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FROM THE EDITORS: THE WRITER IN/AND THE WRITING CENTER

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The publication of this issue of *Praxis* follows the 2015 South Central Writing Center Association (SCWCA) conference held at the University of Texas at Austin in February of this year. The address, articles, column, and book review contained in the current issue vary in their focus and emphases, but all take the theme of the 2015 SCWCA conference, 'What Starts Here Writes the World,' as their central argument.

Lester Faigley, in his keynote speech delivered at the conference, argues that writing centers are deeply human places in an evolutionary sense, and that their success grows directly from the ways writing consultations use the same cognitive adaptations that enabled us, as humans, to form social groups in the first place. In their column on the International Long Night Against Procrastination, Elizabeth Kiscaden and LeAnn Nash suggest some strategies for bringing more students into the writing center through creative outreach programs while Brianna Hyslop, in her review of Ben Rafoth's *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers*, describes Rafoth's suggestions for how we work with multilingual writers once they enter.

In our focus articles for this issue Andrea Deacon, Becky L. Caouette, Claudine Griggs, and Amanda Metz Bemer all take different paths toward a richer understanding of writing centers as institutional entities. Deacon, Caouette and Griggs focus on the ways writing center directors can work within administrative structures to represent their centers most effectively, either by their own efforts or in collaboration with departmental colleagues and students, and also on the challenges inherent to working within institutional structures that don't always recognize the importance or understand the function of writing centers. Amanda Metz Bemer asks us to see writing centers through a very different lens, the screen of a computer, and to ponder how website design and the availability of online tutoring mold a student's experience of the writing center; both Bemer's focus article and Kiscaden and Nash's column remind us that for the writing center to 'write the world' we must first get writers in the door, while Deacon, Caouette, and Griggs remind us of how difficult it can be to keep those doors open.

While the publication of this issue of *Praxis* follows one important milestone already mentioned, there is another important milestone the *Praxis* editorial staff would like to mark here. Sarah Orem, a wonderful colleague and editor, leaves us after this issue to pursue her academic career elsewhere, and James Garner will replace her as one of the Managing Editors of *Praxis*. While James has a short history with *Praxis*, having written for *Axis*, the blog associated with this journal, he has a much longer history with writing centers and writing center research. We welcome him as an asset to the team and we look forward to having him as a colleague.

WHY WRITING CENTERS WORK: ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE SOUTH CENTRAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE, 13 FEBRUARY 2015

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My title contains the first of many generalizations I will issue. I forewarn you that I will be painting with a very broad brush, more like a road roller than a paint roller. That said, I do believe that writing centers do work for the most part, and I take as primary evidence their popularity among those who come to writing centers and the enthusiasm among those who work in writing centers. My experience is confirmed by many surveys that conclude people who visit writing centers are overwhelmingly satisfied. To say that writing centers are usually successful for all involved is not to say that they inevitably succeed; they don't. The demise of the first writing center at the University of Texas at Austin is one counter example, a center brought down by a lack of staff, low visibility, a minuscule budget, and, decisively, by a lack of administrative support. You know the story. Nonetheless, I hope you grant my premise—that while writing centers are not epiphytes, living only on what they can draw from the air, they still can blossom on the thinnest of soils on rocky cliffs.

Which brings me to the question: Why do they work? I'm going to offer two explanations. The first is from the perspective of the development of writing programs in American higher education in the twentieth century. I'm giving only a quick sketch because this ground is familiar. Although rhetoric was taught first in colleges in colonial America and the early national period, the principal mission of those institutions was to train ministers in the orthodoxy of the sponsoring denominations. Courses devoted primarily to writing instruction are a post-Civil War phenomenon, springing up at the same time as the establishment of land-grant universities following the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 and the diversification of the curriculum into the disciplines of the sciences, applied sciences, and social sciences that we know today. The number of colleges continued to grow and the curriculum continued to expand into the first decades of the twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1920, writing courses diversified into advanced writing, technical writing, business writing, journalism, and creative writing courses (Berlin 55-56). At this

time the forerunners of writing centers also appear. Peter Carino, in a 1995 article in *Writing Center Journal*, observes that as early as 1904 writing courses using the "laboratory method" were based on peer-editing groups and individual consulting from the instructor. Carino traces how these courses evolved into stand-alone writing labs of the 1930s, 40s, 50s, and 60s, facing issues similar to those of writing centers today: Whom should they serve? What services should they provide? What form should consulting sessions take?

Following World War II, the dominant trends in American higher education have been the explosive growth of enrollment and the diversity of the new students. Enrollment at degree-granting postsecondary institutions rose from 2.1 million in 1951 to 4.1 million in 1961, 8.9 in 1971, 12.4 in 1981, 14.4 in 1991, 15.9 in 2001, reaching 21 million in 2011 (United States). The more than doubling of students between 1961 and 1971 produced a crisis in American higher education because many were first-generation college students, often lacking not simply preparation for college work but also the ability to adapt to an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile culture. One response to this deluge of students was the creation of writing centers, which seemed to fit hand-and-glove with the spread of basic writing programs. Susan Mendelsohn notes that a number of writing center scholars (for example, Michael Pemberton and Joyce Kinhead) acknowledge a longer history of writing centers but claim that the writing center movement began in the 1970s.

Certainly writing centers proliferated during the 1970s and no doubt the larger institutional and social contexts were favorable to their spread. Certainly the exponential increase in the number of college students was a major contributing factor. But there are also reasons to question the direct linkage between rise of writing centers and the expansion of college writing programs.

First, many writing center professionals do not associate the development of writing centers with college writing programs. The influx of students following World War II brought pressure to offer remedial writing instruction, and as early as 1950,

Robert Moore attempted to distinguish the remedial instruction in “writing clinics” from the voluntary workshops in writing labs. The issue was far from settled by 1984 when Stephen North published his landmark essay, “The Idea of a Writing Center.” North starts with this sentence: “This is an essay that began out of frustration” (433). He concludes the first paragraph with these words about his colleagues: “[They] do not understand what I do. They do not understand what does happen, what can happen, in a writing center” (433). In 2012, writing center director Alexandria Janney observes in reading North’s article, “It was a little disappointing and frustrating to see how much has remained the same since 28 years ago when this article was written.”

Second, writing center practices have had strong external influences. Well documented in the issues of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, begun by Muriel Harris in 1976, are the influences of feminism. For example, Roxanne Cullen in 1992 writes that concepts of “connected learning” and “connected teaching” set out in Belenky et al.’s *Women’s Ways of Knowing* “seem appropriate terms for articulating that special learning that occurs at the Writing Center” (2). Less well documented is the influence of the citizenship schools of the Civil Rights Movement. The woman Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to as “The Mother of the Movement,” Septima Poinsette Clark, was one of the leaders in establishing meeting places in the Deep South where African Americans who had been denied adequate education could learn literacy skills such as filling out forms, writing checks, and ordering by mail (Olson 213-15). Today, many writing centers are not situated in American colleges. They have sprung up in high schools, after school programs, community-based centers, and increasingly around the world where the histories of secondary and higher education differ significantly from those in the United States. Thus, there is no singular writing center movement or trajectory of development.¹

Moreover, the brief narrative of American higher education I have offered says almost nothing to answer the question I am posing: Why do writing centers work? North considers this question in terms of individual consultations in “The Idea of a Writing Center” when he argues that the job of the writing centers is “to produce better writers, not better writing” (438). I will examine North’s argument shortly, but it’s equally important to interrogate the idea of a center—a group of people working together with certain shared assumptions. I would like to widen the scope and history far beyond the eighty or so years that stand-alone writing labs and writing centers have existed. I’m going to do what used to be known as a

Carl Sagan move but today is probably known as a Neal deGrasse Tyson move—in other words, billions and billions.

Actually just seven or so million years. That’s when our primate ancestors divided from chimpanzees. For most of those millions of years, our ancestors shared space with other closely related species. Around 200,000 years ago the first anatomically modern humans appeared from which all 7.3 billion of us on the planet today descended. The eruption of a volcano in modern Indonesia between 77,000 and 69,000 years ago caused a climate catastrophe that reduced humans to critically endangered status between 1,000 and 10,000 breeding pairs, but the population bounced back and spread quickly into Europe and across Asia, reaching Australia no later than 46,000 years ago. Humans moved up the Danube about 40,000 years ago, encountering their larger cousins, the Neanderthals. By 30,000 years ago the Neanderthals were gone. When the last ice age ended around 11,000 years ago and the Neolithic revolution saw the beginnings of agriculture and settlement, *Homo sapiens* were alone in an evolutionary sense (Gamble, Gowlett, and Dunbar 12).

The different evolutionary paths are evident today in the physical contrasts between humans and the other great primates, which evolved powerful jaw muscles that allowed them to chew up leaves and other vegetable matter. Humans meanwhile developed much larger brains, but brain tissue requires over 20 times as much energy to run as the equivalent in muscle tissue (Navarette, van Schaik, and Isler). So what was the evolutionary advantage?

This question has been the focus of a great deal of recent research across several disciplines including palaeoanthropology, cognitive archaeology, and evolutionary psychology, much of it funded by the British Academy. In 1992, Robin Dunbar, a professor of anthropology and evolutionary psychology at Oxford, confirmed what was long suspected—that brain size or more precisely the neocortex size is strongly correlated to group size in primates. Primates are highly social, maintaining their personal contact with other members of their group typically by grooming. When a group exceeds its species limit, it fractures. For humans at some point in their evolutionary history, physical forms of grooming were replaced by speech and the exchange of social information. Speech has several advantages over physical grooming. It can be done while being engaged in other activities such as eating. It can involve multiple people at one time. And it allows people to

find out about events they did not witness and thus form judgments about others.

Dunbar's equation predicts that the size of a human social network is limited to about 150 individuals—known as Dunbar's number—which has become popularized in books and periodicals. At first glance, this number appears absurdly low; after all, the majority of humans now live in cities. Of course we can be acquainted with far more than 150 people. The upper limit is based on long-term memory, with the maximum ability to connect names with faces at around 1,500 to 2,000. But Dunbar is interested in the maximum number of people who can maintain stable social relationships, in other words, how many people you can keep tabs on at any one time. Studies have supported Dunbar's number in various contemporary settings, including social media (e.g. Gonçalves, Perra, and Vespitnani). Indeed, the number is typically much smaller than 150; the maximum number of good friends is more like 50 (Gamble, Gowlett, and Dunbar 52).

Social networks require an enormous amount of cognitive energy to maintain because individuals have to infer what the other individuals in the group are thinking and adjust their behavior to accommodate the interests of others as well as to advance their own interests. This process, called *mentalizing*, depends on the volume of specific regions of the neocortex. This research provides insights about how all humans lived as hunter-foragers in times before agriculture and settlement. DNA and archaeological research indicate that humans in the period between 200,000 and 11,000 years ago lived in groups of about 30 to 45 individuals. There weren't anthropologists around to observe them, but we do have accounts of hunter-foragers in modern times that present a remarkably consistent picture. Hunter-foragers were for the most part egalitarian, which is notable from an evolutionary perspective because chimpanzees, our closest relatives, are anything but egalitarian, with groups dominated by alpha males (Boehm). Hunter-foragers did not have chiefs or leaders as such. Decisions were made and disputes settled by the group. Two causes account for this egalitarianism. First, hunter-foragers needed to move frequently to find food, hence they couldn't accumulate much property. Second, they needed work by coalition to avoid creating dominance hierarchies that would threaten the cohesion of the group. Hunter-foragers fostered norms that promoted the values of sharing and generosity. The only person who had a limited leadership role was an elder who guided the band on where to go to find food.

Reading about hunter-foragers reminded me of my time as a writing center director. My role was

principally that of the elder who was charged with finding the food. The initiatives that the writing center undertook were ones that grew from the group, such as creating an online writing resource. We had training sessions, but the real leadership came from the staff and experienced consultants who demonstrated the values of the writing center through their constant dedication and enthusiasm. The people who worked in the writing center established behavioral norms. Many writing teachers have similar values, but writing centers possess the advantage of having these values expressed as a group.

Over a century ago the pioneering French sociologist Émile Durkheim recognized the social value of coming together to share an experience, which he called *effervescence*. Communal participation amplifies the intensity and enjoyment of a wide range of activities from playing and watching sports to singing in a choir to laughing in a comedy club. Jane McGonigal makes a similar proposal in *Reality is Broken* when she contends that the appeal of online multiplayer games is based on intrinsic rewards. She claims that humans crave satisfying work, the experience of being good at something, the building of bonds, and the chance to be part of something larger than ourselves. According to McGonigal, online multiplayer games deliver these rewards. I would argue that writing centers provide all of these rewards to the people who work in them, plus the added satisfaction of gaining knowledge and doing something socially useful.

But what about people who come to the writing center? They may benefit from the writing center ethos, but most don't enter the community beyond the short time of the consulting session. What is it, then, that makes a consulting session work? Stephen North explores this question in "The Idea of a Writing Center." He writes,

We always want the writer to tell us about the rhetorical context—what the purpose of the writing is, who its audience is, how the writer hopes to present herself. We want to know about other constraints—deadlines, earlier experiences with the same audience or genre, research completed or not completed, and so on. (443)

North comes to the conclusion that the essence of the writing center method is talking, no matter what kind of writing is brought to the center.

From what can be externally observed, I agree with North. The question is what is going on that cannot be externally observed in the big neocortex of the writing center consultant. Humans have not only

the ability to use language but also the ability to infer mental states of other people and their intentions. Think for a moment about sarcasm. Something—the tone of voice, a facial expression, or the outrageousness of a statement in a particular context—tips us off that speakers might mean the opposite of what they seem to say. By five years old children have the ability to recognize that people have minds of their own, what psychologists call “theory of mind.” This ability continues to develop as people grow to adulthood. The majority of adults can manage five levels of what philosophers refer to *intentionality* (Dennett). The following statement gives a quick example of five-level intentionality with each verb indicating a level: “I *wonder* whether you *suppose* that I *intend* that you *think* that I *believe* X” (Gamble, Gowlett, and Dunbar 52). Some people can cope with even higher levels of intentionality, and I suspect that many of them work in writing centers.

A consultant engages in this kind of complex mental gymnastics in a writing center session. Typically when a person enters a writing center, he or she is asked to check in and is met by a consultant who greets the person. After a few preliminaries such as checking on previous visits and explaining procedures, the consultant invites the writer to present the task that she or he has brought to the center, for example, a personal statement for a law school application. Personal statements are not part of the curriculum, so the writer has few resources for help besides the writing center. The consultant might begin by asking the writer about specific goals for the session besides gaining admission to law school. When the writer and the consultant read the statement together, the consultant’s neocortex must shift into high gear. The consultant has to analyze the persona created in the writer’s text, imagine the faceless readers of the personal statement and their likely expectations in terms of the writer’s goals, the conventions of the genre, the ability to write well, and, furthermore, how these match up or fail to match up. Simultaneously the consultant has to formulate what she or he will subsequently discuss with the writer. When the discussion begins, the consultant has to keep all of these trains of thought active while talking about the writer’s draft statement and respond to what the writer has to say. To succeed the consultant must expand how the writer imagines the task at hand. It’s hard work and it tires you out. (It also burns up a lot of calories, which is one reason writing centers often have snacks readily available.)

Part of the problem behind North’s assertion that our colleagues don’t understand what we do in writing centers is that we don’t have adequate language to

explain what goes on in a writing center. What I have just described cannot be summed up as higher-order concerns or the rhetorical context. The consultant is directly intervening in the writer’s thinking. The consultant, as North observed, is changing the writer, not the writing.

But, in turn, the writing may be changing us. If, in fact, the modern writing center movement dates from the 1970s, I would argue that it came in response to fundamental changes in the United States economy. The shift from an economy that was based on manufacturing and creating goods to one based on services, trade, and finance brought increased demands for advanced literacy. Producing ideas moved to the center of the economy, and those ideas are transmitted mostly through writing.

We may have entered at least a new stage if not a new era in writing centers with the dominance of digital media. Now anyone with access to the Internet can create and publish digital content in a variety of media, calling into question very name *writing center* and leading some to argue for *multiliteracy centers* (Mendelsohn; Sheridan; Trimbur). In one sense the possibilities offered by digital technologies seem endless; in another they do not. Humans are highly adaptable. They can thrive in many different kinds of social organizations. By the time of the end of the last ice age, they had occupied nearly every habitable region of the planet with the exception of a few islands. Clearly the big human neocortex gave advantages beyond those of being able to live in cohesive groups. Our behaviors and diets have evolved along with our technologies. Nevertheless, we *Homo sapiens* are still by and large the same genetic creatures who have been around for a very long time. Dunbar’s number points us to the crux of our problem. Digital technologies have the potential to put us in contact with thousands of other people, but we lack the capacity to carry on interactive relationships with, at most, a few more above Dunbar’s number of 150.

The limitations of Dunbar’s number are critical for inexperienced school writers who imagine their audiences as only their teachers. To succeed beyond college, they will have to write for a great diversity of people who often have conflicting as well as shared interests. For writers who come to the writing center with tasks that they typically find unfamiliar and complex, the experience of having someone address their writing with genuine concern is invaluable. They have for a brief time entered the security of the group and benefitted from the knowledge of the group. The key for writing centers moving forward is how to amplify this experience. I see daily examples of

students working in groups in campus coffee shops. My assumption is that many are self-organized. Writing centers can tap this energy, fostering groups that take advantage of the increasing diversity of the college population to give writers a concrete sense of the audiences they will engage.

We humans bring our Stone Age brains to employ the technologies of the digital era. In spite of our mental limitations, we still possess extraordinary abilities, ones that may, if we are lucky, take us beyond the threats of environmental catastrophes on our immediate horizon. We as a species have an extraordinary knack for coming up with ad hoc solutions to the problems that confront us. There's a simple answer to the question "Why do writing centers work?" It's because we're human.

Notes

¹ We in Western nations tend to associate literacy with formal schooling, even if it is home schooling. Mass literacy, however, is not necessarily connected with mass education. For example, the literacy rate in ancient Rome was likely far higher than previously estimated. Tom Standage contends that the Romans created forerunners of social media with elaborate systems of distributing information by papyrus rolls and wax tablets. While few of these everyday artifacts remain, the graffiti-covered walls of Pompeii frozen in time by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE suggest that literacy extended far down the social ladder. Early historians were not much interested in the graffiti, but more recent scholars have appreciated the value of the political slogans, the advertisements, the witticisms, the sexual boasts, and the vulgar, such as "Secundus defecated here," and what they tell us about the daily lives of ordinary Romans (40).

A modern example of literacy occurring outside of schooling was studied by psychologists Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole in the 1970s among the Vai, an ethnic group in northwestern Liberia. In the early nineteenth century, tribal elders developed an indigenous syllabic writing system for their language that was taught along with other traditional knowledge by women for girls and by men for boys. Literacy taught in the schools was restricted to English and Arabic. The point I am making with these examples is that individualized writing instruction has and can occur outside of formal schooling.

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LONG NIGHT AGAINST PROCRASTINATION: A COLLABORATIVE TAKE ON AN INTERNATIONAL EVENT

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The Long Night Against Procrastination is an international tutoring event created by the writing center at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany in 2010 ("Lange Nacht Der Aufgeschobenen Hausarbeiten"). The inaugural event was established by writing center staff in response to student requests for all-night tutoring support. Where lesser individuals would have chuckled in response to such a request, the writing center at European University Viadrina decided to give it a try. Writing center staff dubbed this event the Long Night Against Procrastination, or rather the *Lange Nacht Der Aufgeschobenen Hausarbeiten*, in German. This annual event has gained recognition and grown, spreading to writing centers at institutions such as DePaul University, University of Manitoba, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Naturally, the name of the event has been adjusted in response; the event is now *Weltweit* (or International) Long Night Against Procrastination.

At Waldorf College, the Writing Center is located within the Luise V. Hansen Library, which eased collaboration on co-hosting the first Long Night Against Procrastination event in the library space during the spring of 2013. Successful collaboration between the writing center and the library has since turned the Long Night events into one of the most popular and engaging semi-annual events on campus. The intent of organizing Long Night events was principally to provide students with support on their writing assignments by offering extended hours and tutors to assist with proofreading, citation style, and developing thesis statements. Librarians also participate in the event, providing students with assistance with locating and evaluating sources. This partnership event blends academic writing with research support, and ensures increased camaraderie between staff and students working on assignments late into the night.

One may well wonder how holding a night focused on procrastination avoids becoming an enabling event. In fact, encouraging students to work at the last minute for one night draws them into the library and writing center services in productive ways

that result in return visits at earlier stages of future projects. Writing center visit numbers have steadily grown since beginning the Long Night events at Waldorf, with visits up by 15% or more per semester. Many students don't avail themselves of writing center or library assistance because they haven't been shown the benefit; getting students in the door during Long Night events overcomes this barrier. Academic procrastination is common among college students, especially undergraduates learning to manage concurrent writing tasks, extracurricular activities, and social lives away from parental control. Long Night events can reduce student anxiety, encouraging them with timely academic support, fun, and access to resources that can help them accomplish the tasks at hand.

The Waldorf College Writing Center has a small staff (the director and eight tutors for the 2013-14 academic year) serving the entire student body. This limits how many students can be served during normal writing center hours, which are based on need, tutor availability, and the director's schedule. All tutors typically work during the Long Night Against Procrastination event, providing a fully-staffed night of access and consequently serving a larger percentage of the student body. This proves particularly beneficial to fine arts students and athletes, whose practice and game times in the evening often prevent access to tutoring support. While professors and instructors encourage student participation in the Long Night events, we have found that many students find their way to writing center help during the event through the encouragement of friends and roommates as well.

Not only does the Long Night give students access to writing center tutoring staff, but it also provides access to library research assistance. Reference librarians are available to assist students with verifying the quality of source materials, locating additional scholarly resources for assignments, and using library guides for citation help and other needs. The events are beneficial in that they attract a number of first-time library users; students are often mandated to attend the event by an advisor or athletic coach, which provides students unfamiliar with the library an

opportunity to work one-on-one with a reference librarian to explore the resources available to them.

Organizing the Event

Through experience, we have determined that choosing an appropriate date for a Long Night event is the most significant factor in determining its success. At the Luise V. Hanson Library facility, Long Night events are organized by a team containing both library and writing center staff, led by the directors of those departments. For the first event organized at Waldorf College, our team chose to hold the event March 8, which closely coincided with the timing of the Long Night international event. Feedback from students and faculty later indicated that the date did not line up well with assignment due dates. In response to this, faculty were solicited to provide input prior to future events, in order to better align the Long Night event with assignment due dates. This communication proved to be essential to the success of subsequent Long Night events our team organized; in fact, several faculty members adjusted the due date of assignments to allow students to benefit from the event. The second Long Night event was later scheduled for mid-November 2013, and participation at this event was three times that of the first.

Another important consideration when planning a Long Night event is the length of time the event will run. How late is late enough? We found that Long Night events at other institutions concluded anywhere from midnight to the wee hours of the morning. The duration of the event may be dictated by the amount of personnel available to staff it. The first event organized at Waldorf College concluded at 3:00 a.m., at which point exhausted staff escorted students from the facility. Based on foot traffic during that first event, we concluded our second event at 2:00 a.m., keeping facilitators more lucid to the event end point. This also made locating volunteers for the later shifts somewhat easier. Library staff and writing center tutors are recruited for the event on a voluntary basis, but the latest shifts are inevitably handled by the writing center and library directors and students who are self-described “night owls.”

Conscription of additional Long Night staff has also been accomplished through the recruitment of faculty volunteers. Students indicated in our first surveys that having their professors available during the event would be beneficial, information that we used to solicit faculty volunteers. Student-faculty interaction is valued at Waldorf College, so it was a fairly easy sell to the faculty members to enlist their assistance. Faculty members from a variety of

disciplines were made available at scheduled hours across the evening, and students readily availed themselves of access to the professors in the informal atmosphere of the event. Faculty members indicated that they appreciated the chance to answer questions and clarify expectations with the students, and the overall sense is that the students’ work was improved as a result of the added interaction. Observing how students approach their assignments outside the classroom venue was also a pedagogical benefit to our faculty. We hope to continue faculty involvement, as it has proven valuable to students, faculty, and to the library/writing center staff.

Our experience also taught us that marketing the event to not just students, but also to faculty, is necessary for a successful event. The marketing department at the college develops a poster template and supplies high-quality posters and bookmarks prior to each event, streamlining campus-wide promotion. Librarians and writing center staff distribute bookmarks to faculty, encouraging them to pass materials on to any struggling students. Other marketing activities for these events include email campaigns, posting on social media, and a story published in the local newspaper.

Our team organizes stations within the library facility for Long Night events, which are staffed by writing center tutors and librarians. Each station is dedicated to a particular aspect of support, such as citing sources, proofreading, or locating information. Due to the number of students that participate in these events, we have found it necessary to dedicate several areas as quiet space as well. A recent Long Night event offered a station for relaxation, presenting a projection of guided relaxation imagery and dim lighting. Surprisingly, student feedback indicated that this was the most popular station offered during the event.

Perhaps the best advice we could give to a team considering holding a Long Night Against Procrastination event is to make it your own and make it entertaining. Various academic institutions make the event unique in their own way: the University of Puget Sound promotes “public declarations of non-procrastination” (University of Puget Sound), and others offer interruptions for guided office yoga (Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison). At New York University Abu Dhabi, students use a “motivation dartboard” to track progress on their goals throughout the event (Datig and Herkner). In order to make the events at Waldorf College as engaging as possible, students are provided with snacks and the opportunity to enter into hourly giveaways. Drawings for giveaways – gift baskets and

college gear – have had the added advantage of offering an incentive to students to provide feedback through a voluntary, anonymous assessment form.

Assessment

In order to plan future events, students are asked to complete an evaluation of each Long Night event, providing feedback on what they thought worked well and what could be improved. At our fall 2013 Long Night event, 86 completed evaluations were received, creating a relatively comprehensive picture. Entering the event, 68% of the students responding assessed their ability to complete their assignment as “good” or “excellent.” Upon exiting, over 90% reported this level of confidence in their ability to complete their assignment. Perhaps the most satisfying metric was that 100% of students evaluated indicated that they would attend a Long Night event in the future.

As with many student events, most suggestions for improvements centered on the quality and quantity of food provided. The team provided a variety of food, including pizza rolls, Chex mix, popcorn, and baked goods, but was unprepared for the turnout at the second event and fell short. Perhaps the most valuable comment from our 2012 inaugural event was the suggestion to make faculty members available during the event to answer questions about assignment requirements, instigating the involvement of faculty at later events. Many students requested that the event be held each semester, and several optimistic students suggested that this event be held every night.

Future Developments

Assessment data have shaped plans for future events; for example, faculty has been recruited to attend events. We also purchased additional food: the college’s theater department offered the use of their industrial popcorn machine for future events, and the dining service offered the use of pizza ovens. Additional media was created: postcards were provided for students to “write home” and tell their families that they are hard at work. Our team hopes to bolster the number of students following the event on Twitter by tweeting updates throughout the night. Events have generated changes and improvements as our team continues to adapt Long Night events to meet the needs of the student population. While the Long Night events at Waldorf College have been campus-focused, the possibility exists to expand this into something more community-based over time. Colleges and universities in larger areas, with active writing groups, may do well to consider including groups outside of the campus as well.

The International Long Night Against Procrastination events have proven both popular and valuable at academic institutions around the globe. Hosting one of these events provides writing centers with an opportunity to collaborate with libraries or academic achievement centers on campus. These events create an atmosphere of serious work and amiable student camaraderie, attracting a number of first-time visitors to the facility. This annual event provides an opportunity to support and engage students on campus. Join the fight against procrastination!

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THE PROBLEM OF “OPPORTUNITY”: NEGOTIATING A WRITING CENTER ADMINISTRATOR’S WAC(KY) PUBLIC IDENTITY

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In his essay, “Writing Centers in the Small College,” Byron Stay explains that the magnified institutional visibility of writing center directors – especially directors on small campuses or directors of new centers – can be problematic and is “not necessarily a good thing” (149). However, he also makes the case that directors can “take advantage of their visibility,” turning it into an opportunity to “incorporate their writing centers into the academic structures of their institutions...especially writing across the curriculum programs” (150). Yet, the line between “problem” and “opportunity” is often tricky to discern, and as a co-founder and co-director of a relatively new campus writing center, I often find myself struggling to figure out how much professional time and energy I want and need to expend when it comes to work that falls outside our writing center’s core mission and day-to-day operations. It’s not uncommon for me to be viewed on campus more as generic writing expert (aka a “writing person”) than a director of a campus center.

For many writing center directors, the boundaries between “problem” and “opportunity” become especially murky when it comes to writing-across-the-curriculum work, particularly for those directors like myself whose campuses lack formalized WAC programs. I will first examine how and why this lack of formalization often results in writing center directors becoming “de facto” WAC leaders on their campuses. Next, I will investigate a host of institutional politics and potential problems facing writing center directors who assume administrative roles and duties for which they are not formally recognized nor compensated. Finally, I will offer up specific strategies to help writing center directors respond to Stay’s call to “take advantage of their visibility” and take responsible action to advocate for their own positions and potentially meaningful and sustainable WAC initiatives on their campuses.

Of course, as Martha Townsend has observed, “WAC programs are highly idiosyncratic,” and they need to be contextualized to be understood (47); therefore, it might be helpful to begin by offering some brief background on the institutional challenges and framework at my particular university, a regional

Midwestern public institution serving approximately 9,000 students. When I arrived as a new faculty member in 2004, there was little in the way of campus-wide writing programs or initiatives, and certainly no writing center. Beyond a newly formed Technical Communication Program, there was essentially no institutional writing culture. In 2005, a departmental colleague and I founded our university’s first writing center, a center whose primary mission involves offering tutoring services to all students on campus via one-on-one consultations by trained peer tutors; we each received (and continue to receive) 25% reassigned time (a one-course reduction from a 4/4 teaching load) to co-direct the center.

Over the past several years, our campus climate has changed and improved: in addition to the creation of the writing center, I was able to formalize our first-year composition program, becoming its first director in 2008. As part of the program, we’ve ushered in curricular reform, created regular professional development workshops for instructors, and pursued grant opportunities. These developments have coincided with the hiring of several Rhetoric and Composition Ph.D.’s in the department who are well-versed in current composition theory and pedagogy. As a result of these developments, in the past several years, we’ve certainly seen glimpses of institutional change, in the growing recognition that composition and “writing studies” is a discipline to be taken seriously and shared across the university.

Despite these positive developments, however, and despite several conversations about some form of sustained WAC activity on campus, my institution still lacks a formal, comprehensive WAC program. By “formal, comprehensive program,” I should clarify that I’m using the definition laid out by Susan McLeod and Elaine Maimon in their classic article, “Clearing the Air: WAC Myths and Realities,” an essay whose principles remain current today and are reflected in the International Network of WAC (INWAC) Programs’ recently published “Statement of WAC Principles and Practices.” Specifically, McLeod and Maimon contend that a strong WAC program should be made up of several elements, all of them intertwined:

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1. Faculty development (workshops, consultations, etc.)
 2. Curricular components (writing emphasis courses, writing in the discipline requirements, etc.)
 3. Student support (workshops, tutoring, etc.)
 4. Assessment
 5. Administrative structure and budget, which they deem "most important" – WAC requires leadership by someone with experience and release (reassigned) time (580-81).

My institution has some of the above elements in place, but not all; while there's been plenty of talk and theoretical support from upper administration to establish the robust program that McLeod and Maimon envision, ultimately no money, release time, or clear "home" for the program has been established.

As on many campuses, we have faced some resistance about the potential curricular components of WAC: the usual debates about what a "writing emphasis" (WE) class would look like; how WE classes could be added to already bloated program plans and requirements; how faculty teaching WE courses would be trained or surveilled, etc. I suspect this experience sounds familiar to many writing center directors at institutions similar to my own. We've even had a few folks offer up the old gem that our "students write well enough," and if they don't, that's the English Department's business. Yet, despite these complaints, of all the elements of WAC on McCleod and Maimon's list, it's the creation of an administrative structure and budget (again, the element they deem "most important"), which is resisted most on our campus. In the aforementioned "Statement of WAC Principles and Practices," the authors share McLeod and Maimon's sentiment, arguing that for a WAC program to be "effective and sustainable," it "requires administrative support such as course releases for program leadership, a standing budget, and support for professional development." Despite how crucial this formal administrative/budget structure is for WAC, it's resisted, I suspect, often because campus administrators don't understand how complex WAC is or should be, or they think that with an existing WPA and/or writing center director on campus, there are enough "writing specialists" to handle all things writing-related on campus.

Taking on Too Much: Assuming the Position of "De Facto" WAC Director

So, in light of this resistance to formalizing a full WAC program, we--either as WPAs or writing center

directors--often find ourselves serving as "de facto" WAC leaders on our campuses: holding workshops, consulting with faculty, doing research, running assessment, etc. This begs the obvious question of: why? Why, even though we know better, are we compelled to take on this work despite little recognition or compensation? Why do we venture into aspects of WAC for which we do not have adequate time or resources? While there are no definitive or easy answers, investigating these questions is important in order to begin solving the problem.

One reason we often take on too much might best be illustrated by way of a 2012 thread on the Writing Center Mailing List (WC listserv). A writing center director noted that her center was about to launch a series of pedagogical writing workshops for faculty across campus and was soliciting advice about what topics to address and how to advertise the sessions. Many participants on the list, while not offering advice, expressed an interest to "hear more" from others, as they, too, had interest in holding similar workshops on their campuses. In the midst of this feel-good sharing, veteran scholar Jeanne Simpson posited a simple question which turned the conversation into a meta-exploration of the issue at hand. "Why," she asked, "is everyone clamoring to do these workshops in the first place?" While she noted that folks might have clear and compelling reasons, she wrote: "There's one reason I hope is absent: the need to cover a sense of inadequacy or low status. If one walks like a victim and quacks like a victim...one will be a victim." Simpson's warning resonated with me, as I, too, have often felt pressure to do extra WAC work under the writing center umbrella, in an effort to "prove my worth" and "earn my keep," especially in times of deep budget cuts and financial uncertainty at my university.

This desire to "prove one's worth" is especially prevalent among new writing center directors or directors of new centers. Reflecting on their own experiences as first-year administrators, Lauren Fitzgerald and Denise Stephenson in their article, "Directors at the Center: Relationships Across Campus," explain that it's easy and tempting to take on too much in the first year since new directors are often "uncertain about the parameters of [their] jobs," and "desperately want to fit into their institutions" and "be seen as contributors" (122). In some cases, new directors may be their own worst enemies, feeling as if they must continually justify their center's worth by taking on additional work or services, even when this work does not clearly relate to their center's mission, fall within the parameters of their job description, or

fit comfortably into their slice of reassigned administrative time. In the race to take on more and more, there is little time to critically assess if anything is being done well; it's also a true recipe for burnout, as directors may feel like firefighters, always "on call" to put out the next blaze for anyone on campus who asks them to.

A second related reason, I believe, writing center directors often become de facto WAC directors could most succinctly be wrapped up in the question: "If not us, then who?" Compositionist Donna Strickland notes that by virtue of our graduate training, rhetoric and composition specialists are "affectively aligned" with writing program administration and are prepared for the "inevitability" of taking on such tasks (80). Given the Rhet/Comp background of many writing center directors, when we see an opportunity to take action, we might panic, knowing that theoretically, we could do the work and do it well. And often, the answer to the "if not us, then who?" question isn't just a black hole of nothingness, but a less savory alternative altogether. Last year, for example, the director of our Teaching and Learning Center on campus approached my fellow writing center codirector and me, asking us to run some faculty WAC workshops on writing assignment design and assessment. She explained that if we were "too busy" to put together a customized workshop, she had discovered some podcasts which offered pre-packaged (and, I discovered, not very current/sound) advice about writing pedagogy that she thought might suffice. After just a cursory review of these podcasts, we found ourselves rolling up our sleeves and planning the workshop—feeling as if we had to step in and save the day.

Tackling the Politics of "WAC-Lite"

While these reasons for becoming a de facto WAC director are understandable and often well intentioned, I've begun to see them as especially problematic. I'd argue that when, as writing center directors, we *do* take on WAC responsibilities which fall outside the core mission of our centers, given our lack of reassigned time, compensation, etc., it's often "WAC-lite" – an unstructured, poorly funded, non-sustainable enterprise consisting of little more than a workshop here and a random consultation there. Basically, WAC-lite presupposes a troubling "something-is-better-than-nothing" platform, which, in and of itself, might serve as another philosophical reason/justification to take on WAC work.

However, Barbara Walvoord critiques the sustainability of this platform when she argues against

the common WAC workshop and follow-up model of faculty development.

The word 'follow-up,' after all, reveals an underlying assumption that the centrally located workshop led by a writing specialist is the key transforming event, which needs only 'follow-up' to maintain the conversion. The thought pattern spells demise or stagnation once the recruitable faculty have been through a workshop. WAC must see itself not as a transforming workshop plus 'follow-up,' but as part of a sustaining set of services, a network, a culture, within the university, that supports ongoing, career-long, self-directed growth for faculty. (26)

Also, the "something-is-better-than-nothing" platform is tricky because WAC-lite is seldom viable from a workload standpoint. Doing a little bit of WAC is difficult; after our recent workshop on assignment design, for example, my fellow writing center codirector and I (praised for doing such a wonderful job) were asked to lead a series of grammar workshops for faculty and hold follow-up one-on-one consultations with participants from the assignment design workshop. Some work begets more work, and the cycle is unending.

Finally, having writing center directors do WAC-lite or WAC-on-the-side can set a dangerous administrative precedent. Doing uncompensated WAC work as a writing center director sets us up to be what Donna Strickland calls, a "not-quite-administrator," with no official title to validate this labor. As a result, Strickland points out, this "intellectually rich work will be relegated to what the WPA Council has called the 'ill-defined and seldom rewarded category of service'" (81). Hence WAC can be viewed as an activity that can always be done on the side or in addition to one's other duties. Yet, the WPA Statement on "Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration" rightfully argues that creating a WAC program and running it well is a form of scholarship; the foundation (administratively and curriculum-wise) has to be set properly if a program has a chance of succeeding or gaining momentum – certainly a tall task for a "not-quite administrator."

Taking Responsibility: Thinking "WAC-Aligned" vs. "WAC-Lite"

So, when all is said and done, what can we not-so-quite WAC administrators do – especially those of us who are encouraged by administrators on campus to pursue WAC-related "opportunities" or who are on

campuses where developing a full-fledged WAC program, complete with a director, isn't a top priority? Instead of feeling that the only responsible or ethical action is to do what we can "on the side" or in addition to our other duties, I would argue that our first responsibility should be to the programs we're contractually charged to run, develop, oversee, and grow. That said, eschewing all WAC-related duties and activities is not a savvy, a realistic, or—as I'll point out shortly—a necessary course of action for writing center directors. Therefore, in the remainder of this essay, I hope to offer some ways in which we can simultaneously take responsibility for our own centers and support WAC, without becoming uncritically caught up in the political and professional quagmire of WAC-lite.

The first step in taking this responsibility might, perhaps counterintuitively, involve stillness and retreat. As I illustrated earlier, writing center directors often feel compelled to become *de facto* WAC leaders because they are driven by a strong sense of panic and anxiety to act quickly. As Laura Micciche points out in her essay, "For Slow Agency," "pressure is constantly exerted" on those of us who run writing programs and centers, "creating conditions that are made to feel like emergencies, warranting immediate action or intervention," but "rarely does this reality bear out" (82). Therefore, Micciche urges administrators to slow down, reminding us that "agency operates on a continuum that includes action and change, as well as less measurable but no less important forms of action like thinking, being still, and processing" (74). In short, Micciche reminds directors to be reflective practitioners.

Space for reflection is a must, and a good place to focus this reflection is on one's mission statement. If a writing center director's head is swimming in a sea of WAC demands or requests, this is the perfect time to get back to the basics and revisit the center's core mission. As Kelly Lowe explains, a mission statement is "a statement of what an organization is, why it exists, and the unique contribution it can make" (73). From a practical standpoint, mission statements help directors map out the flesh and bones of a center—charting the center's institutional structure, staffing, budget, training, core services, and determining who is responsible for each aspect. Reviewing a mission statement can help a director take the center's pulse, so to speak, and isolate key areas or services (e.g. online tutoring, tutor training, etc.) which might need more attention, focus, or budgetary support. It makes little sense, after all, if a director is out running faculty WAC workshops at the expense of thoroughly training

tutors—if, as is often the case, peer tutoring is at the core of the center's mission.

Yet, as noted in the "Statement of WAC Principles and Practices," writing centers are generally considered "natural allies for WAC." Further, when reviewing the "typical goals of US WAC Programs" as laid out in the "Statement," many of these goals have significant overlap with the mission of most writing centers: e.g. "To sustain the writing of students across their academic careers"; "To increase student engagement with learning"; "To increase student writing proficiency"; and "To create a campus culture that supports writing." As referenced earlier, one of the key tenets of McLeod and Maimon's definition of an effective WAC program is "student support" (580), something which constitutes the heart and soul of writing centers. Therefore, when reflecting and taking inventory of their centers' mission and services, I would urge directors not to focus their energies on or get sidetracked by WAC-lite, those uncompensated, non-sustainable duties which feel "added-on" and disconnected from their centers, but rather on the existing duties and services their centers provide which are, what I call, "WAC-aligned," work that is a natural fit for some of the "typical goals" shared by both writing center and WAC programs.

For example, in the context of my own center's mission, not only is peer tutoring an activity which could be considered WAC-aligned, but so are the tutor-led series of student writing workshops we hold each semester; the many inter-disciplinary promotional classroom visits we provide; as well as the partnerships we've built with Distance Education to offer online tutoring; and Residence Life, to offer evening and weekend satellite tutoring and study sessions in campus residential halls. In other words, upon reflection, most centers are doing important work—in an effective and sustainable manner—as "natural allies of WAC." While such private reflection and recognition of this work is valuable in terms of where and how a center's needs and mission are both unique and WAC-aligned, it's not enough. As Kelly Lowe argues, a mission statement "is perhaps the most important document your program can have. Not only does it spell out what you will and won't do, it can, in times of struggle, protect you from being (intentionally) misunderstood by others" (74). In short, a mission statement is a key educational and political tool.

A second step, then, in taking responsibility is to communicate the mission and role of one's center clearly to all interested parties. I would first strongly urge directors to map out a list of key administrative stakeholders in their center—this list should include

the director's immediate supervisor as well as any other administrators (e.g. provosts, deans, etc.) who frequently inquire about the center or request the director's services for WAC-related activities. Directors should then periodically schedule formal meetings with each of these individuals to review the center's mission and to share two lists of duties: a routine list of usual labor and daily/weekly activities, as well as a list of "signature initiatives," new activities and programs the director has undertaken (e.g. creation of satellite tutoring locations, growth of online tutoring initiatives) to enact and carry out the center's core mission and commitment to student learning.

Further, in both the routine and signature initiative list, a director should highlight those duties and services which are WAC-aligned, to clarify that the center is already "doing" and supporting WAC in important ways. Administrators need to see that a director is not only maintaining the center through usual duties and routine, but also growing and improving the center, as well. And, if directors do not take charge of this growth and improvement – or do not showcase it to administrators in a compelling way – they are likely to be charged with more WAC-lite duties. They also run the risk of others swooping in with their own agendas which might only tangentially, or not at all, be aligned with the mission of the center. While writing center directors are often adept at publicizing their center's services to students, they need to be equally adept at publicizing their own workload and accomplishments to campus administrators. Unless directors proactively share their center's mission, as well as their own duties and signature initiatives, their labor is too often invisible and undervalued, and they risk being seen as generic "writing people" on campus who can and *should* gladly take on any and all writing-related ideas and programming.

Taking responsibility in the ways I've just outlined can, indeed, give directors a sense of control and agency over their campus identity and relationship to WAC. However, in closing, it's important to acknowledge that even if directors are to take such responsibility, some (particularly those who are untenured or non-faculty) may, no doubt, still feel real pressure to fold more and more WAC programming and duties into the writing center. In such cases, I would urge directors to carefully select work which is aligned and fits logically within their center's current mission; in making this determination, directors should consider a few questions: 1.) Can this initiative draw from current staffing/labor configurations? 2.) Can current programming be altered or adjusted in a

way to accommodate this initiative without harming core services? 3.) Do I, as director, have enough time and resources to carry out this initiative (e.g. in terms of training, research, and assessment)? If not, are there non-essential, existing duties or initiatives I could cut or re-allocate?, and 4.) Is this initiative sustainable over time? If the answer to all of these questions is "no," then the initiative is not likely a good fit for the Center; however, if the answer to just one or two of these questions is "no," then these are specific areas in which a director might have to ask for additional funding or support. And, of course, a director is much more likely to be successful in receiving additional funding or release time if the need for such funding is carefully vetted, specific, and clearly articulated; the above questions offer a lens through which to research, organize, and present one's request.

If directors find themselves pressured to take on the more labor-intensive and less naturally WAC-aligned curricular components of creating writing emphasis courses (e.g. developing department writing plans, or crafting writing-in-the-discipline requirements), they should lay out the resources they'll need to do it well and to make a lasting impact – drawing upon peer research in making the case. While campus administrators at institutions like my own might not be swayed by pie-in-the-sky descriptions of nationally recognized WAC programs at much larger or better-funded universities, local research often has a lot of sway, especially if directors can find a thriving successful program at a peer institution deemed as a competitor. Directors could go so far as to set up a consultation between upper administration at their campus with a successful WAC director at a peer institution to see what is necessary in terms of budget, assessment, infrastructure, etc. Such consultations are a powerful argument for increased reassigned time or the creation of a separate WAC position altogether.

Finally, I would remind directors under pressure that the most responsible thing they might do is to advocate for a full-fledged WAC program rather than try to *run* WAC-lite initiatives out of hide. I firmly believe that labor is often better spent gathering data and research and allowing interested others to take up the call. Directors don't have to be a one-man or one-woman show on campus. Just because they might be vocal about the needs of a formalized WAC program, that doesn't mean that they need to be the one to head up efforts.

In the opening of the essay, I noted that when it comes to WAC work, the line between "problem" and "opportunity" can be difficult to discern for many writing center directors. However, as I've illustrated, the problem of WAC demands can be transformed

into an opportunity for directors to revisit their centers' missions and become more vocal about the work – especially work that is “WAC-aligned” – which their centers are already doing. The actions, strategies and tips presented throughout this piece are just a few suggestions for ways in which writing center directors can respond to Byron Stay’s call to “take advantage of their visibility,” not in ways which will transform directors into amorphous “writing people” on campus, but in purposeful ways which will help directors better define, articulate, and carry out the mission of their respective writing centers, as well as their own institutional identities as writing center administrators.

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A COMPELLING COLLABORATION: THE FIRST YEAR WRITING PROGRAM, WRITING CENTER, AND DIRECTED SELF-PLACEMENT

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At Rhode Island College (RIC), Becky Caouette, Director of Writing, and Claudine Griggs, Writing Center Director, are invested in helping students become better writers. That's our job, and our privilege. While we share this goal, we each work under markedly different institutional scaffolding. Perhaps nowhere was this difference more apparent than in our former writing placement testing process for RIC's First Year Writing (FYW) courses, where *all* of the work was done by the writing center. In what follows, we talk about how the uneven work distribution provided the exigency to change our placement process, and how we turned to Directed Self-Placement (DSP) as a possible solution on two fronts: providing better placement procedures for our students and creating more egalitarian (and collaborative) working conditions between the writing center and the FYW Program.

Institutional and Departmental Backgrounds

Our situation will be familiar to many readers: RIC is a mid-sized four-year state college that serves about 9,000 full- and part-time students. The FYW Program is housed in the English Department, and almost all of the instructors who staff FYW courses are adjuncts. The writing center falls under the Office of Academic Support and Information Services (OASIS), which provides the writing center budget.

Consequently, we hold different institutional identities. Becky, who is the administrator for the FYW Program, has a tenure-track full-time 9-month faculty appointment in the English Department. Claudine, the Writing Center Director, serves as a part-time instructor in the English Department (teaching two classes per year) and as a part-time staff member of OASIS. She has a 12-month renewable 3-year term contract and is designated as a part-time (87.5%) employee with full-time equivalent benefits. But while Becky's role and responsibilities are generally clear and familiar, Claudine's can become murky. For example, she reports to the director of OASIS in her staff role, receives teaching assignments/evaluations from the chair of the English

Department, "collaborates" with the Director of Writing, and occasionally gets work from the academic and admissions VPs.

Since Claudine's contract began several months before Becky's (May versus August 2009), Claudine made a policy decision based, in large part, on necessity: despite a job description that required her to "collaborate with the Director of Writing" and with him/her to "administer college placement exams," Claudine decided in spring 2009 that unless the new Director of Writing opposed the decision, all writing placement exams would be filtered directly through the writing center. Because of this decision (which Becky later did not dispute), the writing center has remained the exclusive home of the college's writing placement exams since 2009, which means a good deal of work for Claudine and her staff, and also raises questions about institutional identities, working conditions, and how best to serve students.

Placement in First Year Writing Courses, Then and Now

Until the spring of 2013, incoming RIC students who scored above a 430 on each of the written and the verbal components of the SAT were automatically placed in Writing 100: Writing & Rhetoric (now First Year Writing 100: Introduction to Academic Writing). Students who earned a "C" or higher in Writing 100 received General Education credit and fulfilled the College Writing Requirement.

Students who scored a 430 or below on either the written or the verbal components of the SAT were required to sit for the college's Writing Placement Exam, and the writing center sent them information describing the two-hour exam and 17-18 possible test dates/times that were generally offered from late April to early August, the majority of which occur in May and June, including 4-6 Saturdays and 8-10 late afternoon/early evening sessions. Students then called the writing center to register, writing tutors proctored the exams, and the Writing Center Director was typically on site for all testing. In 2013, the writing center administered 527 writing exams and coordinated the subsequent scoring sessions that

required four meetings involving 20 faculty members and 40 faculty hours.

Students had a maximum of two hours to complete the exam, were asked to choose between one of two questions (both personal in nature), and were allowed to draft a preliminary outline or essay in one of two “blue books” that were provided. Their final essays were then read and scored by Claudine along with a group of English Department adjunct instructors who were selected based on their previous FYW Program experience; Claudine also led a “norming session” prior to the first exam reading. Readers would then “place” students either in Writing 100 or English 010 (Basic Writing)—a course whose credits do not “count” towards graduation or a student’s GPA (students then needed to pass ENGL 010 before enrolling in WRTG 100). Each exam was scored by two readers; in cases where two readers disagreed, a third reader would break the tie, so to speak. The writing center would report the scores to students by mail, and the center’s administrative assistant would enter all results into the online records system. English 010 students would be blocked from registering into Writing 100 until successful completion of Basic Writing.

Given the different institutional identities and workload for each WPA, it’s no wonder that there had sometimes been tension between the former Director of Writing and the Writing Center Director, both of whom retired from RIC during May 2009. While we were hired at the same time, Claudine had been a RIC adjunct faculty member for six years before taking charge of the writing center. She knew that administering the writing exams (sometimes evenings and weekends), hiring the adjuncts to score them, and entering the results into the college records system had created stress when either the previous Director of Writing or Writing Center Director complained that the burden was unfairly divided.

In spring of 2013, we decided to change our placement procedure in an effort to better serve our students and better balance the workload. The FYW Program collaborated with the writing center for the first phase of Directed Self-Placement, or DSP. Dan Royer and Roger Giles first published about this process in their 1998 article “Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation.” DSP gives students control over placement and, according to Royer and Giles, successful self-placement “often begins with a proper estimation of one’s abilities” (70). Thus, students are given tools to make an informed decision—commonly, and in our case, students fill out a self-efficacy questionnaire to help them in the process. Students can also receive counseling or

advising at RIC, often by Orientation faculty, and our FYW faculty are asked to gather writing samples from students during the first week of classes and to counsel any students about “questionable” course selections or refer them to Becky. But instructors are *not* allowed to drop students from their FYW sections: if students believe they chose the right course, instructors are advised to defer to the students.

We consider this to be the first phase of DSP because we are still determining what tools our students need to make their decisions. For example, we are currently, and possibly in the future, requiring students who score below the previously mentioned SAT cutoffs to sit for the college’s Writing Placement Exam; on the other hand, we might open DSP up to all students, regardless of SAT scores (see below), making DSP truly universal. Students now receive their exam results from the writing center via an evaluation form that states, “Based on your Writing Placement Exam, instructors *recommend* that you take...,” and a box is checked indicating one of three possible selections: English 010, FYW 100, or FYW100Plus (a recently added six-credit course that includes elements of Basic Writing and Introduction to Academic Writing and meets the College Writing Requirement). But students are still free to choose whichever FYW course they want—even if that selection contradicts the exam readers (we speak, below, on our separate perspectives of this requirement—and its future).

Moving From Then to Now: Impetus and Consequences

As Claudine will admit, she found the idea of DSP to be a hard sell. Many of RIC’s first-year students are under-prepared for college writing (about half of the incoming class score 430 or below on the written and/or verbal portions of their SATs). Because Claudine has worked with many basic writing students who insist that their writing “is fine,” she doubted that DSP would be practical for RIC students—many might register for FYW100, regardless of skill, and fail. But after discussions with Becky and reading recommended articles, Claudine began to appreciate the potential of DSP. First, if other state universities and colleges, like Grand Valley State, could successfully use self-placement, so might RIC. Second, the concept of student empowerment through choice was something that appealed to Claudine’s 1960s sense of justice and personal freedom. Third, DSP could reduce the writing center’s workload in administering writing exams each year to 500-600 students.

For Becky, DSP seemed to be an instant "panacea," even though Ed White warned against such thinking, adding that "All kinds of unforeseen problems lurk behind the implementation of DSP, perhaps most pointedly a shift in perception of who should be responsible for academic decisions" (29). But for Becky, it would help remove one concern that had weighed heavily on her since her arrival at the college: the fact that the writing center did almost all the work to place students in courses of the program that Becky directed. Beyond the regular writing center responsibilities, DSP could remove or reduce Claudine's writing assessment workload: scheduling, organizing, proctoring, scoring, reporting, phoning, and mailing. Claudine and her administrative assistant often emerge from the months of May and June exhausted and bleary-eyed.

For Claudine, though, taking on the work of the Writing Placement Exams was important. Claudine sought to offer Becky more time in her first year to get to know the FYW Program, to weigh its strengths and weaknesses, and to begin planning improvements. Her "self-sacrifice" in claiming jurisdiction over the writing tests was not without self-interest. Claudine wanted a cordial and productive working relationship with the new writing program director, and she wanted Becky to focus on FYW without worrying about mounds of freshman exam books. Also, because Claudine had already worked for six years with the English Department's adjunct faculty before becoming the Writing Center Director and now supervised the writing tutors who served as the proctors, it seemed natural for her to coordinate the adjunct and student employees regarding the exams.

Labor, of course, is at the heart of Becky's concerns. Because of the staffing realities—and inequities—of the FYW Program, she is hyper-aware of the ways in which her tenure-track faculty line offers privileges not afforded to Claudine or the exam readers. Becky scores placement exams as needed, often on an emergency basis, but we both would rather offer stipends to the adjunct faculty, many of whom cobble together a living by teaching at one or more institutions. At the moment, DSP has not reduced but rather has increased the workload in the writing center because the placement exams are still required as part of what is called "Informed Self-Placement" (ISP) during its pilot year,¹ and we wanted students to take the exam and receive faculty recommendations before learning about DSP. Claudine believes that RIC should continue an "informed DSP" in the best interest of students; she conversely would like to drop or reduce the testing requirement to focus on other ventures like expanding

the writing center's faculty writing retreats, offering similar events for students, or conducting more research about teaching and learning.

Claudine is quick to point out that, while she has done her best to protect the writing director's time from exam responsibilities, Becky has exceeded her part of the bargain by strengthening the FYW program, implementing DSP, and embracing the writing center as a program partner. This collaboration, which began with an informal agreement between two directors, has been good for us and, we believe, our students. And Claudine understands that a writing center *is* part of a writing program, whether acknowledged or not, because FYW students occupy a large share of the writing tutorials. For example, 39.2% of RIC's 1,626 writing center service hours in fall 2013 were provided to English/FYW students; fall 2012 came in at 35.0%; and fall 2011 was 44.4%. The three spring semesters (2011-13) averaged at 27.8%. We may disagree on some individual policies and procedures, but we agree that the collaboration has benefited RIC's writing program as well as its writing center.

Existing Concerns and Future Remedies

DSP might help alleviate the labor inequality in our FYW program, but there was an additional—indeed primary—motivation behind implementing the process. After all, Becky could have assuaged her guilt by simply splitting duties with Claudine or shouldering the entire responsibility for student placement. DSP was appealing to Becky and, eventually, Claudine, because it offered a new way to think about student placement. In addition to exploring a workload reduction, we acted together to implement what we believed was a *better* placement method. While possibly addressing the labor issues was a big draw, we both agreed that if, at any point, DSP proved ill-suited to RIC's students, we would reevaluate our placement methods—even if that meant returning to the previous system.

While very little has been written on the relationship between writing centers and FYW Programs regarding DSP, Phyllis Frus reports in "Directed Self-Placement at a large Research University: A Writing Center Perspective" that the University of Michigan's Writing Center, though the coordinator of placement, was often divorced from curricular and pedagogical decisions in the first-year writing program. But DSP at least opened a conversation about the issue, and Frus and her colleagues wanted "to find ways to overcome the split between the Sweetland Writing Center and First- and

Second-Year Studies because that limits the effect DSP can have on pedagogy in introductory composition” (187).

DSP brings together the RIC Writing Center and FYW Program. Because students are no longer mandatorily “sorted” but are instead asked to have a conversation with themselves and others (family, faculty, friends, orientation advisors, academic advisors) about placement, there is more discussion about RIC’s FYW courses along with the benefits and risks in selecting FYW100, FYW100Plus, or English 010. As an instructor, Becky even asked students to take the DSP Questionnaire in her own class to compensate for possible anomalies in our beta test. And as noted, all instructors are now expected to obtain a first-week writing sample from students; FYW faculty are having active conversations about placement instead of simply checking their rosters to make sure students are in the right course according to the placement exam. We believe these are good steps.

As of this writing, RIC’s DSP process is under review. Our first full pilot year illustrated areas that need improvement. DSP questionnaires were mailed to students, yet many students did not receive or ignored them. Thus a crucial aspect of DSP—students’ self-assessment—was compromised. Orientation advisors often had to counsel students “on the fly” about course options, and while the advisors are skilled and supportive of the FYW Program, they are not trained writing instructors. Further, students may defer to their advisors instead of critically estimating their own abilities.

In fact, students often complied with the recommendations provided by readers of the Writing Placement Exam; in a confidential survey of FYW100P students, 50% indicated that they followed the recommendations of the Writing Placement Exam readers. Claudine prefers that students continue sitting for the exam and receiving their scores as a recommendation; for her, the instructor recommendations serve as another piece of data for students to consider (see Bedore and Rossen-Knill). Becky has concerns about whether students will overly privilege that institutional voice.

Fortunately, we have no evidence that supports Claudine’s initial concern about higher student failure rates. However, for spring 2014, we had to cancel our only section of ENGL 010, Basic Writing, because of under-enrollment, and this caused concern among ourselves and upper administration. We know that some students *need* a two-semester FYW sequence (ENGL 010 followed by FYW 100), but we worry that too few students may enroll in ENGL 010 to justify spring sections. Thus, some students who place

themselves in ENGL 010 may find themselves without a course and feel compelled to enroll in FYW 100Plus or FYW 100, which may not be a good fit, in their efforts to complete the College Writing Requirement within their first year.

One suggestion that we are considering is that those students whose Writing Placement Exam recommends ENGL 010 be limited to selecting either ENGL 010 or FYW 100Plus; these students would not have the option of enrolling in FYW 100. While some of our colleagues still see this as a “choice,” Becky and Claudine are concerned that this may degrade the spirit of DSP. Of course, some student groups are not involved in DSP: those whose SAT scores place them automatically in FYW 100 and those in special grant-based admissions programs that simply follow the Writing Placement Exam recommendations. Thus, if we further limit options for students whose Writing Placement Exam scores consign them to ENGL 010 or FYW 100Plus, only about 30% of incoming first-year students would participate fully in DSP.

We are now faced with the difficult choice as to whether this pilot is worth pursuing, and readers will recall that our objectives were twofold. One, we wanted to provide a better placement method for our students, but only a third of incoming freshmen may benefit from DSP. Second, we wanted to reduce Claudine’s workload, yet DSP has increased it; not only does Claudine and her staff have to proctor and score Writing Placement Exams, they have to mail out additional information to students, change how they enter information about exam scores, and field questions from students about course choices.

Still, we can’t quite walk away from DSP at this time. We’ve received positive reports from several camps about the conversations happening about writing. Susan McAllister, one of our colleagues in student services, wrote: “I have been thinking...the DSP effort provided the opportunity, before coming to orientation, for our freshmen to give some thought to their writing skills, and it sent a message to them that we consider this an important part of their first year at RIC, which in turn provided a great introduction to Writing [FWY] 100P, etc.” Such comments indicate an unanticipated, but key, benefit of DSP—conversations about writing across campus. Then, too, DSP has helped codify an FYW policy that we had encouraged before, but never required: the first-week writing samples and discussions about course outcomes and goals. And in line with Royer and Gilles, Directed Self-Placement just *feels right* (61).

The recent news about changes to the SATs—especially the potential for an optional essay

component—will likely affect how our college places students. It may expand the number who are invited to self-place (with or without the Writing Placement Exam), and we still need to refine our communications with students about DSP. But if we fully implement DSP to all incoming freshmen, that may make the process more meaningful on our campus. There are many moving parts to this pilot, not all of which were anticipated.

Final Thoughts

Writing centers can sometimes be undervalued, viewed as remedial way stations for developing writers or exam depots for incoming students. And writing center directors may be looked upon as WPA wannabes because they are “staff” or “faculty-staff” or “term appointees” (Claudine has even heard the term “quasi-faculty”). But in addition to training new peer tutors and coordinating tutoring services, which are primary concerns, Claudine tries to promote the writing center as a full-service “center for writing,” and beyond traditional tutorials, she also collaborates with the Director of Writing; facilitates two week-long faculty writing retreats² each year; and meets with other department faculty at their request to discuss student writing. Becky’s and Claudine’s work has been especially interactive and constructive because of a mutual desire to improve writing at RIC. We share the belief that writing centers contribute to FYW Programs and students in better programs are more likely to enjoy and succeed in their writing courses.

Becky will continue to analyze data from this pilot year and meet with stakeholders, including Claudine, to adjust Directed Self-Placement for the upcoming academic year. Claudine will anticipate the spring’s writing placement exams even as we consider unexpected consequences from this past year and potential responses. And we will analyze, synthesize, talk, read, compare, and talk again. Not just about DSP, but about teaching and learning in RIC’s First Year Writing Program. We’ve been doing this for almost five years, and it seems unlikely that our Directed Self-Collaboration will end anytime soon.

Notes

¹ Pamela Bedore and Deborah Rossen-Knill ask probing questions about student perceptions of “choice” in their essay “Informed Self-Placement” (ISP). While their research at the University of Rochester parallels many of our challenges/experiences at RIC (communicating effectively with students about placement options;

asking students and instructors to discuss writing samples in class, etc.), the authors note Royer and Gilles’ approach:

Although this may sound ideal, we must ask ourselves how the student—the incoming freshman—can make an informed decision about the future (college writing) based only on the past (high school writing)...Not only is it asking the student to do guesswork that he or she may not be qualified to do, but it also contradicts what we hope to teach the student about academic work: that one should conduct contextually relevant research if one hopes to make an informed statement about an issue. (56-57)

At the U of R, staff and faculty use standardized test scores, student writing samples, and conversations with students to ensure that students feel as if they have a choice and, conversely, that they make the choice with some confidence. At Rhode Island College, Becky and Claudine differ in their interpretations about how students use/privilege the information provided about FYW course selections, but we believe, like Bedore and Rossen-Knill, that “freedom and choice are contagious” (71). And while we applaud U of R’s individualized conversations with students, we are not certain, given RIC’s students and resources, that this is a viable option for us. Still, Bedore and Rossen-Knill’s work demonstrates that RIC is not alone in asking students to consider others’ perspectives in their decision-making process.

² For further information about writing centers and writing retreats, see: Ellen Schendel, Susan Callaway, Violet Dutcher, and Claudine Griggs. “Assessing the Effects of Faculty and Staff Writing Retreats: Four Institutional Perspectives.” *Working with Faculty Writers*. Eds. Anne Ellen Geller and Michele Eodice. Logan: Utah State UP, 2013. 142-62. Print.

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EXPLORING THE REPRESENTATION OF SCHEDULING OPTIONS AND ONLINE TUTORING ON WRITING CENTER WEBSITES

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Writing centers provide invaluable writing assistance to students, and students who have used writing centers typically come to this conclusion themselves. Despite these positive responses to writing center tutorials, motivating first-time users to go to the writing center can be challenging. Because students turn to the Internet with many of their questions in life, it is likely that a writing center website is the first image of a writing center that many students encounter. Because of this, a writing center's website can be an important persuasive tool in helping students become excited about visiting the center and using its services. More importantly, it is the first step in a user's experience with a writing center.

We need to examine these sites to learn how we can benefit more students by getting more students to use the center. In this article, I investigate how writing center websites can more consciously mold students' experiences in a positive fashion. Writing centers can shape the ease of the student experience of using their websites and centers by employing usability principles and considering Burke's rhetorical principle of identification. Specifically, because students today use the Internet and mobile devices more than ever, I focus on how writing centers are meeting student needs through their methods of scheduling and their availability of online tutoring. To answer this question, I examine 100 writing center websites for their methods of scheduling and availability of online tutoring.

Online tutoring relates to scheduling and identification because they are both things that provide options to students, and thus are a way to identify with students rhetorically and help them see how the writing center can meet their needs and how it values their time. They are also both topics that students need to know about and would likely first learn about on the writing center's website. I will first examine usability theory and its relationship to how websites are designed.

Literature Review

Usability Theory

In order to attract more students to the writing center, it is important that the writing center website is designed to be easily used by as many members of the target audience as possible. Usability theory and user-centered design are useful for implementing this goal.

Usability theory has its roots in science and engineering and was initially intended to "validate a product from the standpoint of utility" for a company—making sure it worked, essentially (Barnum 6). Eventually, through the work of researchers such as Gould and Lewis, usability began to focus more on user experience. This shift in thinking is marked by the terminology change from usability to user-centered design, though both refer to many of the same theories and principles (Barnum). For the sake of clarity, in this article I use the term usability, though I mean for this to also encompass user-centered design.

At its center, usability's goal is for people to be able to use a product "quickly and easily to accomplish their own tasks" (Dumas and Redish 4). Of course, "easy" is a subjective term. In general, users care about the amount of time it takes to accomplish a task, the number of steps it takes to accomplish that task, and "the success they have in predicting the right action to take" (Dumas & Redish 5). Thus, usability deals with how easily an audience can use a product. In this instance, the product is the writing center with an audience of prospective student-clients.

The usability concept of "user story" is particularly useful when focusing on audience issues. The user story answers the question of what a user wants to do with a product (Six). In essence, the user story tells us how users would like a product to function. For a writing center, many users want to schedule an appointment or to figure out how to schedule an appointment, typically by first using the writing center's website.

The concept of the user story works well with the rhetorical concept of identification. The Burkean rhetorical principle of identification rests on the idea that people must see their interests reflected in the speaker's interest in order to be motivated. The

concept of the user story helps us to determine the user's interest. Hence, writing centers must demonstrate to students that they can help them reach their goals, that they understand their user story. The question becomes, then, who is the audience and what do they want? Usability theory and identification thus prompt us to understand users in order to better connect with them (Barnum).

Principle of Identification with Writing Center Student-Clients

At the core of usability theory is the need to understand or know an audience. Who is the writing center's audience? Scholars have studied them (including, for instance, Bishop), though these types of quantitative studies in writing center literature are not as numerous as a researcher would like.

Most simply, a writing center's prospective clients are writing students at a college or university. Many are younger than their writing instructors (though most certainly not all). Almost half of them are generally freshmen (Carroll, Pegg, and Newmann). It is also clear that many instructors of writing require students to go to the writing center or refer them there, but simply asking students to go to the center is perhaps not enough motivation for many of them to do so. In her 1990 article, Bishop surveyed students who chose not to attend the center and those who did in order to discover what motivated students to get help with their writing and take the steps necessary to use the resource that is the writing center. She discovered that students wanted to know that they would get something, "some recompense," for receiving writing center tutoring (Bishop 37). Her survey responses suggested that instructors tell students how it would help their grades or add extra points to papers. Overall, students want to know that going to the writing center is worth their time and effort—in her survey, 53 percent of students who chose to not use the center felt that they did not have time; 38 percent felt that they did not have a need for help with their writing (35). These numbers suggest that students feel that the writing center cannot help them—they do not understand how it can help them fulfill their goals.

What are these goals with which tutors can help students? That likely varies somewhat amongst the masses of students, but, in the words of Stephen North, "they will...be motivated to (say) finish writing; to be finished with writing; to have their writing be finished. They will be motivated to have the writing they submit for a class win them a good grade, whatever they imagine that will take: for it to be mechanically correct, or thoroughly documented, or to follow the instructor's directions to the letter" (North 82). This is not to say that students are uncomplicated

and will never engage deeply with their text, but that they may not realize that they might come to do these things at the writing center. Students need to realize that the writing center can help them to write a successful paper, whatever their definition of 'successful' may be.

Amicucci explains the importance of considering student needs in her chapter on enticing distance nursing students into using the writing center. As Amicucci explains, when we are looking at students in a very specific program at a particular university, writing centers can create a dialogue to understand needs. On the broader front, however, writing center directors, professors, and tutors can attempt to figure out the most basic writing-related needs of all our students in order to reach as many of them as possible. She notes "finding common ground with the Nursing students required understanding [their] needs" (66). Amicucci goes on to explore how these students began using the center more when they received more information about it, stating a "need to clearly communicate the goals of these programs to students" (73). Ultimately, Amicucci achieved success through working with Nursing faculty to create targeted modules for their students and finding a "common language" (71). She was thus able to build a connection with her target audience.

The first opportunity for building connections with writing center audiences according to the principle of identification is found in the moment students first contact the center to find information and make an appointment. An increasing percentage of writing centers now have an online presence, and many of our students will get their first impression of the writing center from the center's website. In Burkean terms, this is the writing center's first and best chance to identify with students and thus to cause "the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interest" (46). Burke argued that identification is the key to rhetoric; an audience needs to see how their interests can be matched up with the writing center's cause. If no such match is apparent, any other attempt to persuade the students that the writing center is a worthwhile part of the writing process will almost certainly fail.

The interests of the students in this situation are pretty clear: to fulfill a requirement given by their instructor and/or to improve the grade they get on their essay. The cause of the writing center is likewise straightforward: to be seen as a valuable part of the writing process by providing useful advice. Students need to see that the cause of writing centers corresponds with their interests in order for them to want to use them: they need to identify with the

writing center. This need to identify provides an opportunity for writing centers to build connections with students, particularly through a writing center's website content and design. This principle of identification can be implemented through a writing center's website in a few ways. Because writing centers cannot necessarily assure students that they will receive some sort of payoff for visiting the writing center (e.g., a better grade), they might instead try to identify with students by making using the writing center an easy thing to do. When a writing center makes it easy for students to access it, this can then help students to identify with the writing center. Thus, this article examines the number of ways writing centers schedule appointments, as well as the availability of online tutoring. Both of these methods relate to how writing centers represent themselves as valuing student time and identifying with student needs.

Methodology

To discover how writing centers are using their websites to help students set up appointments and whether they're providing online tutorials, this study analyzes one hundred college and university writing center websites. The writing centers were chosen to give a representative cross-section of different parts of the country, public and private institutions, and undergraduate (including community colleges) and graduate schools. The data is made up of sixteen community colleges, twenty-six private universities, and fifty-eight public universities. Many of the websites were accessed using links from the International Writing Centers Association's list of "writing centers online."¹ Specifically, this study examined how the websites discussed and allowed for scheduling online and whether schools offered online tutoring. In order to do this, the author examined the 100 writing center websites for explicit instructions on how students can schedule appointments. When reviewing the sites, the author looked for terminology such as "how to make an appointment" and "for appointments..." (as well as variants of these phrases, such as "tutorials," "sessions," and "scheduling") in order to determine how appointments could be made by students. After initial review of the sites and their terminology, the author counted instances of terminology such as "walk-in" appointments, "in-person" scheduling, "phone call" appointment scheduling, and "online" appointment scheduling, as well as variants referring to these methods. This study only reviews the choices that are thus made obvious from the websites themselves. In some instances,

other appointment-making options might be possible, but they were not made explicit according to the standards of this study. The author then looked for whether the websites included an option for online tutoring.

Results

As previously stated, the very first encounter a student has with a writing center is generally through the center's website. From the website, students discern writing center hours, location, and how to make an appointment. This section first examines the scheduling options that the writing centers' websites made clear are available to students. Then, this section examines whether centers provide online tutoring.

Scheduling

It quickly became apparent in this study that students can schedule appointments in writing centers in three ways: scheduling in-person by physically coming to the writing center, calling the center, and scheduling online. The websites suggest that only 20 of the 100 schools (20%) offered students all three scheduling options. Four centers (4%) failed to explicitly mention how to schedule an appointment on their sites. 32 centers (32%) offered only 1 method for scheduling.

Of these 32 centers that offered only one method of scheduling, 5 centers required students to call to make appointments, while 19 required online scheduling. Of all the centers, 53% allowed students to schedule online in some fashion (whether via scheduling websites or email). Of these centers, 19 of the 53 centers (36%) required students to schedule their appointments online (as their only scheduling option).

Online Tutoring

In addition to scheduling, this study also examined whether writing centers offer online tutoring. Of the writing center websites examined in this study, 43 centers overall (43%) offered online tutoring in some form. 16 schools that offered online tutoring did not offer online scheduling (37.2%); Only 28 centers (of the 53% overall) offering online scheduling also offered online tutoring (28%).

Discussion of Results

This section first discusses scheduling and what these results show about writing centers and how well they help students to identify with their goals. Then, it discusses online tutoring in relationship to scheduling, student identification, and usability.

Scheduling

Many schools (53%) allowed students to schedule online, which makes them approachable (students who are used to using computers likely find it easy to schedule online) for students. However, forcing students to do their scheduling online hurts this approachability somewhat (19% required students to schedule online as the only available method). Requiring one method of communication, which this examination suggests 32% of writing center websites do, limits students' abilities to make appointments and might prevent writing center usage in situations where students are uncomfortable using computers for scheduling or have limited Internet access. Of course, some websites that only explicitly allowed students to schedule online also listed a phone number; these schools may be amenable to scheduling over the phone for students, though this possibility is unclear to users. Other schools very explicitly required the online scheduling by stating that no other form of scheduling was allowed.

On four sites, a failure to adequately and completely discuss scheduling at all drastically fails these writing centers and students; it creates a disconnect between the writing center's purpose and the student's needs. A website's failure to discuss the particular information that students are searching for causes students to fail in their tasks of scheduling, at least initially. Students thus do not see how the center could fit their needs and they may feel frustrated because they took the time to find information that simply was not present. This frustration is likely to cause students to no longer seek the services of the writing center.

Overall, writing centers can identify and connect with the most students by offering a variety of ways to schedule appointments. Because we want as many students as possible to be able to easily set up an appointment with the writing center, usability theory suggests that providing as many means as possible to schedule appointments is most usable for this audience. Universities and colleges have a range of students with a multitude of varying needs and preferences; one method of scheduling, for instance, online scheduling, will not appeal to everyone. A blind student may prefer to schedule over the phone whereas a deaf student may prefer the online option. On-campus students with free time in the middle of their day might prefer to just drop in to make appointments. Writing centers need to make it as easy as possible to make appointments; students do not want to go the extra mile to do something they feel unsure about in the first place—and since many students come to the writing center (at least at first)

because of a requirement, they likely feel some apprehension at this new experience. In essence, writing centers need to make their centers easy to use, and scheduling is one way of making the experience less anxiety-ridden for students.

Online Tutoring

Forty-three percent of writing centers in this study offered online tutoring, nearly half. Of these 43 centers, 16 centers (37.5%) did not have online scheduling for their online tutoring appointments. At the time of this study, only 28 centers with online scheduling also had online tutoring. Offering online tutoring without online scheduling is at odds with the principle of identification and usability in general. Students want their writing center session to be as painless as possible. If students are already on the computer to schedule an appointment, allowing them to remain on the computer for their session could be easiest for them and would jive with the relationship the center has begun to build with the student through online scheduling. Through providing online scheduling, the writing center creates the narrative that they promote and believe in computer use for writing tasks. When scheduling online is mandatory, not providing an online tutoring option creates a disconnect that is possibly shocking—requiring students to use the computer for one act and then totally prohibiting computer use disrupts the act of identification and the connection the student is working to make with the center. When students are trying to understand the writing center and its value to them, this disconnect in values is confusing. More research is necessary to discover how students deal with this type of writing center narrative. The next section discusses recommendations of this study and future avenues of research.

Recommendations

This study's findings suggest two recommendations implicitly tied to usability and identification—writing center websites need to offer options and actively seek user feedback. It is important to note that not all writing centers have the resources or control necessary to change many of the aspects of their websites. It is still relevant, though, to know methods of improvement in the event that an opportunity to change practices arises.

Recommendation 1: Offer Options

First, writing centers can effectively identify with students by offering options. These options would include multiple methods of scheduling—like online

(via email or a scheduling program), over the phone, or in-person. Allowing drop-in appointments (when feasible) would also meet some students' needs. In addition, providing multiple methods (face-to-face and online) for tutoring sessions can help with identification—some students will want, and even require, that tutoring take place online. The ease of use (for some, this means lack of travel) associated with online tutoring may help motivate students to seek it out and see how the writing center can meet their needs. Of course, as Amicucci explains, having faculty discuss the writing center with their students is still one of the most effective methods of getting students in the door or on the website—once they're on the website, though, it is up to the writing center to show students their “common ground” to solidify the connection (73). When options are available for students, it is also important to make sure that the options are then explicitly stated on the websites in a way that students can easily understand. For instance, this might mean including a page about “How to Schedule an Appointment,” which lists the methods allowed.

Recommendation 2: Usability Test Websites

Finally, from a usability standpoint, this article would be remiss not to make usability testing a writing center's website with its target audience the second recommendation of this study. Writing centers want to ensure that their websites are accessible for students and easy to use. Rarely do students volunteer their opinions on a center's website; this information must be sought out. While extensive testing may be beyond the means of a writing center, testing a website with five to eight members of the target audience will give a representative sample from which to draw conclusions on how the website might be designed to meet audience needs (Nielsen and Landauer). This testing would reveal, for instance, whether students understand the information the center provides online (such as the methods to schedule an appointment).

Future Research

In addition to ease of use, usability also deals with visual design. On the page or screen, good organizational and visual design enhances navigation to make documents more useful (Jackson). Aesthetics is also important to a document—we must, for instance, persuade readers to read documents (see Redish, “Understanding Readers”). Like this, people must be persuaded to use websites (particularly for using websites for specific functions, like scheduling writing center sessions). Aesthetics is subjective,

however, and provides an avenue for future research: does the attractiveness of writing center websites affect their use by students? Though beyond the scope of this study, it is likely that an aesthetically-pleasing web presence may better attract students to writing centers. In order to gauge the effect websites have on the student audience in the meantime, writing centers can ask for feedback.

Conclusion

Writing centers need to focus on identifying with students in the online environment. Designing their websites for usability principles and identification helps to attract students, retain them, and teach them. Giving students options (such as scheduling in multiple ways and getting tutoring in more than one format) helps centers to be approachable and comfortable, and one of the aims of writing centers is generally to be comfortable for new student users (McKinney). Ultimately, giving students these choices helps them to be more confident, which can aid a collaborative situation in which a tutor is trying to help a student take responsibility for improving her writing.

Above all, writing centers should address the needs of their students. According to Greene, “a writing center that addresses the diverse needs of a broad range of students, as well as the competing epistemologies of a faculty, must by its very nature be designed to be flexible enough to serve the needs of its constituents” (32-33). When students are given choices, they may be more secure about the session in total—they have a sense of control, even if they feel they are inexperienced writers. In turn, they may be less likely to tell the tutor to “fix” their paper. Making choices of scheduling and types of tutoring available makes centers more able to meet student needs because more students will be able to identify with the center. Designing writing center websites for identification will hopefully build and sustain student connections to keep students coming back to centers and improving as writers throughout the semester and their college careers.

Notes

¹ <http://writingcenters.org/resources/writing-centers-online/> [accessed May 31, 2011]

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REVIEW OF *MULTILINGUAL WRITERS AND WRITING CENTERS*

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Ben Rafoth's *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers* is a timely call for directors and tutors to become better prepared to work with multilingual writers. Pursuing this avenue of training is more important than ever, as enrollment by international students who speak and write in multiple languages continues to grow in universities in America and around the globe.

The slim volume makes no claim to offer its audience a specific method for training tutors to meet these needs. Rather, the book is an "informed invitation for writing center directors and their tutors, especially advanced tutors, to make greater use of theory and research from the field of second-language acquisition" when preparing to work with multilingual students (3). As such it acts as a resource that offers a glimpse at the variety of needs found in increasingly diverse writing centers, and signals where directors and tutors can find further resources for training.

Each chapter of *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers* presents a different aspect of a tutoring session where Rafoth sees room for improvement. The book draws upon Rafoth's own experience, published literature on second language acquisition (SLA), and interviews and observations he has conducted in order to offer suggestions to address issues that might arise, from practicalities like staffing to individual strategies a tutor might implement in a one-on-one session.

The first chapter, "The Changing Faces of Writing Centers," offers context for Rafoth's call to action by examining the growing diversity of writing centers. Rafoth presents a series of "snapshots" of writing centers from around the globe to illustrate the ways that writing centers have grown and adapted to accommodate the increasing enrollment of international and multilingual students at their institutions. He also illustrates the challenges that can arise when trying to label or group these students, such as privileging of English over other languages (ESL, ELL), or mislabeling that can occur when assumptions are made about the motivations behind their language acquisition (are they elective bilinguals or circumstantial bilinguals?). Rafoth wraps up this contextualizing chapter by pointing out that, while American writing centers of the past seemed to uphold a monolingual culture, they are increasingly "places where multilingual writers see language less as

an end in itself and more as a means to achieving what they want *to do*" (39, emphasis in original). The rest of the book then offers suggestions for how writing centers can assist multilingual writers in meeting these goals.

Chapter two, "Learning from Interaction," reveals ways in which conversations during a tutoring session can be more instructive. One of the most illuminating discussions for tutors in this section may be the explanation of native-speaker privilege and how this can account "for why some international students—and some native English-speaking students—avoid tutors who are not native English speakers" (45). The second chapter also provides numerous terms and concepts that tutors should familiarize themselves with, not necessarily to use in a consultation, but to create a vocabulary they can use to begin developing insight into the complicated relationship between tutors and multilingual writers. By providing tutors with examples of when interaction with multilingual writers is successful and unsuccessful, this chapter provides a starting point for further research into the literature on language acquisition that can enable them to have successful tutoring sessions.

The chapter on "Academic Writing" focuses on the challenges this specific genre raises for NNES students. As Rafoth points out, the conventions and expectations of academic writing are often difficult to fulfill even for native English speaking students, particularly when it comes to the challenge of vocabulary (76). For NNES students, these challenges are exacerbated by the increasing demand for advanced degrees (and therefore pressure to publish) in applied fields, a growing prominence of English-medium journals around the world, and receiving unhelpful or disrespectful instructor feedback. To address these concerns, Rafoth highlights the tutor's role in helping writers understand and prioritize academic writing conventions, in addition to providing a space for learning that is respectful and caring. He also touches on the need for feedback and support for instructors, offering the example of a faculty workshop on designing writing assignments that will result in work that actually meets the instructor's expectations. Writing centers with the available resources can therefore assist the multilingual student

writers at their institutions both through one-on-one interaction and outreach to the campus community.

Chapter four looks at corrective feedback and the notion of “error.” Current interest in student error, Rafoth explains, is less “for reasons of purity and punishment than for the recognition that error is a natural part of learning to speak and write” (105). The chapter contains strategies for approaching tutoring sessions in consideration of errors and how to provide corrective feedback rather than simply correct or edit a writer’s work. For example, the strategy of recasting is “one of the most useful tools in a tutor’s belt” (114), as it involves getting a writer to notice an error by restating it in a correct form. However, there can be downfalls to using recasting with NNES writers that lead this strategy to simply become editing, for example “when the writer’s intended meaning is clear but words and phrases aren’t quite ‘right’ sounding” (118) to the tutor. Rafoth demonstrates how this and other strategies may need to be adapted, offering warnings and cautions so the tutor can develop an approach to corrective feedback when working with multilingual writers.

The final chapter appears primarily aimed at writing center directors, as Rafoth notes that the process of preparing and educating tutors to work with multilingual writers begins with the director (122). However, “Preparing Ourselves and Our Tutors,” would also be of interest to tutors, especially if they have an interest in writing center administration. This chapter highlights some of the practical decisions and plans that need to be made in terms of staffing and training a diverse writing center. As in the previous chapters, Rafoth provides examples from his interviews and previous experience to show how directors and tutors can find ways to address the issues that might face their particular center. Both director and tutor need to be able to adapt and know which tools are useful in a given situation and which are not; the pages of *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers* “suggest where to look for some of these tools and the reasons they might be effective, but they don’t provide a cupboard of strategies to open for tomorrow morning’s tutoring session” (129).

While Rafoth offers many suggestions for directors and tutors, some may be impractical for implementing in all writing centers, depending on the resources available and the goals they seek to achieve. For example, he imagines a writing center where criteria for employment might include knowing a second language or minoring in linguistics, or where

sessions might last two hours rather than thirty to fifty minutes (56). Rafoth acknowledges that these models might not fit every center. Instead of providing a quick fix or model for operations, his book provides a useful access point for writing center directors as they develop goals and train staff, and tutors who are interested in cultivating their abilities to work with multilingual students.

Perhaps one of the primary benefits of this resource is that it will surely be accessible to both the directors and the tutors it is aimed at. Tutors unfamiliar with the published literature will find the glossary of terms provided at the end of the text, as well as the references list particularly helpful. Overall, *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers* provides a useful overview of the issues that a writing center might already be facing or face in the future as student populations continue to grow and change and centers continue to adapt to meet their needs.

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