the writing center has been on the front lines of solving the literacy crisis, encountering many different kinds of students who are labeled as social problems and who do not belong to the "norm" (Carino, Waller, Arkin, Boquet, Yahner and Murdick). The writing center is expected by the government to increase the effectiveness of the educational system.

The use of writing centers as an effective solution to the national literacy problem in the U.S. leads these centers to become major resources for countries outside the U.S., and the successful image the centers present has prompted many educational institutions, domestic and international alike, to develop a writing center for their best institutional purposes (Mullin 1). Yet very limited research has been conducted about Asian writing centers, and Taiwanese writing centers are no exception. This paper starts by analyzing the literature on Asian writing centers, and then specifically focuses on Taiwanese writing centers in hopes of investigating the similarities and differences between writing centers in Taiwan and in the U.S. The present study indicates that one of the big differences between Taiwanese and U.S. writing centers is that faculty members commonly play the tutor's role in some Taiwanese centers. Secondly, free-standing centers in Taiwan offer bilingual writing assistance, which is rarely seen in the U.S.

Asian Writing Centers

The image U.S. writing centers have created regarding effective writing support for individual students has inspired similar approaches in Asian higher education. In the Asian educational context, possible factors invite the writing center approach, such as larger class size, limited instruction in

classroom settings, limited attention to each individual student, and students' different levels of English proficiency (Tan, Hayes, Johnston, Johnston et al.). Nevertheless, because interests in establishing writing centers outside North America did not emerge until the late 1990s or early 2000s, a limited context of the Asian and European writing centers as well as the limited number and scope of these centers is observed. As she discusses the challenges of innovating the writing center outside the U.S. in both her article and books published in 2010, Be Hoon Tan points out that the application of writing centers is relatively new in most Asian countries, and very little published material focuses on Asian writing centers.

By exploring Asian and European writing centers, Tan draws several generalizations from her comparison of those writing centers located within the United States and non-U.S. writing centers, and those generalizations help faculty members who are interested in creating their own institutional writing centers. For writing centers in an L2 context, certain accommodations seem to be needed—in her article, Tan specifically addresses adaptation to local needs and context.

- The first difference that Tan discovers is that “the non-North American OWLs (online writing labs) are either monolingual (in English or the native language), bilingual, or multilingual, while the North American OWLs are 100% monolingual and English” (Tan 404). The centers situated in European countries are usually bilingual or multilingual. The bilingual and multilingual services that L2 writing centers provide also seem to demonstrate that “the writing center approach has been used to teach writing in other languages” (Tan 405).
- The second difference is that the Asian and European writing centers seem to use faculty members, rather than peers, as tutors.
- Third, Tan points out the absence of email and real time tutoring in Asian and European writing centers.
- Fourth, in spite of creating resources that adapt to local students' learning needs, the supporting writing sources provided on the centers' websites are all directly from links to U.S. writing centers' websites, such as the Purdue Online Writing Lab.

Apart from the differences, according to Tan, some similarities of writing center operation also exist between North American and non-American writing

centers.

- First, both types of centers operate under a no-proofreading policy.
- Second, similar to North American writing centers, most of the non-North American writing centers in Tan's study provide “face-to-face individual tutoring, themed workshops, and a rich collection of online support materials” (Tan 405).
- Third, most of the non-U.S. writing centers focus on assistance for academic writing, but a number of them offer services that are not limited to writing support, but also include “oral presentation, reading and writing for career purposes” (Tan 405).

Although Tan's article offers an overview of how non-U.S. writing centers function, Tan's research subjects do not include the centers operating in Japan. Japan seems to be the place where most scholarly discussion about writing centers takes place in Asian countries. The writing centers symposium in Asia has become an annual event since the University of Tokyo held the first symposium on writing centers February of 2009 (website of the International Writing Center Association).

Focusing on four writing centers in Japan, Johnston et al. examine the similarities and differences in the ways that the four writing centers function, in order for other Japanese universities to understand the shape of the writing centers. The target writing centers in their study are at Osaka Jogakuin College, Sophia University, University of Tokyo, Komaba Campus, and Waseda University (“*Writing Centers in Japan*”). Although Johnston et al. conclude that there is no specific Japanese model, some generalizations from their study are still evident.

- First, the writing center at Waseda University supports writing in both Japanese and English.
- Second, the Japanese writing centers in their study not only offer writing support but also assist students in preparing for the tests that will be required for application to schools abroad. Johnston et al. state, “it is difficult for us to limit ourselves to the term ‘Writing Center.’ The students have needs in writing, reading, giving oral presentations, applying for study abroad, and help with tests[,] such as TOEFL and TOEIC” (“*Writing Centers in Japan*”) They conclude that they are really “Writing and Learning Centers that support students in their learning and improvement of writing and other skills” (Johnston et al., “*Writing Centers in Japan and Asia*,” “*Writing*

Centers in Japan”).

- In some of the writing centers, faculty members play the role of tutor.

The last two features seem to be the significant indicators for a writing center situated in countries (especially Asian ones) where English is used as a second/foreign language. In 2009, in a forum concerning writing centers and tutoring in Japan and Asia, the Japanese Associations for Language Teaching (JALT) presented a common idea for the function of the writing centers at Japanese universities: “all [the Japanese writing centers] are committed to not just helping students produce a better paper, but to support student learning” (Johnston et al., “*Writing Centers in Japan and Asia*”). That is to say, in Japanese writing centers, the goal of supporting students’ general learning seems to take precedence over that of assisting students with their writing. “Writing centers” in L2 contexts are no longer the writing centers where improving students’ academic writing ability is the focus; rather, L2 writing centers may better meet non-native English speaking students’ needs when they help students learn not only writing, but also other language skills.

Additionally, faculty members serve as tutors in most Japanese writing centers. Faculty members playing the tutor’s role is the second indicator of non-American writing centers, and this common phenomenon seems to challenge the approach of peer tutoring. As the co-director of the writing center at Tokyo International University, George Hays discusses some of the tutees’ perceptions in his writing center concerning the peer tutoring approach, and the overall results of his questionnaires indicate that students agree that peer tutoring is good because they feel more relaxed and helped when they interact with their peer tutors. One of his research participants said that he felt less intimidated in collaboration with his peer tutors than with his professors (595). However, Hays also finds that there are some instances when tutees become irritated by their peer tutors (for example when they cannot have every grammar mistake corrected – especially when it comes to article usage). Interestingly, although the majority of his research participants understand the concept of peer tutoring, a few of them still feel irritated by the refusal of their tutors to passively correct grammar mistakes (595). Hays concludes that more in-depth research on how effective peer education can be needs to be carried out (595).

While most of the articles published regarding Japanese writing centers discuss the configuration of an L2 writing center model suitable for Japan, Adam Turner argues that the effects that social-cultural

background brings to the shape of Asian writing centers should not be underestimated.

Adam Turner, the director of the writing center at Hanyang University, Korea, discusses the dissonance that has been created by the application of the North American writing center model in Korea. Adapting the U.S. writing center model to local needs and culture results in a different type of writing center. The English Writing Center, which is part of the Hanyang Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), was established in 2003 as a result of a proposal Turner made. He points out that his clients seem to be affected by the deep-seated cultural concept that “age differences of even a year must be respected;” this cultural concept might increase the difficulty in implementing the peer model of interaction in Korea (“*Re-engineering*”). For instance, the centers placed in Hanyang and Seoul National Universities, which serve undergraduate students, do not use a peer-tutoring model.

As the only native English-speaking faculty member in the department of English, Turner “does the editing and conferencing alone” (“*Re-engineering*”). The target tutees are both faculty and science major students, and most of them “are not attending any classes in English or studying English in a formal program” (“*Re-engineering*”). Since his target tutees seem to be mainly from the field of science, the writing support his tutees need the most is “journal article revisions based on reviewers’ comments,” “research writing for publication purpose,” and “professional lab reports” rather than writing assigned in class (“*Re-engineering*”). In the conferencing process, his clients submit their papers to him via email and have to offer a sample article from the journals in which they wish to publish. With the MS Word editing function, Turner will first gain an understanding of the requirements and structure of the sample article that his students attach to the email, and then he will send the edited paper with his suggestions for revision before their face-to-face sessions start.

Additionally, Turner discovers that his students prefer a more directive approach rather than a non-directive approach. Based on his experiences working in this writing center, he finds it more appropriate to play the role of teacher as facilitator rather than peer as facilitator. Regarding the process of giving comments on his clients’ writing, Turner takes an approach that is between “editing and conferencing” in order to meet the needs of students’ publication goals (“*Re-engineering*”). He does not proofread and correct all grammar mistakes, but he does “flag sentences that are not understandable for revision and may correct some important errors that interfere with

communication” (“*Re-engineering*”). Working in the L2 writing center, Turner expresses that he has found the combination of online and face-to-face feedback “to be the most effective and flexible for writing center work,” and he also adds a note that the traditional way of separating online and face-to-face writing center service may need to be reexamined (“*Re-engineering*”). In short, the tutoring approach that he has acquired from the U.S. writing center model has been adapted to his L2 working environment: he is more directive in his tutoring approach.

A Close Look at Taiwan’s Writing Centers

Though the establishment of writing centers began in the 1930s, the study of this field only started to receive academic recognition in the 1970s. In this regard, writing center work is a fairly young field in the U.S., as is its influence on the development of the contemporary writing centers in Asian countries from which the majority of tutees come. Researchers, such as Carol Severino, Jessica Williams, Shanti Bruce (ESL Writers), Ben Rafoth, Tony Silva, and Ilona Leki, have targeted their research at strategies for effectively tutoring the increasing number of international students as tutees in writing centers in the late 1990s and early 21st century. Unlike the emergent study in the 1990s, which focused on the awareness of the ESL/EFL learners’ cultural or linguistic differences, these researchers, and others doing related work, examined ESL issues in a broader and more in-depth analysis, both decoding NNES learners’ English acquisition and writing process as well as investigating their cognitive and second language development. Since the 1990s, researchers focusing on ESL issues have seemed to decode their target research participants in the U.S. by trying to identify effective tutoring approaches for enhancing NNES learners’ writing competence; however, researchers seldom investigate the challenges and benefits the application of the writing center approach brings to L2 contexts, where enhancing NNES learners’ writing competence is also the goal. If both L1 and L2 writing centers share the same goal of improving NNES learners’ writing competence, investigating writing centers located in L2 countries, such as Asian ones, is worthwhile. Understanding the operation of L2 writing centers and their adaptations to each individual country also helps indicate the possibility for writing centers in the U.S. and Asian countries, such as Taiwan, to work together to create a collaboratively international writing center community.

As discussed earlier, very little published material focuses on Asian writing centers, including writing centers in Taiwan. Thus far, only one conference

presentation regarding Taiwan writing center work has been found, in the 2010 International Writing Center Association-National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (IWCA-NCPTW) Joint Conference. The two presenters, Thomas Truesdell and Jui-Chuan Chang, examine the efforts to start an EFL writing center at National Cheng Chi University. They also discuss “the challenges of introducing collaborative, peer-based learning strategies to both students and administrators who are accustomed to a hierarchical passive learning environment” (IWCA program).

Through email communication, both presenters provided the handouts that they used for their presentation. From the handouts (personal communication, January 30, 2012), Chang shared his study on students’ needs and comments about the center as well as tutors’ comments on their writing center sessions. Most students in that university need assistance on statements of purpose (SOPs), resumes, and autobiographies for job or graduate school applications. The second greatest support students need is guidance to help them prepare for standardized tests, such as the TOEFL and GRE. Interestingly, the interview data from their study indicates that students rarely ask for tutors’ assistance with their essay and paper writing. For students in Chang’s writing center, writing in English seems to be a means to pass a test, receive a degree, a certificate, a job, or even a type of acknowledgment of being socially successful (Chang’s handouts). Chang’s results also suggest that students expect tutors to be a walking dictionary—knowing every word in English and everything related to English. Tutors are expected to answer tutees’ questions right away, and the tutoring sessions are perceived as the one-time thing. In other words, once students have completed their SOPs or resumes, they do not feel the need to come to the center anymore (Chang’s handouts). Also, students highly praise tutors who show them the mechanics and conventions of writing in English, such as sentence structure, thesis, organization, and coherence. Yet their attitude toward the use of the center seems not to echo with the composition theory prevalent in the U.S.: writing is a recursive process, and the one-time writing center session cannot fix all learners’ writing problems. Students’ reluctance to visit the centers multiple times corresponds to tutors’ comments that “most students do not like the idea of rewriting and revising; they think changing a few words or rewriting a few sentences is good enough” (Chang’s handouts). Tutors feel frustrated when their tutees think one session can solve all of their writing problems, but at the same time, tutors also feel their tutoring competence is not good enough to deal with large-scale, global problems

in their tutees' writing, and thus more training on effective strategies for tutors is necessary (Chang's handouts).

Chang further points out the challenges that his writing center has to face. First, the tight budget becomes a main reason for mistreating tutors as student workers. In addition to tutoring students, tutors have to take on administrative work, such as "designing and drawing posters for promoting the services of the Writing Center on campus" (Chang's work notes). This trivial administrative work sometimes distracts tutors' attention from their own tutoring sessions. Second, with an unclear idea of the writing center work, tutors seem to have difficulty maintaining the quality of their sessions. The only six hours of training tutors receive before they officially start their sessions seems not to be enough. Chang concludes that developing a writing center course that requires an internship period might help strengthen tutors' competence in conducting effective and productive sessions.

Apart from the aforementioned 2010 IWCA conference presentation, discussion of the other Taiwan writing centers—their operation, institutional role, tutoring approaches, development, and challenges—seems to be neglected in writing center scholarship. All of the related information concerning writing center work can only be viewed on the webpages of each university in Taiwan.

The establishment of Taiwanese writing centers began in the early 21st century. These centers share the common goal of enhancing students' writing abilities. Taiwan does not have many writing centers, and only a few of them can be found after a thorough web search and exhaustive check through the list of the country's traditional public universities and universities of teachers² (excluding the national universities of technology). Because of the unique institutional purposes and needs in an L2 context, some of the centers do not run exactly like the U.S. writing center model, and they are more like prototypes of it in their application of one-on-one interactions with students outside of classroom settings. Very little literature discusses Taiwanese writing center work, so for a better understanding of these writing centers placed in the six traditional universities, Table 1 presents the basic information about them, collected through extensive web research along with phone interviews (National Tsing Hua University writing center website, National Cheng Chi University writing center website, National Chiao Tung University Language Teaching and Research Center website, National Chiayi University Language Center website, National United University Writing Clinic website, National Sun Yat-

Sen University Language Learning Lounge website³). For an easier grasp of how Taiwan's writing centers operate, these centers are categorized into three types of models. From Table 1 (see p. 9), we can conclude that the more freedom these centers have to offer services and the more stable funding they receive, the more responsibility they have to improve students' writing abilities.

The first type of writing center runs comprehensively and similarly to North American writing centers. Separated from language learning centers, this type of center stands alone and is in charge of its own operation. This type of center is usually affiliated with the office of Academic Affairs directly under the control of the school and does not need to worry much about the budget affecting the center's ability to operate. The free-standing status and direct financial support from the school causes this type of center to bear more responsibilities, and at the same time, to have more freedom to decide the services that better improve students' writing abilities. Additionally, this type of center offers writing support in both English and Chinese (Tan 404). Of the Taiwanese writing centers surveyed, only one can be categorized into this type: the one at National Tsing Hua University.

With some differences, the second type of center model also operates similarly to the model of "writing center" that runs in the U.S. Instead of operating autonomously, this type of the center offers services that are assigned by broader organizations, such as a language center or research center. The writing center has to follow instructions from top management directives; therefore, this second type of writing center has less freedom and less direct financial support in deciding the type of services it wants to offer. The role typically played by the second type of center means that the center's only duty will be conducting tutoring sessions. Yet this type of center has a greater chance of having to shut down because of budget issues. For instance, a phone call to the center at National United University revealed the surprising fact that it had actually stopped running in 2009. The life of that center only lasted for two academic years after the budget from the Ministry of Education ran out. Sometimes this type of center has to offer language support in addition to writing assistance. The writing centers at National Cheng Chi University, National Chiao Tung University, and National United University are classified into this category. In the writing center at National Cheng Chi University, students play the role of tutor, but in the other two universities, faculty members are the tutors. However, all of these writing centers only offer writing support

in English, unlike the bilingual writing assistance provided in the first type of center model discussed above.

The writing center sessions operating in both the National Sun Yat-Sen University's language learning lounge and National Chiayi University's language center are categorized into the third type of writing center model because of the one-on-one interactions with students in those sessions. This type of center is under the control of the language center or a similar sort of organization. Of these three types of writing centers, the third type has the least freedom to offer the services it wants to provide. Like the second model, the third type is only responsible for offering tutoring sessions. The big difference between the second and third types is that the third type is usually not called a "writing center"; rather, it is usually called a "language consultation center" or a "language teacher." The issue of the funding that keeps these "centers" working needs more in-depth investigation, and research on these two centers through web search and phone interviews indicates that both centers are still functioning now. Tutors run the sessions based on the peer-tutoring theory. One-on-one interactions with students take place outside of regular classroom settings, but apart from the expected one-on-one tutoring approach, the goal of the sessions is not restricted to providing writing assistance. Instead, tutors are expected to help students with any problem related to English learning and to guide students to practice English in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In these centers, students play the role of tutor rather than faculty members.

In addition to the three types of center models discussed above, there is one writing center that exists in an online format. This type of "online writing center" is difficult to categorize into the three models classified above. First, among Taiwan's traditional public universities, an online writing center is one of the services that National Sun Yat-Sen University's language learning lounge offers. However, the information related to its operation on its webpage does not specify if students have the opportunity to participate in synchronous sessions with their tutors. The webpage shows that students submit their papers to the web platform designed by this online writing center, and instead of proofreading students' papers, tutors will return their overall comments on the students' writing via email. The lack of information regarding whether students will receive an immediate response from their tutors and whether students will have synchronous interaction with their tutors makes this online writing center difficult to categorize as a comprehensive writing center. The second reason it is

difficult to categorize this online writing center is that in addition to the online writing center, the center also provides physical face-to-face language consultations. Although having both an online writing center and face-to-face sessions seems to be quite common in U.S. centers, such as the one at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, the asynchronous sessions at National Sun Yat-Sen University's "online writing center" seem not to fit the protocol of the most writing center work in the U.S.

The brief discussion of the three models and the online writing center presented above provides an overview of writing center implementation in Taiwan's six traditional public universities. The three models classified here not only indicate an application of the North American writing center model, but also demonstrate the shape of the adapted writing center model.

One of the big differences between these centers in Taiwan and the U.S. center model is that faculty, rather than peers, often play the tutor's role in some centers. The second difference is that free-standing centers offer bilingual writing assistance, which is rarely seen in the North American center model (Tan 404). Concerning the policy of no-proofreading, the centers at National Sun Yat-Sen University, National Cheng Chi University, and National Chiao Tung University announce such a policy, but the limited research on Taiwan writing center work fails to indicate if the rest of the writing centers announce and administer this policy.

An adapted writing center model seems to be inevitable, as the exact application of the model used prevalently in the U.S. to Taiwan's traditional universities might not necessarily meet their institutional needs. Such a notion also echoes Turner's study concerning the search for a suitable writing center model in Korea, and he concludes that "some of the practices of the typical North American writing center model need to be adapted to fit international contexts and needs" ("*Re-engineering*").

The first type of adapted writing center discussed here is the one that is close to the U.S. writing center, and the benefits of offering bilingual assistance in both Chinese and English is not difficult to understand even though such a service is not commonly seen in the U.S. As English is the de facto global language, and Taiwanese students desire to learn it well, all the universities in Taiwan are encouraged by the MOE to assist students in learning English, so the assistance in English service seems to be obligatory and necessary. The assistance in Chinese is actually closer to the writing center service commonly practiced in the U.S. because of the status of Chinese as Taiwan's official

language and mother tongue. Taiwan has become one of the countries where more and more foreigners would like to learn Chinese, so the first type of writing center seems to have the potential to develop more comprehensively to begin tutoring in Chinese as a second/foreign language. Yet more data needs to be collected to determine its future development.

Compared to the third type of the writing center, the second type of writing center seems to be easily at risk of having to shut down because of its focused or restricted assistance on the development of students' writing skills. According to Truesdell and Chang's presentation discussed earlier, the majority of tutees comes to the center primarily to have their papers corrected, and those papers are more exam or job/school application-oriented and subject to particular deadlines. Also, most Taiwanese students are not required to write their classroom assignments in English. Under these circumstances, tutees seem to value more the idea of producing better papers than training better writers. In this regard, if the writing centers only focus on offering writing assistance in an environment in which writing is not commonly or practically perceived as a process, and in which writing in English seems not to be the requirement for university students' assignments, writing centers can barely survive.

The third type of writing center seems to be the type that better meets tutees' needs—learning English well in terms of four skills. This type of writing center also corresponds to Johnson et al.'s study. The most crucial aspect of the third type of writing center in Taiwan that deserves further research is what tutors can do to help their tutees become both good language learners and better writers, as well as what L2 directors can do to navigate the centers to a place where good language learners are also better writers.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

The synthesis of this review of L2 writing centers, mostly located in Asian countries, and discussion of the writing centers in Taiwan's six traditional universities reveal several significant indicators of non-U.S. writing centers:

1. Comprehensive L2 writing centers usually offer bilingual services: English and the first language used in the L2 context.
2. Outside the U.S., the use of faculty members as tutors rather than peers seems to be common.
3. The services that L2 writing centers offer seem not to be restricted to writing assistance but are more language support focused.

4. Regarding the policy of no-proofreading, most of the non-U.S. writing centers announce such a policy, but the limited research and scholarship on Taiwanese centers' work fails to indicate how this policy is administered in the "actual" tutoring.

Although the preliminary research results uncover the skeleton of the L2 writing center, such as its purpose of establishment, target students, and services offered, the flesh of the operation—students' needs and expectations, tutors' tutoring approach and philosophy, and directors' vision statements—still remains unclear and deserves more in-depth investigation. For instance, the degree of accommodation to tutoring strategy, such as Turner's non-directive tutoring approach discussed above, requires further study.

The torch of writing center work has been passed to Asian countries, and Taiwan is not an exception. But the bright light deserves more work, and this article is simply the start for an ongoing project of gathering interview data with tutees, tutors, and directors of Taiwan writing centers. The very limited research on Asian and Taiwanese writing center work does not specify the features that an adapted writing center requires in an L2 context.

Identifying the features that better meet the needs required by Taiwan's traditional public universities is significant. Those identified features will help specifically index one of the potential operation systems for the writing centers located in countries where English is used as a foreign/second language. The results of the present study help countries outside Taiwan, especially other Asian countries, such as Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, and so on, revisit the theory of collaborative learning and the effectiveness of more "mature" students assisting their peers to enhance their writing competence in an L2 context where peers might not be socially and culturally seen as authority figures.

The specific operation system identified in an L2 context also provides the writing center community in the U.S. with a different perspective for responding to a more diversified writing center, be it located in the U.S. or in an L2 country. Understanding the operation of L2 writing centers enhances the practices of collaborative learning because such an understanding opens the dialogue between L1 and L2 writing centers for improving NNES learners' writing competence as a shared goal. The present research helps to indicate the possibility for the both writing centers in the U.S. and Taiwan to work together to create a more collaboratively international writing center community. When writing centers located in L1 and L2 countries

work together, achieving the goal of cultivating better writers, rather than better papers, is near.

Notes

1. The references of the writing centers in the six Taiwan traditional universities in this paper. For easier access to those centers' websites, the links are provided below:
Language center web site. Retrieved from National Chiayi University. 2012. Web. Jan. 2012.
http://www.ncyu.edu.tw/lgc/content.aspx?site_content_sn=36275
Language Learning Lounge web site. Retrieved from National Sun Yat-Sen University. 2012. Web. Jan. 2012.
http://zephyr.nsysu.edu.tw/self_access/newweb/a5_clinic.html
Language Teaching and Research Center web site. Retrieved from National Chiao Tung University. 2012. Web. Jan. 2012.
http://ltrc.nctu.edu.tw/news_o.php?id=132
Writing center web site. Retrieved from National Cheng Chi University. 2012. Web. Jan. 2012.
<http://flc.nccu.edu.tw/writingcenter/>
Writing center web site. Retrieved from National Tsing Hua University. 2012. Web. Jan. 2012.
<http://writing.wvlc.nthu.edu.tw/writcent/index.php/main/viewcontent/23>
Writing clinic web site. Retrieved from National United University. 2007. Web. Jan. 2012.
<http://lctc.nuu.edu.tw/sac/ClassInfo.asp>
2. Compared to the universities of technology, both the traditional public universities and universities of teachers have a longer history, better reputation, and more stable funding from Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan. Both types of universities are also mainly responsible for Taiwanese higher education.
3. See references.

Works Cited

- Arkin, Marian. "A Tutoring Retrospective." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 14.10 (1990): 1-6. Print.
- Blau, Susan, John Hall, and Sarah Sparks. "Guilt-Free Tutoring: Rethinking How We Tutor Non-Native-Speaking Students." *Writing Center Journal* 23.1 (2002): 23-44. Print.
- Boquet, Elizabeth H. "Our Little Secret: A History of Writing Centers, Pre-to Post-Open Admissions." *College Composition and Communication* 50.3 (1999): 463-82. Print.
- Bruffee, Kenneth. "The Brooklyn Plan: Attaining Intellectual Growth through Peer-Group Tutoring." *Liberal Education* 64 (1978): 447-68. Print.
- Carino, Peter. "Open Admissions and the Construction of Writing Center History: A Tale of Three Models." *Writing Center Journal* 17.1 (1996): 30-48. Print.
- . "Early Writing Center: Toward a History." *Writing Center Journal* 15.2 (1995): 103-15. Print.
- Griswold, Gary. "Writing Centers: the Student Retention Connection." *Academic Exchange Quarterly* 7.4 (2003): 277-81. Print.
- Hays, George. "Learners Helping Learners in an EFL Writing Center." *JALT2009 Conference Proceedings*. Ed. Alan M. Stoke. Tokyo: JALT, 2009. 589-96. Print.
- Johnston, Scott. "Writing Centers in Japan and Asia." *The Language Teacher* 33.6 (2009): n. pag. Web. Jan. 2012.
- Johnston, Scott, Steve Cornwell, and Hiroko Yoshida. "Writing Centers in Japan." *Osaka Jogakuin Daigaku Kenkyuu Kijou*. 5 (2008): 181-92. Print.
- Johnston, Scott, Hiroko Yoshida, and Steve Cornwell. "Writing Centers and Tutoring in Japan and Asia." *JALT2009 Conference Proceedings*. Ed. Alan M. Stoke. Tokyo: JALT, 2009. 692-701. Print.
- Mullin, Joan. "Looking Backward and Forward: What Hath Writing Centers Wrought? A Fifteen-Year Reflection on Communication, Community, and Change." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 25.1 (2000): 1-3. Print.
- North, Stephen. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *Landmark Essays on Writing Centers*. Eds. Christina Murphy and Joe Law. Davis: Hermagoras P, 1995. 71-86. Print.
- Opdenacker, Liesbeth, and Luuk Van Waes. "Implementing an Open Process Approach to a Multilingual Online Writing Center The case of *Calliope*." *Computers and Composition*, 24 (2007): 247-65. Print.
- Tan, Bee-Hon. (2010). "Innovating Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs Outside North America." *Asian EFL Journal*, 13.2 (2010): 391-418. Print.
- . *Writing Center Approach: Theory, Practice and Applicability to Tertiary ESL/EFL Education*. Saarbrücken: VDM, 2010. Print.
- Truesdell, Tom and Jui-Chuan Chang. "English is Not My First Language Either: Starting an EFL Writing Center in Taiwan." *Paper Presented at the 2010 International Writing Center Association National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing Joined Conference November 4th to 6th, 2010*. Baltimore. 2010. Print.
- Turner, Adam. (2006). "Re-engineering the North American Writing Center Model in East Asia." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 3.2 (2006): n. pag. Web. Jan. 2012.
- Waller, Susan. "A Brief History of University Writing Centers: Variety and Diversity." Dec. 12, 2002. Web. Jan. 2008.
- Yahner, William, and William Murdick. "The Evolution of a Writing Center: 1972-1990." *The Writing Center Journal* 11.2 (1991): 13-28. Print.

Table 1: The Writing Centers Placed in the Six Taiwan Traditional Public Universities

University	Year Est.	Purpose of Founding	Target Students	Target Tutors	Time of Each Tutoring Session	Services Offered	Affiliation
National Tsing Hua University	2002	To enhance students' writing abilities and to assist students who have writing problems. (It is the first university to start a writing center in Taiwan.)	All Students	Full-time and part-time teachers who are from the departments of English and Chinese and are working in the writing center	1 hour (Students can only have 3 visits per month.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To offer tutoring sessions To host workshops in relation to teaching writing courses To advise thesis and dissertation writing To design sessions for English Corner To offer training courses where invited experts in English and Chinese writing teach a group of students (up to 20 students) To provide helpful writing materials To establish writing corpuses To design the teaching materials for academic writing in English and Chinese 	The Office of Academic Affairs
National Cheng Chi University	2008	To enhance students' writing abilities.	All Students	Graduate and undergraduate students from the department of English	50 minutes (no limitation for number of visits)	To offer assistance on essay, report, thesis, and dissertation writing—including analyzing the goal of the assignment, brainstorming ideas, outlining, ensuring the coherence of the paper, enhancing the coherence of the paper, knowing how to cite, discussing other issues related to academic writing in English	Foreign Language Center
National Chiao Tung University	The WC started in 2000, but more established service began in 2007.	To enhance students' writing abilities and their expertise in academic writing, thesis and dissertation writing, and application materials for schools abroad.	All Students	Native and non-native English speaking teachers who work in the Language Teaching and Research Center	25 minutes (Students can only have 5 regular visits per semester, but more if there are spots open for drop-ins.)	To offer tutoring sessions focusing on issues of writing in English, such as journal, research report, thesis and dissertation writing; study plans; resumes; applications; as well as questions regarding essay writing for TOEFL/GEPT	Language Teaching and Research Center (Language Self-Study Center)
National Chaiyi University	2002	To answer students' questions regarding English learning.	All Students	Undergraduates across departments	50 minutes (students can have 4 visits at most per week)	To assist students who have problems in English	Language Center
National United University	2007-2009 (due to budget)	To enhance students' English abilities along with the establishment of English Corner.	All Students	Native and non-native English speaking teachers who work in the Language Center	1 hour (there is no limitation for number of visits)	To assist students with their understanding of writing in English	Language Center (Self-access Learning Room)
National Sun Yat-Sen University	2009	(a) Regular language consultation: assist students with English language learning problems (b) Online writing center: offer comments on students' papers (500 word limit)	All Students	Undergraduates, M.A., and Ph.D. students across departments	(a) Regular language consultation: 1 hour (no limit to number of visits) (b) Online writing center: submit papers to tutors via email	To assist students who have problems in English and offer them a way of practicing English	Language Learning Lounge

“RAINBOWS IN THE PAST WERE GAY”: LGBTQIA IN THE WC

Andrew J. Rihn
Stark State College
arihnr@starkstate.edu

Jay D. Sloan
Kent State University—Stark Campus
jdsloan@kent.edu

“The point is not to stay marginal, but to participate in whatever network of marginal zones is spawned from other disciplinary centers and which, together, constitute a multiple displacement of those authorities.” —Judith Butler

In their 2009 article “The Queer Turn in Composition Studies: Reviewing and Assessing an Emerging Scholarship,” Jonathan Alexander and David Wallace describe the state of LGBTQIA/queer studies in the field of rhetoric and composition. They note the “inclusion of articles and essays on queerness often pales in comparison to inclusion of material on race and gender” (317), and while this queered literature is “emerging,” it remains “spotty at best” (302). The same can be said, we believe, for similar scholarship in the field of writing centers. Prefiguring our own feelings, they write

Although we are proud to participate in a scholarly and pedagogical tradition that takes diversity seriously, we also feel a profound sense of disappointment each time we read the latest book or journal article in which a theorist or researcher whose work we respect takes on the knotty questions of how identity issues such as gender, race, and class affect the teaching and learning of writing but fails to address sexual identity or, in many cases, even to acknowledge it in passing (301).

We begin with this quote from notable queer theorists because we experience the same paradox: feeling both pride *and* disappointment in our field. Writing center workers have also taken diversity seriously and this commitment has guided serious inquiries into, and re-evaluations of, both our theory and our practice. And yet amidst our critical discussions of structural inequalities related to topics such as sex, race, class, and dis/ability, the discussion relating to sexual identity has been, to say the least, light.

It is our view that an unconscious ideological bias toward heteronormativity has dominated writing center scholarship, unintentionally but effectively winnowing out sexual identity as a subject for sustained reflection and interrogation. In “Composing Queers: The Subversive Potential of the Writing Center,” undergraduate writing associate Stephen Doucette notes the “lack of archival memory and validity for LGBTQ history” within the field of

writing center studies (10), and our own pursuit of such a history confirms this absence. In reviewing over thirty years of scholarship, we found only fourteen articles with sufficiently meaningful discussions of LGBTQIA topics to merit inclusion in our annotated bibliography. Of these fourteen articles, less than half make the alignment of LGBTQIA concerns and writing center work their primary focus; others include only brief narratives, some as short as a paragraph or two, of LGBTQIA tutors or directors in writing centers. It is also worth noting that such scholarship is a recent trend; only two of the fourteen articles were published before 2000. How do we account for such paucity of scholarship, especially within an academic community whose one-to-one pedagogy encourages the habit of taking up difficult, even intimate, issues? Why this failure to address sexual identity when writing centers, often occupying marginal spaces on their campuses themselves, have long identified with and catered to marginalized and at-risk students? Why, on this topic, have we been relatively silent?

This article, designed to serve as a companion piece to our annotated bibliography, aims to bring our failure to address sexual identity into the light, where we can all acknowledge and examine it. LGBTQIA/queer studies is not simply a field for LGBTQIA people; rather, it is a way of reading the world that benefits society in general by critically examining the functions of heteronormativity and homophobia and their effects on how we view and use identity (Alexander and Wallace 301). You don’t have to be LGBTQIA-identified to be an ally, nor to utilize queer theory. Issues surrounding sexual identity are inclusive of us all, and the blunting effect of heteronormativity stunts everyone’s potential. Many readers, we imagine, will not need to be convinced; they will already be well aware of LGBTQIA presences in their centers and may already understand, appreciate, and deploy queer theory. For these readers, hopefully our article and bibliography will in some way speak to shared feelings of disappointment and perhaps give voice to unspoken frustrations. A few readers might find themselves more resistant, perhaps from an entrenched sense of heteronormativity or a defensive enactment of heterosexual privilege. More likely, we suspect, a large number of readers will feel torn in two directions: on

the one hand, curious about the application of queer theory in writing centers and desirous to be inclusive and mindful of LGBTQIA concerns, but on the other hand, unsure of how to begin approaching those concerns, perhaps feeling somehow inadequate to the task, not “queer enough” to speak with authority on these topics. For those readers, we hope this article provides a particularly instructive place to start.

To properly discuss and effectively advocate for the productive intersections of LGBTQIA/queer studies and the writing center, this article is divided into five sections. The first contains an explication of our title and then briefly outlines the formation of the LGBTQ Special Interest Group (SIG) within the IWCA. The second section offers some general definitions for readers who may be new to LGBTQIA/queer studies. In the third section, we highlight a few instances of heteronormativity within writing center scholarship. From there, the fourth section grounds our annotated bibliography in a contextualizing discussion based on the work of Alexander and Wallace. In the final section, we suggest that writing centers are uniquely positioned sites for the examination of sexual identity and urge the writing center community to continue and extend this conversation with a call for further investigations.

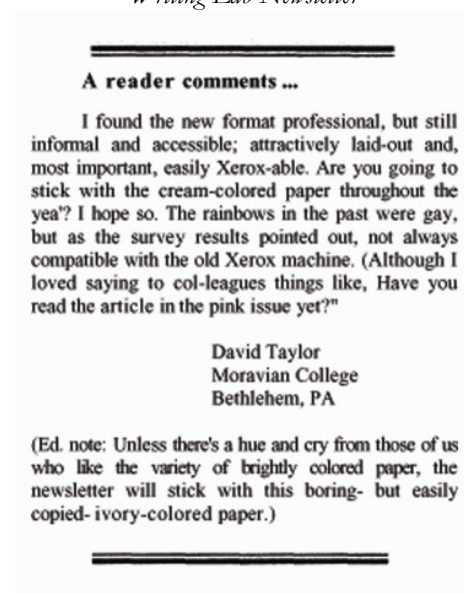
Dissonance and a “Curious Silence”

The title for our essay is taken from an odd fragment of conversation, a “Reader’s Comment” we discovered tucked away in the December 1988 issue of *The Writing Lab Newsletter* (see Figure 1) discussing the *Newsletter’s* use of colored paper. Though we do not know the author’s original intent, a “straight” reading suggests that Taylor simply meant “The multi-colored paper was pleasant,” which is likely how the majority of *WLN* readers in 1988 took it. However, the text now evokes a palpable dissonance, for the term “gay” has multiple potential meanings: happy or pleasant on the one hand, homosexual (often male) on the other. “Rainbows,” in the context of the quote, refer to the multi-colored paper on which the *WLN* was originally printed. However, rainbows (particularly rainbow flags) have also been a symbol of LGBTQIA pride since the late 70s. Read today, words like “rainbows” and “gay,” and even “pink” or “brightly colored,” take on secondary, “queered” meanings, especially as they are contrastive and not compatible with the “boring” and easily reproducible. Taylor’s words now leap off the page as playful, ambiguous, and strikingly funny.

That two such readings are possible is likely obvious to contemporary readers; indeed, the inability to ignore or overlook its queered perspective is one

element that makes this example useful. In maintaining these simultaneous readings, readers may experience a sense of dissonance. With many texts, however, where queer content remains obscured or hidden, this simultaneity is not the case. Furthermore, if readers are fundamentally enmeshed in heteronormative discourse, alternative readings of a given text may remain unknown, even unknowable. For readers sufficiently attuned to LGBTQIA discourses, however, alternative or queered readings will present themselves. Readers then have to choose, depending on context, which meaning to privilege, or, if utilizing more complex reading practices, to sustain *both* simultaneously, allowing one to play off of, or perhaps subvert, the other. Dissonance results from the rattling together of these simultaneous readings: from tensions, anxieties, and even conflicts that may go unresolved.

Figure 1: Comment from December 1988 issue of *The Writing Lab Newsletter*



A second element that makes this “Reader’s Comment” useful is that while in close enough proximity to create dissonance, there is a gulf between the two readings large enough to engender a sense of alienation: the first reading (“straight”) is not inclusive of the second (“queered”). In this comment, we see a rare use of the word “gay” in writing center discourse, and yet it does not appear to refer to LGBTQIA communities, illustrating a profound, if unintentional, disconnect. For us, this is suggestive of how a discursive vacuum can be enacted around LGBTQIA communities. To eyes not trained to see or even look

for queerness, the world is read from a singular, “straight” point of view, foreclosing engagement with, and validation of, LGBTQIA communities. Rather than embracing reductive or alienating readings, whether intentional or not, queered readings bring the multiplicity of simultaneous meanings to the forefront. Our dissonant reading, then, stems from, but also alerts us to, the erasure or elision of such multiplicities, the lack of recognition of a world we know to exist.

The potential of a queered understanding is not solely or necessarily positive, of course. The term “gay” is also frequently used as a pejorative; the put-down “That’s so gay” is widespread, especially among younger people on our campuses, and perhaps in our centers. Thus, an alternative reading of the remark “the rainbows in the past were gay” could be read negatively, spoken with a dismissive or hostile tone. As writing center workers, we recognize the power everyday language has in effecting very real consequences; for LGBTQIA communities, homophobic rhetoric represents a range of very real threats. The very impetus for our inquiry here, in fact, emerged as a direct result of discussions on the *WCenter* listserv following media coverage of the all-too-familiar pattern of homophobic discourse leading to tragedy: in this case, the September 2010 suicide of Rutgers undergraduate, Tyler Clementi. As many readers will remember, Clementi’s roommate, Dharun Ravi, used a webcam to capture Clementi kissing another man, and then disclosed that information among his circle of friends. Three days later, Clementi jumped to his death from the George Washington Bridge.

On October 8, 2010, Harry Denny wrote a post to *WCenter* entitled “A Curious Silence and a Longish Response,” in which he asked his fellow writing center colleagues “if/when/how” they intended “to respond to this issue at our campus writing centers.” Feeling the need to “do *something*, to not remain silent,” Denny noted that he had turned to his own staff, “a crew filled with young people Tyler’s age, but also sprinkled with those sharing his search for safety and sense of self, complicated by sexuality, race, gender, class, nationality, ability—and ask[ed] them to think about the Tylers in our midst.” Noting the “heartening, but also muted” reaction of the media, Denny encouraged us to view the tragedy not as a singular or isolated incident, but as the result of more subtle and widespread social practices aimed at LGBTQIA communities. “The harassment and bullying and their escalation and culmination around Tyler were extreme forms of the usual fare that

people experience — that most come to tolerate and cope with as a grudging cost of existing in an otherwise often hostile world.” In noting this, Denny shifted focus from the “extreme forms” of harassment Clementi suffered to the “everyday ugliness” that doesn’t garner national headlines. It was the “curious silence” around such everyday aggressions directed toward LGBTQIA communities, then, which led him to talk to his staff about “how it happens in the local, in the ‘smaller’ world that we inhabit and how we/I might intervene.”

In the exchanges that followed on *WCenter*, many in the writing center community rose to the challenge presented by Denny, sharing not only their personal reactions to the tragedy, but also their professional efforts to engage their own staffs in useful, transformative discourse. When Jay Sloan suggested that “perhaps it is time to take a cue from the Anti-Racism SIG and form one to address LGBTQ concerns,” it took only a few days for Roberta Kjesrud, then President of the International Writing Centers Association, to schedule a meeting time, and for leaders to step forward to organize a new LGBTQ SIG at the forthcoming November 2010 IWCA/NCPTW joint conference in Baltimore. It was during that first meeting that the idea for this annotated bibliography developed. The SIG went on to create a listserv, and subsequently met at both the IWCA and NCPTW conferences in 2012. Thankfully, there is now at least one permanent venue within the writing center community dedicated specifically to moving beyond the “curious silence” that too often attends LGBTQIA issues.¹

“LGBTQIA,” “Queer Theory,” and “Heteronormativity”

We noted above our own experience of dissonance and alienation in re-reading the “Reader’s Comment,” and we appreciate that some readers may be experiencing feelings of distance or alienation from unfamiliar terms like “queer” or “heteronormative.” Still, as Kim Gunter notes, we make our living in composition with words, our own and others’ (69). We recognize, and indeed hope, that many of our readers are not already active participants in LGBTQIA communities or in the field of queer studies. And for these readers, some of the vocabulary we take for granted may be unclear: our words may not yet be their words. Given our intent to connect with as broad an audience as possible, we would like to pause here and provide some general definitions, with the caveat that such definitions should be read as provisional rather than final. We

encourage readers to consider these definitions not as rigid or finite, but as contestable and fluid. They are but starting points in an ongoing process of engagement.

A good place to begin is with the term LGBTQIA itself, as acronyms often lead to confusion. Many groups use different configurations of this common alphabet soup, and its terms have multiple and simultaneous meanings, revealing the slippage underlying queer understandings of identity. LGBTQIA can stand for “Lesbian,” “Gay,” but also “Genderqueer” (that is, someone who does not fit into society’s gender binary); “Bisexual” (or “Bicurious”); “Transgender” (often shortened to “Trans,” an umbrella term for people who transgress or transcend gender norms in any number of ways); “Queer” (a word reclaimed from derogatory use though not embraced in all quarters) but also “Questioning” (as in someone unsure of their sexual identity); “Intersexed” (someone whose external genitalia at birth do not fit the gender binary); and finally “Asexual” (a category distinct from “celibate”), but also “Ally” (typically a heterosexual who takes part in the struggle against homophobic oppression). As we can see, the spectrum of sexual identity is not as neat as the often-invoked gay/straight binary would have it seem. And this list isn’t exhaustive by any means; it fails to include, for instance, people who identify as polyamorous (that is, people who practice non-monogamy) or pansexual (people whose sexual attraction extends beyond a binary understanding of gender). Furthermore, the grouping of LGBTQIA conflates two distinctly different concepts—sexual identity and gender expression—a problem perhaps reflective of cultural discomfort with both subjects.

We would also like to clarify our use of the term “queer theory.” As distinct from earlier gay or lesbian theories, which tend to focus on stable, “homonormative” gay identities positioned in fundamental opposition to “heteronormative” constructions of heterosexuality, “queer” theory seeks to unpack, disrupt, and deconstruct all such simplistic binaries as well as the stable concepts of identity upon which they are based. “Queer,” according to Annamarie Jagose, “is less an identity than a *critique* of identity” (131, emphasis in original). Queer theorists, then, insist that sex, gender, and sexuality are lived across a continuum of possibilities, and that standard binaries (gay/straight, male/female, masculine/feminine, etc.) serve merely ideological functions inherent to culture and society. By shifting focus from stable identities towards more mobile performances, queer theory becomes what José

Muñoz calls “a modality of critique that speaks to quotidian gestures as laden with potentiality” (360).

Finally, we would like to look more closely at the term “heteronormative.” Distinct from homophobia (the expression of a range of negative feelings directed towards LGBTQIA individuals or communities), heteronormativity is akin to what Adrienne Rich labeled “compulsory heterosexuality.” It involves the privileging of heterosexuality in all areas of life, both private and public. Heteronormativity assumes, and even expects, heterosexuality. In this way, heterosexuality is not simply descriptive (the “norm”); it becomes prescriptive (the “normative”) (Kumashiro 367). With the boundaries set by such privileging and prescription, then, come the disciplining practices of marginalization, including the “curious silence” described by Denny. As discussed earlier and explored in the section below, heteronormativity is a reductive way of doing and reading the world; it can allow us, even force us, to gloss over, ignore, or otherwise marginalize LGBTQIA communities and concerns. The effects of this marginalization can range from micro-aggressions (e.g., the phrase “that’s so gay” directed not at a person, but at a choice of shirt, car, couch, etc) to large-scale, institutional evasions or denials (e.g., the refusal of the Reagan administration to discuss and address the AIDS crisis during the 1980s). We look again to Alexander and Wallace’s view of the field of rhetoric and composition. They write, “Ironically, because of the laudatory commitment to diversity in our field, we must take particular care that our liberatory intent does not serve an inoculating function, blinding us to the ways we remain unwittingly complicit in systems of oppression such as heteronormativity” (317). Is it possible that we, the writing center scholarly community, have unwittingly overlooked a segment of the population? Have we been “inoculated” by our best intentions?

Heteronormativity in Writing Center Scholarship

Just as we noted the often-unintentional tendency of heteronormative readers to read with a heteronormative eye, so too can writers write with a heteronormative pen, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. To address and hopefully disrupt the smooth functioning of heteronormativity, it is important to place the absences it leaves behind in stark relief—to speak into and at this “curious silence” rather than around it. We believe this silence on LGBTQIA issues has plagued writing center scholarship for far too long, resulting in the marginalization of

LGBTQIA communities through omission, exclusion, and invalidation. While we do not claim that the following represents an exhaustive historical survey, we cite these examples as illustrative of a problematic tendency toward heteronormativity within writing center scholarship, a systemic problem that, while often enacted through the individual, we believe reveals more structural or cultural bias than individual prejudice.

In 1992's "Validating Cultural Difference in the Writing Center," Greg Lyons suggests "we should value students' alternative ways of thinking and communicating and not, in our gatekeeping roles, deny their personal histories or cultural identities" (145). Encouragingly, he goes further, urging writing center workers to help students "who feel alienated to develop a critical consciousness toward their own place in the university and the wider mainstream culture" (145). And Lyons goes on to specify that "writing center clients considered here include those marginalized by ethnicity, race, gender, sexual preference, age, class, and occupational history" (146). Although the legitimacy of the term "sexual preference" has been challenged in subsequent years, we applaud the inclusion. And yet, by the time Lyons reaches his conclusion, his specified audience shifts to "any tutor or teacher working with students who identify their own ethnicity, race, sex, class, or age group as a minority in the mainstream of college students or American culture at large" (150). Where, in those few pages, did our LGBTQIA students go? Intentional or not, the omission is troubling.

LGBTQIA people also went missing from discussions of sexual attraction in writing centers. Neither Michael Pemberton's 1996 article "Safe Sex in the Writing Center" nor Patty Wilde's 2003 "Exploring Issues of Attraction in Writing Center Tutorials" address attraction from a same-sex perspective. "Let's face it," Pemberton writes, "Writing conferences are really quite intimate. Two people—often of different genders but just as often similar age and experience – spend a half hour or hour sitting close together . . . feelings of sexual attraction and/or emotional interest may arise" (14). Wilde's article, although it cites several studies examining heterosexual attraction, uses gender-neutral language, e.g., "there is evidence that suggests that a tutor's attraction toward a student may affect the tutorial" (14). These examples may appear relatively benign, and we applaud the authors' willingness to address a topic that often engenders discomfort; however, in failing to incorporate LGBTQIA identities, they effectively ignore and expel LGBTQIA people from

consideration, ensuring their continued marginalization.

More troubling is an example in which LGBTQIA academic identity is referenced explicitly. In 1998's "Mediating Between Students and Faculty," Michael Pemberton explores the difficulties presented when a student brings in evidence of an instructor who "has a clear political agenda" and who uniformly grades down oppositional students, "regardless of the quality of their arguments or their writing" (16). Pemberton notes that typically "all the readings in the course focus on a single topic from a single point of view" (16). He then lists several examples of what he sees as problematic perspectives within academia: "cultural studies/neo-conservatism/pedagogy of the oppressed/gender issues/gay and lesbian studies/fundamentalist Christianity/pick your favorite ideology" (16). With "gay and lesbian studies" thus marked as a suspect "ideology," and the intentions of its instructors brought into question, the implication seems clear: "gay and lesbian studies" is not a legitimate field of academic inquiry. Linking it to the specifically non-academic pursuits of "neo-conservatism" and "fundamentalist Christianity"—ideological perspectives often associated with the promulgation of anti-gay bigotry—only serves to further delegitimize the entire field.

We recognize that most of these articles were written in the 1990s, and that most writing center scholars would now readily accept LGBTQIA studies as a legitimate field of academic study. Furthermore, as our bibliography shows, there is an emerging trend of acknowledging LGBTQIA communities in writing center scholarship and incorporating queer theory into this work. Despite the good intentions of their authors, however, the examples above indicate the heteronormative tendency to systemically marginalize LGBTQIA communities through omission, exclusion, and invalidation. Some might dismiss such marginalization as "merely" discursive, but we must remember these well-planned and otherwise thoughtful articles have made it through a process of revision, review, and editing; we cannot help but be troubled by what their inclusion might imply about our immediate, unpremeditated practices. As the recently publicized gay suicides mentioned earlier illustrate, these issues are more than merely academic; they are literally life and death for LGBTQIA communities. And in our writing centers, as advocates of diversity and liberatory education, as spaces open to any and all students, and as safe working environments for our tutors, we have a responsibility to attend to

such matters with all the seriousness and devotion they deserve.

With that in mind, we would like to shift our attention to our annotated bibliography, a lamentably small collection of articles relating directly to the overlap of the writing center and LGBTQIA communities. Despite the amount of writing center literature and scholarship available, we could locate only fourteen articles that offer meaningful engagement with LGBTQIA issues, a number that feels far too low to us. By highlighting such work, we hope to accomplish three goals: to make visible its scarcity, to make such engagements more accessible and readily available (especially for those new to writing centers), and to promote further engagement between and within these overlapping communities.

Queerness in Writing Center Scholarship

In performing their review of LGBTQIA scholarship in rhetoric and composition, Alexander and Wallace identify three main “theoretical and pedagogical moves” or themes: the need to confront homophobia, the desire to be inclusive, and the possibility of queering the homo/hetero binary (305). Although they do not include any writing center related scholarship in their study, we find that their categories fit easily onto our own bibliography, providing a convenient way of reading the articles. While not every article can be neatly categorized, and some may fit into multiple categories, we would like to situate a few of the articles in our bibliography within the larger field of writing center scholarship, viewing them through the lens of Alexander and Wallace’s three scholarly moves.

We would also like to note that while a rough chronology may be somewhat apparent in Alexander and Wallace’s themes, they stress that these moves do not represent a “staged model of increasing theoretical enlightenment.” All three themes “will retain relevance for composition theory and pedagogy as long as nonnormative sexual identities remain problematic in our culture” (305). The movement, then, from theme to theme, is not as linear as our written format might imply. Rather, like any educational process, it is a recursive movement: full of ebbs and flows, breakthroughs and revisitations.

With that in mind, after we contextualize our selection of articles within these themes, we will also take a moment to engage in the critically reflective practice of problem-posing: to interrogate those same themes, unpack them, and begin an inventory of what they leave unspoken.

The need to confront homophobia

The first move, or theme, identified by Alexander and Wallace is “the need to confront homophobia” (305). In writing centers, this theme may be most often and immediately addressed in the ongoing conversation regarding tutor responses to “offensive” or “controversial” papers. The guidance offered runs the spectrum from those advocating an overt, situated response, to those who feel addressing “political” topics may steer us “too far afield” (Bennet 10). Take, for example, Michele Petrucci’s advice from 2002’s “Sacred Spaces: Tutoring Religious Writing.” She acknowledges that a tutor may wind up discussing a “highly charged, dogmatic and, in some instances, offensive (sexist, homophobic) essay” (10). Petrucci warns that the tutor should “control her initial reactions (body language, facial expressions, exclamations)” so as “not to destroy the session” (10), thereby calling into question a tutor’s negative reaction to homophobia and implying that the reaction, *not* the homophobic writing, is the problem. Michael Pemberton takes a more thoughtful approach in his columns on ethics, posing problems for which he provides not answers, but possibilities. On more than one occasion (“Do What I Tell You,” “The Ethics of Content”), he brings up David Rothgery’s essay “So What Do We Do Now?: Necessary Directionality as the Writing Teacher’s Response to Racist, Sexist, Homophobic Papers,” suggesting the possibility that tutors have a responsibility to address the discursive face of homophobia.

Reflecting on the articles presented in our bibliography makes it clear that the relevant question to ask is not really “*should* tutors confront homophobia,” because we cannot stop homophobic language, ideas, and papers from entering our centers and confronting our tutors. The question shifts, then, to *how* tutors should confront homophobia. We can see, for instance, how a tutor like Cathy Darrup chooses to confront homophobic and other oppressive language in her 1994 article “What’s My Role? When a Student is Offensive to You: Where (How?) to Draw the Line,” by openly questioning and discussing the beliefs and values that inform the student’s language. Jay Sloan, however, takes us inside the conflicted mind of “an increasingly ‘Out’ gay graduate student” as he tutors a paper on “the sin of homosexuality” (“Closet Consulting” 9). Reflecting on that session as well as on the limitations of non-directive tutoring techniques in a later piece (“Centering Difference”), Sloan lists a number of strategies he might have tried and suggestions he could have proffered. In doing so, he models ways we

might try to adjust our own tutoring practice when working with homophobic or heteronormative texts.

Breaking away from the extant literature and looking to the possibilities that lie ahead, we wish to problem-pose for a moment, to offer readers a few take-away questions as a means of encouraging sustainable engagement with, and critical revisitations to, these ideas.

- How else do we “confront” homophobia; how does it confront us?
- Is confrontation alienating? More alienating than homophobia?
- Should we agree to help students strengthen or refine homophobic arguments in the name of free speech or student agency?
- Where else, apart from student papers, do we find homophobia in the writing center? How do we confront other tutors, faculty, or the broader campus environment?

The desire to be inclusive

The second theme identified by Alexander and Wallace is “the desire to be inclusive of LGBT people” (305). Writing centers have traditionally striven to be inclusive, as reflected in articles such as Lisa Birnbaum’s 1995 “Toward a Gender-Balanced Staff on the Writing Center” and Michael Pemberton’s 1998 “Equity Issues in Hiring for the Writing Center.” Both offer sound arguments for the ethical value of hiring gender-balanced staffs (and in Pemberton’s case, racially balanced as well). This sense of inclusion impacts more than hiring, as can be seen in Mulvihill, Nitta, and Wingate’s 1995 “Into the Fray: Ethnicity and Tutor Preparation.” Similarly, many writing centers deploy inclusive language in mission statements, advertising, and other institutional documents. For instance, one of our centers uses the slogan “Writing assistance for any class, any stage, any one.”

In our bibliography, we see the inclusion of LGBTQIA people primarily in the subjectivities of the stories they tell (or others tell about them). For instance, in his 2000 article “Negotiating the ‘Subject’ of Composition: Writing Centers as Spaces of Productive Possibilities,” Stephen Jukuri writes three narratives about tutoring and the subjective experience of identity. One narrative focuses on his consideration of coming out to a tutee and the effect it would have on their work and relationship. Similarly, Curtis Dickerson and Jonathan Rylander discuss the “pros and cons” of coming out in a session, a process necessarily complicated by our student-centered pedagogy (7). Several articles include brief narratives

of LGBTQIA tutors working in writing centers. In these narratives, we see LGBTQIA tutors struggle with a roommate’s homophobic language (Suhr-Sytsma and Brown), use sexual identity to empathize with a student’s experience of racism (Geller, Condon, and Carroll), and explore the intersections of multiple identities while taking a tutor training course (Green).

Let us again shift our focus and look ahead, problem-posing on the theme of inclusion.

- How else could “inclusion” be enacted, perhaps through partnering with LGBTQIA centers, for example?
- How might we nurture or facilitate the voices of LGBTQIA students? How might we represent them in our scholarship?
- Can sexual identity be discussed separately from other aspects of identity, such as race, class, or gender? Should it?
- Does dissonance follow necessarily from inclusion? What about discomfort?

The possibility of queering the homo/hetero binary

The third and final theme identified by Alexander and Wallace is “the possibility of using queer theory to break down the homo/hetero binary as a constraining mode of thinking about identity and agency” (305). Writing center scholarship has a long tradition of seeking out and applying critical, self-reflexive theories. For instance, Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski’s foundational 1999 article “Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center” provides an excellent example of using broadened critical perspectives to revise our theory while simultaneously grounding their perspective in the everyday practices and consequences of our work. There have also been a significant number of articles applying feminist principles to the writing center (Lutes; Seeley; Woolbright). And the last decade or so has seen a significant focus on anti-racist scholarship, due in no small part to Victor Villanueva’s 2006 “Blind: Talking about the New Racism” and the conscientious efforts of members of the Anti-Racism SIG (Condon; Dees, Godbee, and Ozias; Diab, Ferrel, Godbee, and Simpkins; Greenfield and Rowan). Likewise, embodied theories of practice such as Disability Studies (Hitt) and Fat Studies (Smith) are broadening our critical horizons and re-focusing attention on the bodies that inhabit our centers.

In our bibliography, we can also see the application of queer theory’s critical lens. It can be argued that the writing center’s interstitial identity disrupts binaries of all sorts. This positioning makes the center a natural place from which to enact the

“productive disruptions” that Tara Pauliny calls for in “Queering the Institution: Politics and Power in the Assistant Professor Administrator Position.” Likewise, both Harry Denny’s “Queering the Writing Center” and Jonathan Doucette’s “Composing Queers: The Subversive Potential of the Writing Center” outline the productive interplay of queer theory with writing center theory and practice.

But there are certainly more problems to pose regarding the application of queer theory in the writing center.

- How might the inclusion and enactment of queer theory alter or affect a tutor's practice?
- What can queer theory add to discussions about student agency, authority, and ownership of a text? About our own use of directive/non-directive practices?
- How and where is sexual identity performed (or disrupted) on your campus, and how does this affect your center?
- Does queer theory provide an effective practice for speaking into or against the “curious silences” we encounter?

A Call for Further Investigations

Writing centers operate in the contested, interstitial territory between macro-level social structures and micro-level interpersonal communication, in a borderland “where the space between two people shrinks with intimacy” (Anzaldúa 18). It is this relational space where meanings can be multiple, simultaneous, and provisional that we work, and it is from this dissonant inhabitation that we recognize both the relevance and applicability of queer theory. “Queerness,” according to Alexander and Wallace, “helps us to see the important connections between our personal stories and the stories that our culture tells about intimacy, identity, and connection” (303).

As noted, queer theory isn’t for LGBTQIA people alone, nor do the issues it raises affect only queer people. Like any critical theory, queer theory is a critically self-reflexive stance, encouraging everyone “to turn a critical eye to their own positionalities and embrace their own loose-ended assemblage” (Macintosh 40). Furthermore, queer theory insists we recognize our own complicity within the larger, institutional forces of homophobia and heteronormativity. Because these institutions condition all of us, LGBTQIA or heterosexual, the responsibility to resist is therefore distributed amongst all of us as well. Utilizing a multitude of positionalities, both from within LGBTQIA

communities and from without, is necessary for sustained and thorough critique. Although the three themes listed above provide a good starting place, they should by no means be seen as the only available avenues for research and scholarship. By further problem-posing along the “queer horizon” (Floyd), we would like to draw out some of the opportunities afforded by taking seriously Harry Denny’s call to queer the writing center.

Alexander and Wallace situate their themes within “the need,” “the desire,” and “the possibility.” Likewise, we advocate for critical reflection upon the needs, desires, and possibilities that reside within and between writing centers and LGBTQIA communities. Where do these communities intersect and interact? Where do they diverge and disagree? We encourage future scholarship that includes pragmatic descriptions and models of how writing centers have reached out to, networked with, or otherwise supported campus LGBTQIA communities, as well as narratives that sustain, strengthen, enrich, and complicate what it means to be an LGBTQIA person in the writing center and on campus—as director, tutor, or student. Furthermore, we are interested in scholarship that explores the dialectic of safety and risk, and examines the nature of the space our centers offer LGBTQIA people, especially dissonant or multivocal readings of those spaces.

We would like to further suggest the rich potential in viewing the writing center as a distinctive institutional site for the study of sexual identity and the enactment of queer theory. Drawing on our epigraph, we recognize the need for something more than a complacent marginalization, or what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the “minoritizing” view that sexual identity is only problematic for LGBTQIA communities (qtd. in Alexander and Wallace 301). The writing center, as always already transdisciplinary and interconnected, has a solid tradition of engaging with the dialectic between embracing and resisting institutional marginalization, and perhaps this history can serve as a model for queer people in the writing center: institutional marginalization can be an opportunity for creativity, play, and subversion (see Brannon & North; Davis; Mahala). Michael Pemberton explains that today’s “distributed” centers, while still often misunderstood, are expanding throughout their campuses, reaching “all of the physical and virtual spaces where tutors can now meet and work with writers” (“A Finger in Every Pie” 98). As Judith Butler suggests in our epigraph (xxxvi), networking with other marginal zones is crucial, and the writing center, with its multiplicity of students and

tutors and their multiplicity of identities and motivations, can become a key site for investigating intersectionality on campus.

The writing center is distinctive not only in its institutional positioning, but in the unique ways tutors and students interact. In their article “Coming-Out Pedagogy: Risking Identity in Language and Literature Classrooms,” Brenda Jo Brueggemann and Debra Modellmog write that “[i]n the classroom we head toward the *continual* rather than the *momentary*, turning the naming of our identities from a *onetime* confession into a *process* linked to a theory about identity” (315, emphasis added). The writing center, however, is characterized by sessions that last less than an hour. How might tutors discuss identity in these “momentary” sessions, de-linked from the semester-long processes that typify most academic discourse on queer identity? Alexander and Wallace note the importance of simply “[i]ncluding the usually excluded, speaking the unspoken, and saying the words *gay*, *lesbian*, *homosexual*, and *transgendered* without blushing” (317, emphasis in original). In those moments, tutors can leverage the relative institutional status of the writing center and disrupt the silence of heteronormative expectations. Furthermore, tutors and students may choose to “come out” or “pass” during sessions (Denny, “Queering”), and by allowing for reflection on how those choices affect the often-discussed “rapport” between student and tutor, the writing center can become a key site for investigating what it means to negotiate identity on the fly, in unpremeditated moments of intimacy.

Further discussing the consequences of coming out in the classroom, Brueggemann and Modellmog note that “our identities pose risks: that the academic might explode into the personal” (314). Indeed, the intimacy of the one-on-one writing center session makes these explosions into the personal not only possible, but likely. As a site of in-betweenness, both institutionally and interpersonally, the writing center seems particularly poised to engage in the “productive disruptions” (Pauliny) that queer theory affords. We call on the writing center community to take seriously the consideration of LGBTQIA people on our campuses and in our centers, and to engage in what Harry Denny has called “the perpetual tango of identity invoked and differed” (“Queering” 42). We hope to see the conversations initiated by the articles in our bibliography continued, expanded, and enriched in multiple ways, by scholars publishing in our field, by participants joining in the LGBTQ SIG (both online and at conferences), and by countless (but too often uncounted) tutors sharing and discussing their

experiences in writing centers everywhere. We look forward to hearing what other, future voices have to say in the face of heteronormativity and the “curious silence” that so frequently surrounds and isolates our community.

Note

¹ Anyone interested in joining the SIG’s listserv can do so by signing up at the following webpage: <<http://groups.google.com/group/wcenter-lgbtq>>

Works Cited

- Alexander, Jonathan and David Wallace. “The Queer Turn in Composition Studies: Reviewing and Assessing an Emerging Scholarship.” *College Composition and Communication* 61.1 (2009): 300-320. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987. Print.
- Bawarshi, Anis and Stephanie Pelkowski. “Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center.” *The Writing Center Journal* 19.2 (1999): 41-58. Print.
- Bennet, B. Cole. “Student Rights, Home Languages, and Political Wisdom in the Writing Center.” *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 32.5 (2008): 7-10. Print.
- Birnbaum, Lisa C. “Toward a Gender-Balanced Staff in the Writing Center.” *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 19.8 (1995): 6-7. Print.
- Brannon, Lil and Stephen M. North. “The Uses of the Margins.” *The Writing Center Journal* 20.2 (2000): 7-12. Print.
- Brueggemann, Brenda Jo and Debra A. Modellmog. “Coming-Out Pedagogy: Risking Identity in Language and Literature Classrooms.” *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 2.3 (2002): 311-335. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Condon, Frankie. “Beyond the Known: Writing Centers and the Work of Anti-Racism.” *The Writing Center Journal* 27.2 (2007): 19-38. Print.
- Davis, Kevin. “Life Outside the Boundary: History and Direction in the Writing Center.” *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 20.2 (1995): 5-7. Print.
- Darrup, Cathy. “What’s My Role? When a Student is Offensive to You: Where (How?) to Draw the Line.” *The Dangling Modifier* 1.1 (1994): 2-4. Web. 14 June 2012.
- Dees, Sarah, Beth Godbee, and Moira Ozias. “Navigating Conversational Turns: Grounding Difficult Discussions on Racism.” *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 5.1 (2007): n. pag. Web. 14 June 2012.
- Denny, Harry. “A curious silence and a longish response.” Message to *WCenter*. 8 Oct. 2010. E-mail.
- . “Queering the Writing Center.” *The Writing Center Journal* 25.2 (2005): 39-62. Print.
- Diab, Rasha, Thomas Ferrel, Beth Godbee, and Neil

- Simpkins. "A Multi-Dimensional Pedagogy for Racial Justice in Writing Centers." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 10.1 (2012): 1-8. Web.
- Dickerson, Curtis and Jonathan Rylander. "Queer Consulting: Assessing the Degree to Which Differences Affect a Writing Consultation." *ECWCA* Fall (2011): 7-8. Web.
- Doucette, Jonathan. "Composing Queers: The Subversive Potential of the Writing Center." *Young Scholars in Writing: Undergraduate Research in Writing and Rhetoric* 8 (2011): 5-15. Web. 14 June 2012.
- Floyd, Kevin. *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print.
- Geller, Anne Ellen, Frankie Condon, and Meg Carroll. "Bold: The Everyday Writing Center and the Production of New Knowledge in Antiracist Theory and Practice." Greenfield and Rowan 101-123.
- Green, Ann E. "'The Quality of Light': Using Narrative in a Peer Tutoring Class." Greenfield and Rowan 255-272.
- Greenfield, Laura and Karen Rowan, eds. *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2011. Print.
- Gunter, Kim. "Queer Disruption in the Rural South: Institutionality and the Viability of Queer Composition." *Open Words: Access and English Studies* 2.1 (2008): 69-91. Web. 14 June 2012.
- Hitt, Allison. "Access for All: The Role of Dis/Ability in Multiliteracy Centers." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 9.2 (2012): 1-7. Web.
- Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. NY: New York University Press, 1996. Print.
- Jukuri, Stephen Davenport. "Negotiating the 'Subject' of Composition: Writing Centers as Spaces of Productive Possibilities." *Stories from the Center: Connecting Narrative and Theory in the Writing Center*. Eds. Briggs, Lynn Craigue, and Meg Woolbright. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000. 51-69. Print.
- Kjesrud, Roberta. "LGBTQ SIG at IWCA, was...Clementi." Message to *WCenter*. 12 Oct. 2010. E-mail.
- Kumashiro, Kevin. "Queer Ideals in Education." *Journal of Homosexuality* 45.2-4 (2003): 365-367. Print.
- Lutes, Jean Marie. "Why Feminists Make Better Tutors: Gender and Disciplinary Expertise in a Curriculum-Based Tutoring Program." *Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation*. Eds. Paula Gillespie, Alice Gillam, Lady Falls Brown, and Byron Stay. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002. 235-57. Print.
- Lyons, Greg. "Validating Cultural Difference in the Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal* 12.2 (1992): 145-18. Print.
- Macintosh, Lori. "Does Anyone Have a Band-Aid? Anti-Homophobia Discourses and Pedagogical Implications." *Educational Studies* 41.1 (2007): 33-43. Print.
- Mahala, Daniel. "Writing Centers in the Managed University." *The Writing Center Journal* 27.2 (2007): 3-17. Print.
- Mulvihill, Peter, Keith Nitta and Molly Wingate. "Into the Fray: Ethnicity and Tutor Preparation." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 19.7 (1995): 1-5. Print.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. "Crusing the Toilet: LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity." *GLQ* 13.2-3 (2007): 353-367. Print.
- Pauliny, Tara. "Queering the Institution: Politics and Power in the Assistant Professor Administrator Position." *Enculturation: A Journal for Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture* 10 (2011): 1-14. Web. 14 June 2012.
- Pemberton, Michael A. "A Finger in Every Pie: The Expanding Role of Writing Centers in Writing Instruction." *Writing and Pedagogy* 1.1 (2009): 89-100. Print.
- . "Do What I Tell You Because You Control Your Own Writing." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 22.2 (1997): 13-14. Print.
- . "The Ethics of Content: Rhetorical Issues in Writing Center Conferences." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 23.8 (1999): 10-12. Print.
- . "Equity Issues in Hiring for the Writing Center." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 22.5 (1998): 14-15. Print.
- . "Mediating Between Students and Faculty." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 23.2 (1998): 14-16. Print.
- . "Safe Sex in the Writing Center." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 20.6 (1996): 14-15. Print.
- Petrucci, Michele L. "Sacred Spaces: Tutoring Religious Writing." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 27.1 (2002): 10-11. Print.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Experience." *Blood, Bread, Poetry: Selected Prose*. Ed. Adrienne Rich. New York: Norton, 1986. 23-75. Print.
- Rothgery, David. "'So What Do We Do Now?' Necessary Directionality as the Writing Teacher's Response to Racist, Sexist, Homophobic Papers." *College Composition and Communication* 44.2 (1993): 241-247. Print.
- Seeley, Gabrielle. "A Delicate Balance: Employing Feminist Process Goals in Writing Center Consulting." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* Fall (2005): n. pag. Web. 14 June 2012.
- Sloan, Jay D. "Centering Difference: Student Agency and the Limits of 'Comfortable' Collaboration." *Dialogue: A Journal for Writing Specialists* 8.2 (2003): 63-74. Print.
- . "Closet Consulting." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 21.10 (1997): 9-10. Print.
- . "RE: another longish response about Clementi." Message to *WCenter*. 10 Oct. 2010. E-mail.
- Smith, Eric Steven. "Making Room for Fat Studies in Writing Center Theory & Practice." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 10.1 (2012): 1-7. Web.
- Suhr-Sytsma, Mandy and Shan-Estelle Brown. "Addressing the Everyday Language of Oppression in the Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal* 31.2 (2011):13-49. Print.
- Taylor, David. "A Reader Comments . . ." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 13.4 (1988): 8. Print.
- Villanueva, Victor. "Blind: Talking about the New Racism." *The Writing Center Journal* 26.1 (2006): 3-19. Print.

Wilde, Patty. "Exploring Issues of Attraction in Writing Center Tutorials." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 28.4 (2003): 13-15. Print.

Woolbright, Meg. "The Politics of Tutoring: Feminism Within the Patriarchy." *The Writing Center Journal* 13.1 (1992): 16-30. Print.

Appendix: An Annotated Bibliography of LGBTQIA/Writing Center Scholarship

Darrup, Cathy. "What's My Role? When a Student is Offensive to You: Where (How?) to Draw the Line." *The Dangling Modifier* 1.1 (1994): 2-4. Web. 14 June 2012.

Writing as a tutor, Darrup describes an uncomfortable session in which the student makes offensive comments with regard to race, sex, and sexual identity. The comments, however, are not contained within his "neutral" sounding paper, but within his general conversation, leading Darrup to wonder whether or not it is appropriate or professional to address them. In the end she does address them, but is left wondering how such conduct reflects on both her and the writing center.

Denny, Harry. "Queering the Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal* 25.2 (2005): 39-62. Print.

Denny calls on the writing center community to engage more meaningfully with issues of identity, focusing on queer identities in particular. Viewing the work of the writing center through the critical lens of queer theory, Denny concentrates on two practices: "passing" and "coming out." Just as LGBTQIA people sometimes "pass" by adopting heterosexual norms, so too do marginalized students attempt to pass in academia. And just as LGBTQIA people engage in a process of "coming out," Denny suggests that tutors who "come out" and disclose their own struggles or marginalizations can ease the process for other students. These queered processes are, according to Denny, capable of demystifying and de-naturalizing the normative practices of academia.

---. "Facing Sex and Gender in the Writing Center." *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring*.

Logan, Utah: Utah State UP, 2010. 87-112. Print.

From his book interrogating multiple "faces" of the writing center (chapters include race & ethnicity, class, sex & gender, and nationality), this chapter discusses the possibilities of assimilation, opposition, or subversion in regard to normative constructs of sex, gender, and sexual identity. In "facing" these issues, Denny works to theorize sexual politics by first

looking at its recent political histories and connecting these histories to composition and the writing center. He proceeds to discuss how writing centers may "cover" or conceal sexual politics, then expands his view to how we might "foreground" and queer such politics. Although the chapter title only references sex and gender, sexuality is highlighted throughout, with examples of sexual politics both disturbing and heartening.

Dickerson, Curtis and Jonathan Rylander. "Queer Consulting: Assessing the Degree to Which Differences Affect a Writing Consultation." *ECWCA* Fall (2011): 7-8. Web. 14 June 2012.

Based on a group presentation at the ECWCA conference, two tutors discuss ways queer identities can manifest themselves in writing center work. Viewing the writing center as a workplace, they look at the necessity of safe working conditions for LGBTQIA tutors and the ethics of asking tutors to go "beyond what is relevant to the text" and become agents of change on campus. The authors find no easy answers and end in disagreement over the role of a tutor, suggesting the complexity of such issues.

Doucette, Jonathan. "Composing Queers: The Subversive Potential of the Writing Center." *Young Scholars in Writing: Undergraduate Research in Writing and Rhetoric* 8 (2011): 5-15. Web. 14 June 2012.

Weaving academic discourse with personal narrative, Doucette looks at the compulsory heterosexuality and historic amnesia regarding LGBTQIA people in the field of composition. Doucette finds a place for himself – both theoretically and physically—as a tutor in the writing center, a site he describes as a "potentially subversive queer space." He focuses on the transformative queer potential of the center, in particular the way interdisciplinary knowledge can queer the process of knowledge production for both students and tutors.

Eodice, Michele. "Introduction to 'Queering the Center.'" *The Writing Center Journal* 30.1 (2010): 92-94. Print.

In 2010, Denny's article "Queering the Writing Center" was included in *The Writing Center Journal's* "alternative history" special issue. Eodice provides a brief introduction to the article, extolling some of its merits. She notes her own reluctance to allow queer theory to inform her writing center work. Eodice writes that queer theory is not necessarily tied to any individual identity, but rather a way to view identities. She notes the positive reactions of tutors who read

Denny's essay and suggests viewing queer theory "as one more lens you can adopt."

Geller, Anne Ellen, Frankie Condon, and Meg Carroll. "Bold: The Everyday Writing Center and the Production of New Knowledge in Antiracist Theory and Practice." *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*. Eds. Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2011. 101-123. Print.

In this book chapter, the authors seek to narrate what it means to take up racism and antiracism within the "institutional, administrative, and pedagogical implications" of writing center work. With a focus on "white shame," the authors unpack several stories from their own centers. In one such story, a first-year student shares a paper focused on experiences of racial prejudice, and in response, a tutor uses her own experiences as a lesbian to "empathize with the student's experience of prejudice." Though emotionally difficult, this intersection of identities was ultimately effective. Having made a powerful emotional connection with her tutor, the student reported that the session made her feel more confident.

Green, Ann E. "The Quality of Light: Using Narrative in a Peer Tutoring Class." *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*. Eds. Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2011. 255-272. Print.

In her book chapter detailing discussions of "race/racism, gender/sexism, and sexuality" in a peer tutoring class, Ann Green describes her process of having tutors first utilize "prior texts" to engage in difficult conversations about identity before telling their own "tutor tales." One prior text is "Bi, Butch, and Bar Dyke: Pedagogical Performances of Class, Gender, and Sexuality" by Michelle Gibson, Martha Marinara, and Deborah Meem. The group of tutors reading the essay includes "one person who identified as a lesbian, one who identified as questioning, and two who identified as straight and feminist." These tutors go on to work with, and against, both the essay and their identities in productive ways.

Herb, Maggie and Virginia Perdue. "Creating Alliances Across Campus: Exploring Identities and Institutional Relationships." *Before and After the Tutorial: Writing Centers and Institutional Relationships*. Eds. Robert Koch, William Macauley, and Nicholas Mauriello, 2011. 75-88. Print.

In this book chapter, the authors recall their experiences reaching out to multiple campus resources in an effort to diversify their tutor training program. They focus on two sessions: one from counseling services about working with traumatic writing, the other from Safe Zone presenters about LGBTQIA issues. In the Safe Zone presentation, tutors are quick to talk about overtly homophobic papers, but fall silent when asked to consider their own roles in making the writing center more LGBTQIA friendly. Reflecting on this silence, and the apparent confusion of some tutors for the "real reason" behind the Safe Zone session, the authors consider ways more sustained dialogue – before and after the sessions – could positively affect the sessions' impact.

Jukuri, Stephen Davenport. "Negotiating the 'Subject' of Composition: Writing Centers as Spaces of Productive Possibilities." *Stories from the Center: Connecting Narrative and Theory in the Writing Center*. Eds. Briggs, Lynn Craigie, and Meg Woolbright. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000. 51-69. Print.

Providing three stories about working with writers in the writing center, Jukuri raises questions central to how our subjectivities shape our identity as writers. He views the writing center as a site where these subjectivities are made more visible, and uses his article to "think through" the questions they raise. In one story, the author wrestles with whether or not to disclose his sexual identity to a student, wondering whether or not the student can "handle it." He considers the way(s) it will complicate their working relationship, and in negotiating his own subjectivity, finds himself guarding his language.

Pauliny, Tara. "Queering the Institution: Politics and Power in the Assistant Professor Administrator Position." *Enculturation: A Journal for Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture* 10 (2011): 1-14. Web. 14 June 2012.

Writing as a Writing Program Administrator who is also an Assistant Professor Administrator, Pauliny notes the inherent "queerness" of such a position. Although the focus is on the queer identity of the APA, in one anecdote the author notes the "productive disruption" she created while serving as director of the Writing Center. Her disruption was able to challenge to binaries of administrator/faculty and expert/novice. Pauliny views the act of disrupting the function and reproduction of institutionalized norms as a key component of queer theory, and one applicable to anyone occupying a state of academic in-betweenness.

Sloan, Jay D. "Closet Consulting." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 21.10 (1997): 9-10. Print.

In this Tutor's Column, the author, an "increasingly 'Out' gay graduate student on a Catholic Jesuit campus," must negotiate his reactions to a student writing on the "sin of homosexuality." Sloan details his struggle to confront and move beyond his own private fears—his own lifelong battle with a similar religious rhetoric which kept him in the closet for years—in order to reach out to and engage his "earnest" young student in a productive writing center session.

---. "Centering Difference: Student Agency and the Limits of 'Comfortable' Collaboration." *Dialogue: A Journal for Writing Specialists* 8.2 (2003): 63-74. Print.

Now a writing center director, Sloan revisits his 1997 session with "Young Earnest" to reconsider the limitations of the "comfort-based" pedagogies he had utilized as a tutor, pedagogies still commonly advocated by writing center practitioners. Suggesting that the evasion of conflict and confrontation may actually and fundamentally disempower student writers, the author explores ways he might have better served the student by functioning as what Walter Lippmann once called "the Indispensable Opposition."

Suhr-Sytsma, Mandy and Shan-Estelle Brown. "Addressing the Everyday Language of Oppression in the Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal* 31.2 (2011):13-49. Print.

The authors seek to confront oppression in a broad and inclusive sense, with racism foregrounded, by looking at opportunities for tutors to leverage their language and resist deploying oppressive language and thought. While not addressing homophobia directly, the authors do include "gay" in one listing of Othered identities, noting that such identities are often treated disrespectfully by students. The authors also discuss a bisexual tutor who has dealt with oppressive, homophobic language—not in a tutoring session, but from her roommate. As a result, the tutor worried about being outed and altered her behavior. This example is used to show that language – despite the intentions of a speaker or writer – can have serious impact.