Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Home

Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work

Bolstering Writerly Instincts: Using Role-Play to Help Tutors Address Later-Order Concerns ›

Editor login

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Bolstering Writerly Instincts: Using Role-Play to Help Tutors Address Later-Order Concerns

Spring 2011/Training

by **Kate Warrington**, *University of North Texas at Dallas*

Students who are selected to be writing tutors or who apply for jobs in the writing center are generally confident in their writing ability and have received reinforcement from faculty and peers that they are "good" at writing. These students often have stories of their friends approaching them for help editing their writing assignments, and they happily obliged. But before their tenure in the writing center, these student writers have rarely been asked to explain why a comma should be placed at a certain location in a sentence or why a particular word doesn't fit in the context of a sentence. In several tutorials I observed, the tutors struggled to address grammatical concerns in student writing, often relied on instinctual knowledge to identify errors, and sometimes presented rules of thumb as solutions to these errors which resulted in incomplete answers to student writers' concerns. Tutors use these explanatory shortcuts, I think, for two reasons: 1) they are afraid of becoming too directive–of teaching instead of tutoring, and 2) they aren't completely sure of the grammatical rules themselves. Breaking tutors' reliance upon of rules of thumb (like placing a comma where you should pause, and never using "I" in an academic essay) and giving them more concrete knowledge to share with their clients are challenges for tutor training, particularly because many rules of thumb "work" –most of the time. Writing tutors have been rewarded for using these strategies in their own writing; therefore, they share these strategies with their clients in the writing center.

In the tutorials I observed, tutors recognized that they were relying upon their instincts, and sometimes displayed some uneasiness about not being able to offer the student a more concrete explanation of the concern. For example:

> Tutor: (reading the writer's paper aloud) "The hidden crisis states,"
> Okay, for one thing, that might be a, it isn't really "stating" it…
> Writer: um hmm
> Tutor: maybe it implies or it… (she pauses for several seconds)
> Writer: okay (writes "implies" on the paper)

In this instance, the tutor explains that her reaction to the sentence beginning with "The hidden crisis states" is that "states" is not the appropriate word in this context. Then, she suggests the word "implies" to replace "states" and, with a marked pause, moves on to the next point once the writer accepts "implies" as an appropriate substitution for "states." Of course, the word "implies" is not an appropriate correction because it personifies "the crisis," which is the problem with the writer's initial word choice "states." The tutor seems discontent with the way she addresses this particular concern, as suggested by her lengthy pause. The tutor's instinct is correct that "implies" doesn't work, but she may not have the tools to back up her instinct.

To help tutors bolster their knowledge about grammar and mechanics so they can support their instincts when they identify concerns in student writing, I've used role-play situations in a tutor training course that focus specifically on helping writers address later-order concerns. The goal of these role-plays is for the tutor to eventually notice when he/she is relying upon rules of thumb that offer incomplete explanations of the specific concern in the student's writing and/or to practice providing more complete explanations of the error and an appropriate correction that the student writer can use to identify and address similar errors in the future. I provide each tutor with a copy of the same sample paper, and one tutor volunteers to act as the tutor to my "writer" in front of the class. I encourage the tutor to conduct the consultation as he/she normally would, and I ask questions focusing on later-order concerns (as many writers do). I admit that I sometimes act as a particularly difficult writer, asking the tutor to explain "why" he/she is recommending I pay close attention to certain parts of the paper. For example, this would be a common exchange between the tutor and me (as writer):

> Writer: I know I have a lot of trouble with semi-colons. My professor says I use them too often.
> Tutor: Okay, well, let's look at where you use them (pauses). Okay, here, (points to a place in the paper). Why did you choose to use a semi-colon here?
> Writer: Well, I didn't think a comma would work, so I used a semi-colon.
> Tutor: Why did you think a comma wouldn't work?
> Writer: I don't know...would it have worked?
> Tutor: Yes, I think a comma would have worked better.
> Writer: Why?

In the above example, I hope to encourage the tutor to explain the rules behind his/her suggestion that a comma would work better because if the writer understands the rules, he/she may be able to use semi-colons more effectively. Oftentimes, in these kinds of role-play situations, the tutor will realize that he/she does not know how to explain, in concrete terms, the reason for his/her feeling that there is an error in the student's writing. In that case, this role-play activity opens the floor for discussion of the specific rule or grammatical concept that the tutors need to become familiar with.

If the tutor knows the appropriate rule or concept to explain to the student writer, he/she will practice explaining it as if he/she were involved in a real tutorial, using accessible language and presenting it in a way that a novice writer can understand. Sometimes, at this point in the role-play when the tutor points out a specific suggestion, as in the above example, the tutors who are observing the consultation interject believing that the tutor is being too directive by telling the writer what is correct. They fear that the student writer will merely add the comma and pay no attention to the explanation of why the comma would work better than the semi-colon. Tutors have similarly expressed a fear of being directive when I've spoken with them about their consultations I've observed. For example, the tutor in the consultation I referenced at the beginning of this essay characterized her tutoring style in that consultation: "I try not to be too directive. It slips up sometimes when I say 'why don't you put this here' and she just writes it down." Alice Gillam et al. claim that "tutors frequently evaluate their tutoring effectiveness in terms of their use of authority" (166), which this tutor does during our conversation.

Tutors struggle with the desire to be helpful to students, to help students improve their writing, and to uphold the values of the writing center and the academy. Tutors hope that if they use non-directive approaches, they can avoid offering words or ideas to the writer, thus allowing the writer to maintain ownership of his/her work. However, addressing later-order concerns can become particularly difficult when the writer has very little knowledge of grammatical conventions. When tutors find themselves struggling to apply characteristically non-directive strategies like open-ended questioning, they sometimes run into problems making these strategies work for later-order concerns. Once these strategies fail, they resort to using a more directive approach, which they feel is going against their training. The role-playing activities not only help tutors become more familiar with the rules that support their writerly instincts and allow them to practice explaining those rules to student writers, but they also open dialogue about non-directive/directive approaches and effective tutoring.

Role-playing activities not only help tutors become more familiar with the rules that support their writerly instincts and allow them to practice explaining those rules to student writers, but they also open dialogue about non-directive/directive approaches and effective tutoring.

Tutors who are able to identify later-order concerns in student writing and to explain the appropriate correction for these errors using concrete rules that the student can apply in future writing assignments are better equipped to use non-directive approaches effectively. Some tutors may feel that using rules of thumb helps them to be less directive because these "rules" my be vague ("put a comma where you would pause" still requires the student to decide where he/she would pause) or are considered common knowledge that writers have likely heard before. Tutors sometimes have the misconception that offering concrete advice jeopardizes their ability to be non-directive, and, of course, tutors do not want to cross ethical boundaries and write the essay for the student writer. However, as Irene Clark and Dave Healy argue, "it is worse than simplistic to require that writing centers withhold helpful information and refrain from helpful practices out of a misguided sense of what is ethical" (43). If a tutor knows the grammatical rule that may help a student to learn to correct his/her own writing, then the tutor should feel comfortable sharing that rule and how it should be applied without feeling as if he/she is violating pedagogical best practices. In fact, tutors who are able to feel comfortable with their ability to identify errors in student writing and to confidently explain how these errors can be corrected, are better able to engage in effective, individualized writing instruction, which, according to Clark and Healy, is the mark of an ethical writing center (43). It is best practice to be non-directive without being vague.

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Another benefit of these role-playing activities is that they acquaint tutors with the resources available in the writing center for helping student writers address later-order concerns. Role-playing activities do not encourage tutors to memorize every grammatical rule in the English language, but they do encourage tutors to know where to

of an ethical writing center. find the answers to the questions they don't know how to answer. As Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner emphasize, "Don't be afraid to take a handbook off the shelf and say, 'Let's look this up'" (94). For example, during the role-play, if the tutor cannot explain the reason for the comma being more appropriate than the semi-colon in the writer's paper, the tutor is encouraged to ask the audience of other tutors or to access handouts or online resources in the writing center to find the answer.

Once tutors have the tools to support their instincts, they begin to recognize the limitations of rules of thumb, and they are better able to provide concrete advice that student writers can take away from the consultation. Students who have engaged in these role-playing activities seem to appear more comfortable addressing later-order concerns, and they realize that while they don't need to be grammar experts to be effective tutors, being a writing center tutor provides an excellent reason to revisit and relearn grammatical rules. The long-term result is to give tutors the knowledge and confidence to be truly helpful to student writers by offering writers tools they can use to improve their writing and to uphold Stephen North's often quoted goal for the writing center: "to produce better writers, not better writing" (438).

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Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003–2011)

Book Review: ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors

Spring 2011/Columns

Bruce, Shanti, and Ben Rafoth, eds. *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors.* Portsmouth, NH: Boyton/Cook-Heinemann, 2004. 192 pages.

reviewed by **Edward Quintana**, *Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi*

ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors addresses writing consultants working in a wide variety of academic settings. To help prepare writing-center staff working with English as Second Language (ESL) writers, co-editors Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth have compiled a collection of 18 essays organized into three parts: "Becoming Oriented to Second Language (L2) Learners"; "The ESL Tutoring Session"; and, "A Broader View." Bruce and Rafoth cover the entire process of the tutoring session by including essays on topics such as understanding the cultural and academic identities ESL writers bring with them to these sessions (Chapters 1-2), practicing writing theories and reading ESL writers' texts (Chapters 3-14), and viewing the meanings of writing centers and the learning of other languages across the globe from different perspectives (Chapters 15-18). Rafoth discusses the worldwide power of the English language and the responsibility that comes with teaching English in the closing essay "Trying to Explain English?" He argues that that an American education is fast becoming a globalized commodity for many international students and that learning how to use the English language is a large aspect of globalization.

Part 1 of the book, "Becoming Oriented to Second Language Learners," helps writing consultants better understand "how L2 learners process second languages in their minds as they learn" (29). In Chapter 2 Theresa Jiinling Tseng's essay, "Theoretical Perspectives on Learning a Second Language," gives readers four major theoretical guides and approaches to second language acquisition. Tseng, at one time an L2 learner, lends credible perspective to the process. Tseng hopes that the her work " will not only make [her reader] a more informed tutor but also one who is more curious about, engaged in, and empathetic to the challenges that ESL writers face" (18).

Part 2, "The ESL Tutoring Session," is the largest section of the book. Knowing that every tutoring session with an ESL writer can veer off into uncharted territories and frustrate tutors and ESL writers alike, Bruce and Rafoth chose essays that might guide consultants through challenging sessions. Carol Severino's "Avoiding Appropriation" makes an appeal to anyone who is in the position to assess or grade an ESL writer's text: be careful not to overstep the boundaries of changing an ESL writer's text and identity. Her anecdotal introduction shows how appropriation can diminish and even inhibit the writer's agency. In "Reading an ESL Writer's Text," Paul Kei Matsuda and Michelle Cox describe a few approaches tutors can apply to a student's text. Expounding on the ideas of Severino, Matsuda and Cox implore tutors to be aware of the varying levels of writing skills ESL writers bring to a session.

Bruce and Rafoth close out the last part of the book. Rafoth's "Trying to Explain English?" beseeches consultants to learn grammar and linguistic rules and to avoid telling ESL writers, "That's just the way it is." ESL writers look to writing centers for guidance and writing centers should embrace the responsibility to teach the English language thoroughly. Bruce concludes with "Conversations with ESL Writers," in which she introduces three ESL writers who come to the writing center with varying levels of writing skills. The personal, intimate interaction between the ESL writer and the consultant will differ from session to session depending on the ESL writer's cultural and academic identity. Bruce explains that no matter how much theory and pedagogy a consultant applies, the individual writer and the identity they want to express is of the utmost importance.

I believe Bruce and Rafoth's empathy will help writing consultants understand the perspective of ESL writers. Everyday, ESL writers walk into the writing center and sit down with a tutor hoping to get feedback on how well their writing skills are progressing. *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors* should occupy an essential place on writing-center bookshelves around the world. ESL writers are essential to the future relevance of writing centers. Bruce and Rafoth's compilation serves as an excellent guide to journeys through the writing process that ESL writers and writing consultants take together.

Edward Quintana is currently a graduate student at **Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi** and is pursuing a Master of Arts in English. He is interested in all aspects of writing and hopes to one day enable a career in the field of English composition.

‹ Bolstering Writerly Instincts: Using Role-Play to Help Tutors Address Later-Order Concerns	**up**	**Book Review: The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice ›**

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Bridging the Great Divide: Creating Partnerships between Writing Centers and Student Affairs

Spring 2011/Focus

by **Mckinlaye Harkavy**, *University of South Carolina*

Due to increased college enrollments, diminished budgets, and higher institutional expectations for student learning, English departments are struggling to financially support writing centers. In order for writing centers to maintain their funding levels, they must prove that they are assisting a large number of students and having a measurable impact on students' ability to write effectively. But how can writing centers meet the needs of an expanding student population during this time of decreased resources? The answer may lie in the creation of new campus alliances.

Many higher education institutions are seeking to create integrated learning experiences for students that help them blend curricular and co-curricular experiences. Thus, new partnerships between academic affairs and students affairs officesare becoming more common on college campuses. Writing centers, although academic in nature, should consider exploring possible partnerships with student affairs offices because of the plethora of benefits resulting from such alliances. The purpose of this essay is to provide a model for such collaborations by highlighting how the **University of South Carolina** has created a partnership between residence life, an academic support office, and a writing center to meet the writing needs ofits students. Additionally, this article will demonstrate how such a partnership saved the **University of South Carolina's Writing Center** from being eliminated altogether.

Academic affairs and student affairs professionals often have different educational backgrounds, responsibilities, and priorities. Joan Hirt, a student affairs professional, points out that these differences can lead to misunderstandings, as "There is a deeply entrenched belief that academicians either do not understand or do not appreciate the important roles

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that student affairs administrators fulfill" (245). In reality, though, "they compete for the same overall university resources and for student involvement in their respective programs" (Pace, Blumreich, and Merkle 302). Knowing that both academic and student affairs units attempt to meet the needs of their shared student populations, it makes sense to establish partnerships in order to bolster attendance at programs and remove the "competition" between these two groups.

Creating and sustaining cross-campus partnerships can be a challenge, especially when the offices do not have a history of working together. However,

these partnerships have the potential to be mutually beneficial to students and the partnering offices. Benefits of such partnerships can include increased student attendance at programs, retention rates, and efficiency in the inception of "cross-functional linkages that merge resources and expertise from separate entities to address the learning needs of students" (Nesheim, Guentzel, Kellogg, and McDonald 437). Students benefit from these partnerships by gaining a better understanding of institutional processes and the resources a campus has to offer (440), while the academic and student affairs offices are able to pool their respective knowledge and human capital to create programs or services that positively shape student learning both in and out of the classroom. Given that many senior leaders on college campuses are encouraging these types of collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs, it seems to be an ideal time for writing centers to seek out newer and stronger partnerships with the hopes of reaching a wider population and serving students more efficiently and effectively.

University Housing at the University of South Carolina, in an effort to uphold its mission to create "a sustainable living and learning community that promotes the academic success and personal development of students," has developed an academic support office known as **Academic Centers for Excellence** (ACE). Created in 1995, one of ACE's first initiatives was to bring academic support services directly to students in the residence halls. To accomplish this task, ACE formed a partnership with the university's Writing Center, first established in 1980), and then housed in the English department, thus linking an academic department with a division of student affairs. The initial arrangement between ACE and the Writing Center involved offering writing consultations in satellite locations outside of the Writing Center's main location. Because ACE has offices in three large residence halls and the main campus library, offering appointments in those centers allowed the Writing Center to reach a much broader student audience. This is especially important since as of 2010, 99% of first-year USC students (4,400) and 15% of upperclassmen (2,453) reside in campus residence halls (Institutional Assessment). Over the years, the partnership has evolved, and ACE is now able to provide students additional writing appointment times during more convenient hours for students (early evenings), hours that are outside of the main Writing Center operating hours (Table 1). In addition, ACE now provides administrative support as well as appointment scheduling and tracking software with online scheduling capabilities.

Table 1: Number of hours and appointments offered by each location (2010)

	Writing Center	Ace Locations
Hours open/day	6 (10am - 4pm)	3 (4-7pm)
Appointments/day (30 min. each)	12	6
Appointments/day (30 min. each)	12	6
Average number of tutors/locations	4	1
Number of locations	1	4

	5 (Monday - Friday)	4 (Monday - Thursday)
Number or days open/week	5 (Monday - Friday)	4 (Monday - Thursday)
Total number of appointments/week	240	96

The increase in the number of appointments available to students is not the only benefit of this partnership. For example, in August 2009, ACE adopted the use of Tutor Trac, a scheduling and tracking software, and since then the office has been able to accurately track the number of students who met with writing consultants at ACE locations each semester. The following chart highlights that there was an increase of over 400 student appointments in the four ACE offices from fall 2009 to fall 2010. Making writing consultations available to students later in the day and at more convenient locations has resulted in increased usage of Writing Center services at ACE locations. Unfortunately, the appointment data for the main Writing Center for the same timeframe is not available, but data from previous years (2006-2008) showed an increase in the number of appointments at the original Center location as well. Overall, between the ACE locations and the central Writing Center, writing services are being used more frequently and by more students, indicating increased exposure for both offices.
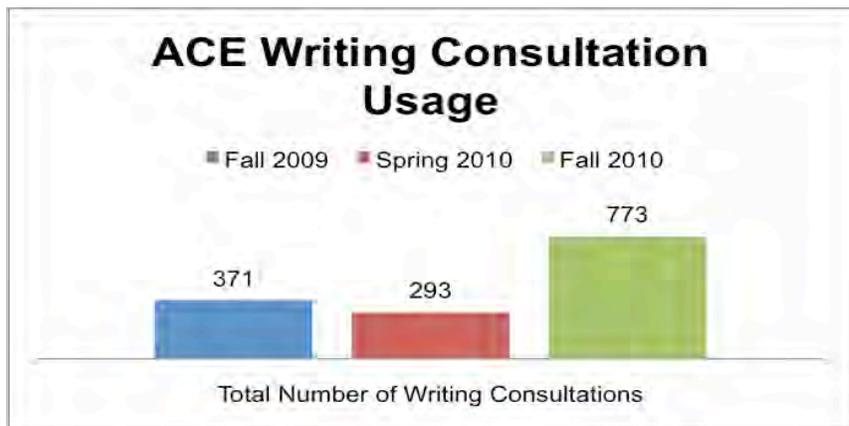
The ability to schedule Writing Center appointments online also makes the services more accessible to students. Previously, if a student wanted to schedule an appointment at the main Writing Center location, the student would have to call or leave a voice mail message at the Writing Center. In contrast, students that want to sign up for ACE writing consultations have been able to schedule those appointments online at any time since ACE began using the Tutor Trac software in 2009. Since January 2011, ACE has given the Writing Center access to the Tutor Trac software, enabling students to schedule their appointments for the central Writing Center and all four of the ACE locations online.

Aside from appointment scheduling and tracking, the use of the Tutor Trac software has greater implications for future assessment efforts. Now that both offices are using the same software to track appointments, administrators from both programs will be able to comprehensively assess which locations are being utilized most by students, the reasons why students are using the Writing Center's services, and who is taking advantage of the services. ACE gathers this assessment data annually in an effort to maximize the services it offers and the space it utilizes, and now the Writing Center will be able to similarly assess their efforts as well.

The Writing Center's need for current and valid assessment data is certainly a concern, as the Center nearly closed for the 2010-2011 academic year. It was announced during the Summer of 2010 that funding for the English department had been cut, including the staff position of the Writing Center's administrator. The English department at that time decided that it could no longer financially support the Writing Center's main location and its tutors without administrative support, and made the difficult decision to close the Center. With funding from University Housing and thus unaffected by the English department's budgetary cuts, ACE decided that it would continue to provide writing consultation appointments at its offices. Unfortunately, the campus' overall capacity to provide writing consultations would have been significantly diminished if the Writing Center had closed. However, in August 2010, the Provost's Office quickly announced that the Writing Center would not be closed, the reason for the reversed decision being an "embarrassing miscommunication between offices" ("In Our Opinion" 4).

Once the Writing Center reopened, administrative duties were handed over to ACE in an effort to streamline the efforts of the program. This gave the Writing Center access to ACE's administrative assistant and scheduling software, creating the opportunity for students to sign up for writing consultation appointments at all of the Writing Center locations, a new advantage added solely because of the partnership. The temporary closure and scramble to re-open, however, has placed the Writing Center in a delicate situation, and it is likely that it will be reviewed by the Provost's Office in order to retain funding for this coming fiscal year. Therefore, a top priority this year has been to collect assessment data on student usage and whether the Writing Center is meeting its specific student learning outcomes. The partnership between ACE and the Writing Center, or on a broader level, Student Affairs and the English department, saved the Writing Center from complete closure, and assessment data will be crucial in keeping the Writing Center open in the years ahead.

The partnership between the Writing Center and ACE at the University of South Carolina clearly demonstrates that successful and sustainable partnerships between student affairs and academic affairs can indeed be created. The pooling of financial and human resources has the potential to benefit both partners. For ACE, the benefits include increased usage of their offices, while the Writing Center gains more visibility among the residential student population and access to new technology and assessment data. Students benefit by gaining more access to Writing Center services through extended hours for writing consultations, an increase in available appointments, ease of online appointment scheduling, and consultations within their living environments. Literally, the partnership brings Writing-Center services directly to students that may otherwise have never accessed them.

Creating a partnership between a student affairs office and academic affairs is not as impossible as some may think. The language between the two offices may differ, but they do share a common goal in that they both seek to help students succeed. Given many institutions' desire to help students integrate their in-class and out-of-class learning, the Writing Center-ACE collaboration at the University of South Carolina is a great example of a partnership that benefits all parties involved, especially the students. Both offices exist to serve the same student population, and with pressure being placed on integrative learning, building smaller partnerships between offices like ACE and the Writing Center is a great first step. Programs can grow out of such partnerships, longitudinal assessments can be conducted, and offices can be saved from

threatening budget cuts. Additionally, alliances between academic affairs offices such as Writing Center and student affairs can work together to reach a broader student population and raise the profiles of both divisions.

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P Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Call for Papers: Fall 2011 Issue of Praxis - Our first peer-reviewed issue

Spring 2011/News and Announcements

CFP: Fall 2011 Issue of *Praxis*: *From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work*

Our Fall 2011 issue continues the theme of our Spring issue. *Praxis* invites authors to reflect on the various ways writing centers serve student populations and wider communities. We are concerned that when writing centers are perceived only as writing hospitals, places that universities expect will "fix" student writing, they are more susceptible to budget cuts and funding crises. This makes it difficult for centers to sustain non-directive, non-evaluative consultation practices and to serve large, diverse communities of writers.

Praxis understands that, despite common institutional perceptions, many writing centers already assume more than a "triage" role. We welcome articles that describe existing efforts to carve out a broader purview for writing centers, as well as speculative essays about how writing centers help host institutions realize their pedagogical and cultural missions.

We are especially interested in how writing centers can raise their institutional profiles. *Praxis* believes that non-directive consultation practices, outreach initiatives, and extracurricular writing-center work can be powerful and economically savvy ways to bring accolade to universities, colleges, and high schools. We ask contributors to consider how, in the interest of securing funding, writing centers might present such an argument to institutional audiences.

Deadline: August 15, 2011

- **Call for Papers Spring 2012 Issue of Praxis: Multiliteracy and the Writing Center**

‹ **Call for Papers: Academic Exchange Quarterly, Special issue on Writing Center Theory and Practice**

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Call for Papers Spring 2012 Issue of Praxis: Multiliteracy and the Writing Center ›

Praxis is a project of the **Undergraduate Writing Center** at the University of Texas at Austin

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Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003–2011)

Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Framing Versatility as a Positive: Building Institutional Validity at The University of Colorado at Boulder's Writing Center

Spring 2011/Focus

by **Alaina Feltenberger and Allison Carr**, *The University of Colorado at Boulder*

One of a writing center's greatest institutional strengths is its versatility. A common misconception is that all writing centers are alike–indeed, many clients may not notice differences from one kind of organizational structure to another. Admittedly, regardless of a writing center's actual structure, it always holds to the ideal of providing support for what Muriel Harris calls "collaboration in learning about writing" (370). Yet variations in writing centers do exist, and often for complex reasons including funding, resources, prospective personnel, and the needs of the larger educational institution or community. Writing centers can be differentiated by the kind of people they employ: either what we call an expert/novice model or a peer-tutoring model, and sometimes a combination of the two. Thus, writing centers are spaces that can be tailored to the needs of the larger institution, and this versatility is one of the writing center's strengths in finding broad applications and implementation across a variety of locales.

Yet, this versatility is also paradoxically one of the writing center's greatest institutional challenges. For example, the unpredictability of this model or organizational structure means replicability is tenuous; it is sometimes difficult to simply pattern a successful writing center at one place and implement the same model in another. Because writing centers are often location-specific, it remains difficult to promote unilateral successes in methodology and training of consultants. Due to the perceived differences in writing centers, the function of a writing center and its importance in relation to the parent institution varies. In other words, because administrators may not realize the pedagogical implications behind the organization of a given writing center, hiring choices and budget decisions must continually be justified to the parent institution, and this burden usually falls on the director and consultants. A writing center's decision to employ paid professionals or institute a system of peer-tutoring has an impact on the level of professional cache that the center has within its academic community. The difficulty, then, is for a writing center to promote its versatility as a positive rather than a challenge that jeopardizes its inherent validity.

In order to demonstrate versatility as a positive facet of the writing center, we will use our own institution's center as

Our goal is to highlight our writing center's versatility while

an example. Our goal is to highlight our writing center's versatility while recognizing that different models can be appropriate for other institutional structures and budgets. At **The University of Colorado at Boulder (CU)**, **The Writing Center (WC)** is housed in the main campus library. Although the location is ideal, the space itself is relatively modest, with a front desk, four designated work spaces with computers, and an adjoining Research Center staffed by a non-WC affiliated library employee. The WC has gone through several incarnations over the past few years, and its sole source of funding is through the **Program for Writing and Rhetoric (PWR)**, which is comprised of a large base of instructors with varying professional expertise who teach CU's required lower and upper-division writing courses. The WC draws primarily on the PWR's instructors for its employee base. As a result, WC consultants at CU are typically graduate students or persons with Master's or Doctorate degrees and who usually have several years of experience teaching writing. We will refer to all writing center practitioners in the expert/novice model as consultants rather than tutors; we recognize that not all people make this distinction, but we will because our university does.

As WC consultants, we consider ourselves professionals; Alaina Feltenberger is a doctoral student in the School of Education studying Literacy, has taught writing for five years, and has worked at CU's WC for three and a half years, while Allison Carr is a Master's student in the English Department, has taught writing for two years, and has worked at CU's WC for three semesters. The consultants at our WC range from graduate students and instructors to professors and professional writers. We feel it is a boon to have such consultants who are also talented teachers, for they have the benefit of prolonged exposure to theories and methodologies of composition pedagogy. In contrast, undergraduate students who work as writing tutors often need to be trained before they begin work; for our purposes, we call such practitioners peer-tutors because they often work with other undergraduate students. At CU, the WC only employs writing instructors or graduate students with similar professional qualifications, whereas tutoring programs on campus (through the athletic department or residence life, for example) hire peer-tutors.

Although many writing centers hire both types of employees, such differences between staff members often accompany a difference in pay. All consultants, whatever their experience, should be aligned with the goals of the writing center and prepared to provide what Jeff Brooks calls minimalist tutoring in an attempt to engage the client as an active author and editor of her own work. But, consultants who are writing instructors are also able to actively engage in a praxis of ideologies that shape both their professional identities and writing center work as a field. For example, we employ L. S. Vygotsky's social-constructivist concepts of individual meaning-making, as explicated in his 1978 work *Mind in Society*, in our consulting practices to ensure that we approach each consultation with the client's unique interests and concerns at the fore. We combine our intellectual positionalities in our day-to-day behavior as consultants; this enactment of praxis requires conscious action and reflection as serious practitioners of composition support.

Although many consultants share our view of writing center work as professional collaborative guidance for writers, we believe that some of the problems with the view of writing centers as merely "writing hospitals" or

correction facilities stem from the lack–or perceived lack–of pedagogical training for consultants. Peer-tutoring models are often seen as lacking expertise; and this view, whether founded or not, often translates to other writing center models as well. When the expert/novice model is employed, as it is at CU, there is a danger that the writing center may begin to be viewed as a "hospital" for those whose writing is "ill." As Michael Pemberton says of professional consultants, "Because of our expertise, the metaphor maintains, we are better able to diagnose the specific nature of the problem evidenced in a piece of text, and we will also have the resources and knowledge available to effect a cure" (13). This metaphor fosters the perception that the consultant is akin to a medical professional with license to prescribe, rather than a collaborator in the client's process.

If we do use a medical metaphor to think about the writing center, perhaps we should think of ourselves as physical therapists instead of doctors. Over time, consultants can help clients learn to stand on their own. We can only meet our goal of focusing on collaborative learning by thinking of ourselves as outside the business of cures, for writing centers are designed to provide "a great deal more than a place to review apostrophe rules" (Harris 371). As writing instructors, we know that it takes more to adequately address the complex "symptoms" that may affect clients' writing. If we can emphasize that the praxis of ideologies occurring in the writing center equips our clients with skills of their own, rather than quick fixes, we increase our chances of being considered a valuable resource for the university community.

At CU, the WC is constantly under threat of budget cuts because its sole contributor, the PWR, is similarly under fire. Despite its ongoing efforts to be recognized as its own legitimate department in the **College of Arts and Sciences**, the PWR suffers from ever-increasing class sizes and ever-dwindling instructor positions. Such institutional duress translates to the WC, which has lost over one-third of its staff (from sixteen consultants down to ten) in the past year. The WC is currently looking for ways to expand its institutional profile in order to attract funding from alternative sources.

If we can emphasize that the praxis of ideologies occurring in the writing center equips our clients with skills of their own, rather than quick fixes, we increase our chances of being considered a valuable resource for the university community.

We believe that there are a variety of ways to achieve this work of institutional profile building, both at CU and other schools, colleges, and universities. One of the most self-evident ways is to encourage consultants to participate actively in the professional composition community of which they are a part; hence, we have written this article and others, we attend and present at conferences, and we facilitate and share in local and regional writing workshops. We also engage in off-campus outreach to the larger Boulder community; Feltenberger will give presentations about peer-tutoring to a local high school with the goal of supporting its secondary-level writing center. The materials that Feltenberger utilizes in her presentation will be adapted from existing outreach guides and will also update and formalize the WC's procedures for presenting to varied groups about collaborative consulting. Part of the ideological goal in providing this high school-level support is the notion that secondary-level writing centers will help incoming college freshmen better utilize CU's WC because writing center work will have become a familiar option of receiving composition

support. In addition to working with local high schools, CU's WC provides additional off-campus outreach by continuing to support CU alumni, who are always welcome to visit the WC, especially to work on job application materials or graduate school applications.

As a student service, both CU's consultants and WC directors are involved in conducting workshops and presentations for different departments that use writing as a significant means of evaluation. As a consultant, Carr has participated in on-campus outreach to departments such as the English Department, whose courses require students to do a great deal of writing. Often the instructors of these courses are not familiar with the support the WC can provide for their students. Consultants can be effective ambassadors for the WC in the university community, as they can accurately describe the ideologies of the WC, as well as the nuts and bolts of a typical session. For these outreach activities, we have created quick reference guides on frequently asked writing questions, and we make ourselves available to discuss resources for integrating writing into classroom curriculum in such a way that it can eventually be used as a means of evaluation. We also promote our in-house library of style guide manuals and reference books as a campus-wide resource. Through these varied activities, the WC demonstrates the importance of fostering collaborative coalitions with both on-campus programs and neighboring institutions. This better fosters a larger community's understanding of CU's WC as a site of writing expertise and support.

Although the elevation of the WC's institutional profile is occurring gradually, we recognize the need to trumpet its versatile achievements in addition to maintaining academic relevance in university coursework. The PWR provides graduate-level classes for instructors to professionalize their teaching practices and to become familiar with pedagogical theories related to teaching composition in particular; we both have taken such courses. Currently, Carr is enrolled in a course focusing exclusively on writing center theories taught by the WC's co-director. This course situates itself first in reference to the literature that built the foundations of the WC's central ideologies and then helps instructors apply these theories to their own classrooms. Though this course is housed in the English Department, it is available to all graduate students who are interested in applying consulting models to their own teaching practices. This course encourages professional development as well as research, both of which lead to larger projects concerning writing center work. This additional research can help raise the institutional profile of the writing center, and we both hope to remain active in these types of ongoing projects.

As we have suggested, versatility as a strength of the writing center allows tremendous adaptability in meeting and exceeding the needs of a given community; as such, we recognize that we can only be experts on the institutional challenges of our own writing center at CU. Our hope is that, continual communication with other composition practitioners, we will foster a broader base of success stories from which to share strategies, research, and inspiration.

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Allison Carr is a lecturer at the **University of Colorado Boulder** and a consultant at **CU's writing center**. She recently graduated from CU with her M.A. in English Literature and is looking forward to chasing the ever-elusive concept of "free time!"

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Home » Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work

From the Editor - Praxis Moving to Peer Review

Spring 2011/Columns

For this issue, *Praxis* invited authors to reflect on the various ways writing centers serve student populations and wider communities in ways that raise the institutional profiles of writing center work. Authors of our six Focus articles consider the question of institutional profile from a variety of perspectives. Together they demonstrate how writing centers at various stages of development and in a variety of institutional settings face and overcome particular challenges. They ask how writing centers might best represent themselves and present strategies for expanding the purview of writing-center work.

Because *Praxis* received a number of provocative articles this spring, the Fall 2011 issue of *Praxis* will revisit our current theme. Also, our Fall 2011 issue will be the first peer-reviewed issue of *Praxis*. *Praxis* will continue to be supported by the Undergraduate Writing Center, a division of the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at UT Austin. The transition to peer review will be accompanied not just by the development of an editorial board and peer review process, but also by changes in the way *Praxis* is published online. Our editors will be taking advantage of Open Journal System's content management applications and will be launching a new website.

Please see our **Fall 2011 Call for Papers** and our new **guidelines for submission**

And please tell your colleagues about this transformation, one that will help us to better server our contributors, readers, and writing-center patrons.

‹ Framing Versatility as a Positive: Building Institutional Validity at The University of Colorado at Boulder's Writing Center	up	Mad Man in the Writing Center: Why Don Draper and I have a lot in common ›

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Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Mad Man in the Writing Center: Why Don Draper and I have a lot in common

Spring 2011/Consulting

by **Mark Thomas**, *James Madison University*

Don Draper is the tall, dark, and handsome lead character on the cable TV series *Mad Men*. I, on the other hand, am short, very white, and average looking, except as I mentioned, I am extremely white. Pale. *Tres blanc*. I am so white that a friend once described me as translucent. In the right light, and from a particular angle, you can see through me. That leads me back to how Don Draper and I are alike.

For those of you unfamiliar with *Mad Men*, the Madison Avenue ad executive ostensibly called Donald Draper is actually an imposter named Dick Whitman, who stole the dog tags from a dead fellow soldier in Korea and assumed his identity. I was watching the finale of season four when the parallel hit me. Tutoring in writing has shown me my double life.

Draper and I both live double lives. Like Don, I have created an alternative version of myself, the version that tutors individuals in the writing center. It's a different self from the one my students see in class. I'm one person in the writing center and another in the classroom. Duplicity is what the mad man and I have in common.

In Don's case, the result is a lot of dramatic irony. The show's arch-historical setting highlights its frame and its artifice; but the layering of character also reveals that, as I said, Draper is surrounded by people who have their own secrets. He's constantly being surprised by what he doesn't know about those around him. Take his new fiancée, Megan, for example. When she telephones her mother with news of their engagement, their conversation *en francais* shocks Don with how little he knows about the woman he just proposed to.

To wrap up the series' fourth season, creator/writer/director Matthew Weiner closes with a shot of Don lying in bed with Megan. Don looks past his bedside clock towards the window, and the 1965 Sonny & Cher hit "I Got You, Babe" begins to play. By closing the season, in an episode titled "Tomorrowland," with this visual and auditory pun alluding to the 1993 movie *Groundhog Day*, I think Weiner underlines that Don is repeating earlier mistakes, even while trying to change his life.

Why am I one person in the writing center and a different person in the classroom? Because the numerous students there are assembled like an audience, my classroom becomes a theater where I perform by conducting class and playing the role of The

Why am I one person in the writing center and a different person in the classroom? Because the numerous students there are assembled like an audience, my classroom becomes a theater where I

Teacher. In the classroom my statements are meant for public consumption and, usually, for general application. For example, when I speak to my classes I look around, as if I could encompass the group with my gestures, while watching for signs that I might need to rephrase for anyone in the room. I try to address the concerns of an average student. But, sometimes I wind up addressing no one present because there is no one average student.

In the classroom I confront multiple subjectivities. And, while the students in my classes have a lot in common with each other, each one of them is unique in his or her agenda and relative interest or desire for learning or writing in particular.

I also have to evaluate my students with grades. That doesn't happen in tutoring, which means that the tutor is much more of an ally than a potential foe. Teaching entails more authority and responsibility than tutoring. (In a tutoring session, those qualities are negotiated and shared between the tutor and tutee). Teaching a required, general education course such as freshman composition means I face a range of interests, attitudes, and aptitudes in every class. For some students, the most important outcome from the course is their grade. A number of them, however, are motivated by the growing awareness of how much writing will characterize their professional lives.

In the writing center, in an intensive consultation with a tutor, the student is encouraged to set the agenda. The student's interest and engagement is usually high, and his motivation and hunger to write better is an important element of difference. Remember, students in the writing center self-select; they choose to be there, carving time out of their schedules for these sessions. Having given up some of their own free time, they value their time in the writing center.

In tutoring, the relationship that develops between tutor and tutee is usually positively collaborative because each one sees his separate and combined efforts to achieve overlapping goals. The writer's primary concern is with a particular document; the tutor tries to help the writer learn something–whether about the writing process, research, rereading, or argumentation–that helps her or him complete the document.

There's also the duration of the interaction. Among tutors, it is commonplace that each session is different from the others. For teachers, each semester offers a similar fresh start. I remember being frustrated by semesters as a student. It seemed that many classes only addressed were just reaching the most interesting material at the end of the semester. Now, I see that was by design. I think teachers, more than students, benefit from having a fresh start every four or five months. Tutors, however, may be reborn at the top of each hour.

Just as the characteristics of a class depend on the students, each tutoring session depends on the writer. This brings me back to the quality of one-on-one transactions. Tutoring means working with one person. For a short while I ally myself with an individual (or a small group of writers, for collaborative writing projects). In our alliance, the writer and I inwardly assess each other. While outwardly we express our hopes and expectations, and work reciprocally toward a shared goal.

When my fellowship at **James Madison University's writing center** began last year, many new opportunities opened up. The people I work with are individually and collectively impressive professionals, dedicated to helping students become better writers. As I prepare for my own Tomorrowland, what can I suggest that would help the next writing fellow to do more than bask in the writing center's reflected glory? The faculty member lucky enough to become the next writing fellow for the writing center will have plenty to do, keeping up with the cadre of undergraduate tutors who share their talents with others and spread the good work in new sites around our campus.

Now that I can see the end of my fellowship in the writing center, I have learned by meeting one-on-one with roughly three hundred **JMU** students that each one is different. Some need only a little help or encouragement to develop their writing further, while others, perhaps initially shy from having been told that they are not good writers, deserve a clean slate, a fresh set of friendly eyes, and a chance to remake themselves through education, through their writing. That's what the writing center offers.

Where would Don Draper and I be without second chances?

Mark Thomas is an Assistant Professor in the School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication (WRTC) at James Madison University. His two-year Fellowship in the University Writing Center culminated in the accompanying article, an earlier version of which was delivered to colleagues at the WRTC Faculty Symposium in February.

Sections

Focus
Columns and Reviews
Consulting
Training
News & Announcements

Archives

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About Us

About Us

Submissions

Submit an article to Praxis

Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Money Doesn't Matter

Spring 2011/Focus

by **Molly McHarg**, *Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar*

Introduction

Stephen North's 1984 article, "The Idea of a Writing Center," highlighted the struggle writing centers face with regard to misperceptions about their function and purpose. North proclaimed that writing centers should not be viewed as centers of remediation but rather as locations for productive and meaningful learning. He vehemently voiced his frustration with faculty and administrators, who he suggested were perpetuating the misconception of a writing center's purpose. Despite that North's call for change and awareness is now decades old, misperceptions of writing-center work remain common.

Praxis's most recent Call for Papers caught my attention — "From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work." I let out a sigh of relief as I recognized, although disappointedly, that it is not only my institution, but centers around the world that continue to struggle with this challenge. As I continued to read through the call, however, I felt rather jolted: "when writing centers are perceived only as writing hospitals…they are more susceptible to budget cuts and funding crises." I write from a context in which the reality is quite the opposite. Allow me to explain.

I work in **Education City** in **Doha, Qatar**. Education City is comprised of a number of American higher-education institutions that have established branch campuses here. Notably, these branch campuses are only selections from the main campuses — for example, **Virginia Commonwealth University** only imported the School of the Arts, **Georgetown University** carried over the School of Foreign Service, and **Texas A & M** replicated the School of Engineering. The aim is to bring the most elite school from each university to Qatar. While individual contracts vary, the primary mandate for all institutions is the same: create a mirror image of the home institution. Education City universities are funded by the State of Qatar; as a result of the Gulf's wealth, funding is not a particularly pervasive problem (although it is notable that the campuses are politically and administratively linked with their home campuses, and on occasion this can result in financial wrangling).

The bottom line for writing centers in Qatar is that, while funding may not be a concern, their institutional profiles are still as low as their U.S. counterparts. Most of the Education City universities have ample discretionary funds, but they are rarely used for writing-center development. For example, writing-center administrators at Education City universities often find themselves writing lengthy rationale statements or trying to justify their need for software, peer tutors, or other resources.

Other departments do not seem to face these same challenges. Libraries, for example, simply request a book that is "necessary to develop the collection" and — voila! — the book is purchased. Writing centers, however, must begin by explaining what a writing center is, what it does, and how it can assist students, faculty, and staff. That is, writing centers are misunderstood and, as a result, deemed unimportant. My goal here is twofold: one, to underscore that writing centers remain low on the academic totem pole, regardless of funding concerns; and two, to articulate some of the methods writing centers in Education City have used to raise this profile — first through a general increase in visibility, and subsequently through a deeper understanding of the writing center's role.

The bottom line for writing centers in Qatar is that, while funding may not be a concern, their institutional profiles are still as low as their U.S. counterparts.

With regard to the first aim, it is important to reiterate that even within a context of seemingly unlimited funding, writing centers still encounter perceptions of being a place for remediation and "fixing." A constant increase in visibility is critical to developing and improving the status of writing centers. General awareness increases general knowledge; the more writing-center staff can disseminate information about writing-center pedagogy, the more improved the center's profile will become.

To articulate some of the methods writing centers in Education City have used to raise the profile of their mission within the institution, I focus on two universities — Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (VCUQ) and Georgetown University in Qatar (GUQ). The reason for this stems from my own experiences — while I have colleagues and anecdotes from other institutions, my primary work experience in Qatar has been with these two universities. As such, I will focus on two primary features I have noticed in writing center work: tutorial reporting and increased professional development.

Act I: Reporting

During the 2009-10 academic year, I worked as an adjunct English faculty member at **Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar** (VCUQ), but I transitioned to a permanent position in the writing center at VCUQ in October 2010. My initial experience as a faculty member was useful because I saw things from the perspective of a writing center instructor (while I was teaching at VCUQ, I was also working part-time at **Georgetown University in Qatar**'s writing center.). As a faculty member at VCUQ, I received reports from the writing center about every student in my class who visited and received services (students sign a waiver at the beginning of the semester — they are able to opt-out of this automatic reporting if they choose). At GUQ, there was a very different reporting system, which will be further described below.

VCUQ's system of automatically reporting each session to the instructor provides a useful, collaborative link between the writing center and faculty. As it is, there is very limited interaction between the writing center and faculty. Since the vast majority of students are non-native speakers, the interaction typically involves a faculty member sending a student to the writing center to "get the grammar fixed." While this may be an area covered in the tutorial, often higher order concerns are also addressed. For example, many students come to the

center simply to understand an assignment before they begin writing. Other students come to discuss the organization of their ideas. Sometimes tutorials are even further removed from the writing process than one would expect — one of my recent reports states, "She seemed to have all the information she needed to complete the assignment but primarily needed emotional support." The reporting system can capture these interactions and assist in educating faculty about the incredibly complex and diverse role of the writing center.

VCUQ writing center staff also attempt to use lay language, making reporting accessible to a broad audience. This is critical in an environment where many of the faculty are either themselves non-native speakers or from disciplines where reading and writing is not heavily emphasized and the role of the writing center is somewhat unclear (e.g. a design school such as VCUQ). A conversational, narrative style of reporting provides a more welcoming framework to which faculty can respond.

In contrast, GUQ has not had any formal reporting structure in place for faculty. Tutors are expected to complete hand-written notes on template forms, which are ultimately filed away and typically forgotten. On occasion, forms may be pulled to assist in determining whether or not a probationary student has made an effort to seek academic support. There are also periodic "Faculty Referrals", when a student has been specifically referred to the center for academic support by a particular professor. In this case, the student is required to have the form completed by the writing center tutor and return it to the professor. Faculty rarely inquire about student use of the writing center, and no efforts have been made to reach out to faculty due to confidentiality concerns. No doubt this line between open communication and maintaining confidentiality is one with which writing centers across the globe struggle, but from my view it is a critical issue for writing centers to tackle in order to improve our overall institutional profile.

Act II: Professional Development

Another salient feature I have seen at both institutions is an attempt at professionalism — specifically, I am referring to professional development initiatives. In Doha, representatives from various writing centers (both inside and outside Education City) collaborate and rotate in hosting writing center meetings. These typically include a specific topic of writing center work (e.g. peer tutor training, staff development, administrative logistics of reporting, etc.), and often one of the participants facilitates the discussion or gives a brief presentation.

In addition to the informal Doha writing center network, there is also a **Middle East and North Africa Writing Center Alliance** (MENAWCA). This group, established in 2007, is a much more formal entity that hosts biannual conferences and aims to provide a forum for writing center concerns and development in the region. Due to the formality of the MENAWCA organization, I must request funding from my institution in order to participate in events. This has significant implications in raising my professional profile within the institution. For example, as a writing center instructor, I have very little and limited interaction with the Dean. However, when I apply for professional development funds to attend the MENAWCA conference, it is the Dean who needs to sign off for approval. The simple act of reading my request and recognizing that such a professional organization exists helps add credibility to

my position. This is not unique to VCUQ; it is typically the upper level administration that must sign approval for all professional development funding.

These acts of professionalism are one way of highlighting the important work of writing centers, not only regionally but within our own institutions. Our professional development initiatives underscore the growing importance of our work as writing center staff for upper administration officials.

Conclusion

This article has been very limited in scope — there are countless other endeavors that VCUQ, GUQ, and other Education City writing centers have embarked upon that are worthy of further elaboration. Nonetheless, these two foci of reporting and professionalism are useful considerations for writing centers around the world that can be realized regardless of budgetary constraints.

Reporting can take many forms and can be a collaborative process. Some institutions may have strict confidentiality rules that prohibit them from sharing session reports. However, there are other ways to have collaborative faculty and institutional involvement. Perhaps an overall report to the faculty or administration with statistics about how many students from different disciplines have visited the writing center, or what types of services they seek, would be appropriate. While reporting can take many forms, the ultimate goal is communication.

Professionalism can also take many forms. While attending conferences and developing partnerships is important, professionalism can happen internally as well. Staff training initiatives can be developed and promoted in-house. Writing center staff can develop and facilitate workshops for other faculty and staff at their institutions, thus demonstrating a desire to be an open and communicative center that is integral to the entire institution. These are professional development opportunities for the entire university community that can be implemented at any institution.

Raising the institutional profile of writing centers is an ongoing, challenging task. Regardless of funding constraints, there are mechanisms that can be used to maintain a culture of communication and an awareness of the importance of writing center work. While writing instruction and development is a primary aim of centers, dispersing knowledge and an understanding of our profession also remains a critical element of our mission.

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Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Negotiating Authority: Perceptions of Age in the Writing Center

Spring 2011/Consulting

by **Courtney L. Werner**, *Kent State University*

From 2003 to 2006, I worked as a writing center tutor at a small, private, liberal arts college. I was the "traditional" college student while I worked at the writing center: I was between the ages of 19 and 22 and a middle-class Caucasian woman. During my three years working as a tutor at the Moravian College and Theological Seminary Writing Center, other tutors and I faced our biggest challenges while working with Moravian Seminary students–graduate students at the seminary studying to become affiliated with the Moravian Church. These students were typically many years older than the tutors. As younger tutors, we often felt that these older student-writers did not value our input on their writing.

Although there were many conflicts between writing center tutors and seminary students, tutors often lumped all conflicts under the heading of "age conflict." Hoever, it is clear to me now that there was more going on, more contact zones interacting, than what was on the surface. Seminary students, though typically older, were often international students; their identities and habits during the conference were complicated by ethnicity, race, culture, religious beliefs, and age. Being younger, inexperienced, traditional college students from middle- to upper-class backgrounds, we felt all of the conflicts resulted from age differences because at the time we could not fathom what else would cause them. When I took a graduate position at Texas State University, it became that clear age influenced writing tutorials differently at various writing centers.

Non-traditional students – students who are 23+ – constitute 42.14% of the overall student population at Texas State, and the number is consistently increasing. 183 non-traditional students visited the writing center between January 13, 2008 and March 19, 2008 out of a total of 500 students, marking the demographic as an important clientele.

This project–a limited case study– examines the tutorial process as a negotiation of authority, especially where age is concerned. I ask whether the age-related contact zone is a significant influence in writing center tutorials. To answer this question, I designed a preliminary survey to distribute to the writing center tutors and conducted interviews with four survey respondents. Though I limit my current discussion to the interview findings, I argue age differences during a writing center tutorial session sometimes impede or strengthen a tutor's ability to connect with a writer as peers. Because becoming peers is integral to a quality conference session where writers learn about their writing and critically examine ways to enhance their

Is the age-related contact zone a significant influence in writing center tutorials?

writing. The ability to connect with a tutor, to become peers with the tutor, affects the writing process. I argue stereotyping non-traditional students, denying the impact of age in the writing center, and working to build a peer relationship are three phenomena writing center staff and researchers must critically examine in order to meet the needs of expanding student demographics on college campuses.

A word about my case study participants: the original surveys were distributed to all the Texas State Writing Center tutors, and all tutors were given the opportunity to volunteer for follow-up interviews. Tutors voluntarily filled out the survey and returned them anonymously to me via a drop box located in the writing center. Tutors who were willing to engage in follow up interviews indicated their interest on the survey along with their contact information. Six tutors responded, but I was only able to schedule interviews with four. Roughly 73% or eight out of eleven survey-respondents are non-traditional student-tutors while only 27% (three tutors) are traditional student-tutors. 64% (seven) survey-participants are female, while 37% (four) are male. The ratio of male to female participants reflects the demographics of the writing center, where the ratio is sixteen female to six males (8:3). Of the tutors I interviewed, three are traditional-age students and one (Keri) is non-traditional age. All interviewed tutors are female.

Stereotyping the Non-Traditional Student

"Non-traditional students are less wary of just telling me exactly what they think," says Dayna. According to Ryane, "If anyone's going to argue with me about something, or I guess disagree with something that I say, it's usually them." Keri says, "By the time that you get into your 30s and 40s, you develop habits." Ashly feels, "non-traditional students who come to the writing center are more motivated because they're deciding to come back to school."

Each above quotation describes a stereotype about non-traditional students: non-traditional students can be blunt and demanding of respect and equality; age-related seniority exists; non-traditional students can be more resistant to tutors' suggestions; and non-traditional students are more motivated than other students.

These overlapping themes can be broken down into three basic stereotypes: non-traditional students have more life experience than traditional students, they command more respect and authority in a tutorial, and non-traditional students are more set in their writing habits. In one respect, each of these stereotypes shows non-traditional students taking control over tutorials to increase the quality of the tutorial for themselves. In another respect, non-traditional students' actions lead tutors to feel sessions have a lower quality because of a lack of peer equality. Keeping these stereotypes in mind, I examine how these tutors negotiate becoming peers with non-traditional students.

Denying Age

Tutors often feel non-traditional student-writers are no different than traditional students. Based on the surveys and interviews, age did not originally register as a significant factor for tutors in determining tutorial success. Identity is often crucial to a person's writing process, as many theorists (see Villanueva; Grimm) point out. Therefore, when Ashly told me that she does not think demographic factors affect tutorials because the most important factor is "whether or not

[students have] been forced to come" to the center, and she felt "[those things aren't] really related to the other factors that were asked about [on the survey]," I was skeptical. However, three of the four tutors I interviewed purported similar views.

For Keri, the survey brought touchy subjects to the surface: "I actually talked to other tutors and said, 'Is this real? Are there really differences?' And they gave me some of their examples. I went back and really thought about it." Keri came to see that there are both differences and similarities between non-traditional and traditional student-writers. It was apparent, though, that she had never stopped to think before–never needed to think–about how people's differences affect tutor-student interaction. Keri says that when she began taking the survey, she thought she was just tutoring people–no real difference between them. When she finished, though, her opinion moved beyond "we're all equal."

Ashly, though, remained resistant. When asked how her approach to a session might change when she realized the student-writer she would be working with was a non-traditional student, Ashly said nothing would change. Her tutorial ritual would say the same, and age would not register as a factor in her thought process about the student or her writing. Ashly denies that writing center sessions might be affected by the writer's age. At the end of our interview, she told me, "a lot of people who are older than me tend to judge me a little more because it's so apparent that I'm younger than them. I'm starting to see it more and more." Ashly did not see a connection between how older people might judge her and the ways non-traditional students might treat her within the confines of the tutorial session.

> *Even if age had eventually become a blip on writing center tutors' factors-affecting-the-session radar, tutors did not see age as problematic or complex when they first began to tutor.*

Even if age had eventually become a blip on writing center tutors' factors-affecting-the-session radar, tutors did not see age as problematic or complex when they first began to tutor.Ryane describes her first tutorial session with a non-traditional student-writer as awkward because she did not expect to encounter older students. Unlike Ryane, Dayna had the initial denial evidenced in both Keri and Ashly's comments. When I asked why she choose to list age as the second most important factor in determining success of the tutorial on the survey, she responded,"Sex/gender, really doesn't matter. Religions? I hardly ever find out what religion a person is when they come in, unless they have some kind of obvious markings […]. Sexual orientation–something I usually don't know. So it really came down to race and age, so those are really the only two things that affect me."

Dayna gave much thought to what aspects of a student-writer's identity contribute to or impede an ability to become peers, ranking race and age as most likely to affect the tutorial.

Becoming Peers

A final theme emerging from the surveys and interviews is the process of becoming peers. Keri, Ashly, Ryane, and Dayna struggle with concept of being peers with non-traditional student-writers. The tutors take different stances in terms of identifying with non-traditional students as peers. Two identify strongly with these students while two feel they are at a disadvantage when interacting with non-traditional students on a peer-to-peer level.

For Keri, there is a sense of real peer collaboration with non-traditional student-writers that she does not have with traditional students. She says she experienced "camaraderie" with one particular non-traditional student writer and has the same feeling with others. Keri also says, "when I see an older person, I have a level of compassion" because of their common ground as returning students. Keri relates to non-traditional student writers and admittedly projects her own experiences onto them: an effort that allows her to engage as peers with non-traditional.

Ashly, too, comments on the idea of being peers when she discusses community building with non-traditional tutors. She says she wanted one particular non-traditional student-writer she worked with to "know that I knew the place that she was in, that I could share with her that, and that I could help her through that if she ever wanted to come back and see me about anything." Ashly, however, does not simply encourage community by inviting student-writers to come back to the writing center, she builds bridges by introducing her non-traditional student classmates to the writing center as a place that caters to them. She describes telling one classmate to come to the writing center to use the microwave–a sure way to build community with a non-traditional student looking for the scarce commodity of a microwave to heat up her dinner on campus.

For Dayna, on the other hand, there is a lesser degree of peer equity with non-traditional student writers. Dayna says she is "definitely intimidated by" non-traditional student writers and that she is "just a little bit more wary than if it was just a regular student" and has anxiety about working with non-traditional student-writers, a comment suggesting effective peer collaboration relies on many factors including age.

Ryane also struggles to become peers with non-traditional student-writers. She claims that tutoring an older student is a role reversal with little room for the consideration of peer equity due to "people my parents' age, and having some twenty-something tell them […] how to work on their paper. […]. It's a backwards role for both parties." Ryane's comments suggest she definitely feels the role reversal; Ryane cannot find common ground with these student-writers, nor can she be their peer while she worries about negotiating such a role reversal–the opposite of many teacherly settings.

Although this piece does not speak to all writing centers or tutors, as the number of non-traditional students increases on college campuses, the number of writing center visits by these students also increases. Preliminary findings suggest age-related contact zones affect tutors' perceptions of the non-traditional students they work with. Tutors may at first be resistant to the idea that age affects tutorials at all, but the effect is still there. If tutors do not necessarily "see" writers' ages, then they think age does not affect tutorials; however, this is not the case. Because all pieces of writers' identities affect their interactions with other writers (or tutors), and especially because tutors are more likely to initially deny writers' ages as a factor in tutorial sessions, age-related contact zones in writing centers need more attention than they have previously been given.

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P Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference

Spring 2011/News and Announcements

February 16 — February 18, 2012

Noel Studio for Academic Creativity
Eastern Kentucky University
Richmond, KY

Keynote Speaker:
Cynthia L. Selfe

Conference Theme:
Next-Gen WC: Composing Spaces, Exploring Ideas

The conference theme encourages us, as individuals and as a field, to think generatively about writing center spaces and the compositions that create and shape them. Let's reconsider familiar conversations–staffing, budget, and perception–while composing next-generation spaces and exploring new ideas in writing center theory and practice. In true writing center fashion, we encourage a variety of submissions with broad interpretations of the theme.

http://www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html

Chair:
Russell Carpenter: russell.carpenter@eku.edu

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Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003–2011)

Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Staking Institutional and Theoretical Claims for the Writing Center

Spring 2011/Focus

by **Katie Stahlnecker**, *Metropolitan Community College: Ohamha, Nebraska*

"I fear, sometimes, that we are too willing to give our institutions what we think they want, *whether or not it is what* we want *or, ultimately, even what* they want."

–Elizabeth Boquet

"What just happened?" I asked myself repeatedly as I embarked upon the hour-long drive back to my campus after my first paid speaking engagement. I was invited by a small liberal arts college in a nearby community to address a group of thirty faculty members from across the curriculum to share my knowledge of writing centers. In response to an email inquiry regarding the purpose of my visit, their contact person (a chemistry professor) replied as follows: "In terms of the content of your presentation, our main goal is to educate (or at least begin to educate) ourselves about writing centers in general and to build support for creating a WC at our college in the near future, so I'll rely on your experience and expertise to give us the information you think is most relevant at this stage in the process."

At the time, I had been a writing center consultant for fourteen years, a doctoral student studying writing center theory and pedagogy for five years, and the designer/coordinator of a new multi-campus writing center for three years. I had worked with countless students, considered every aspect of writing center work while learning the theory behind it, and negotiated with administration and faculty to establish our writing center as a democratic space within the hierarchical structure of the institution. So I had experience, and from that I had plenty to say. No question about it. But *expertise*? Expertise at the rate of $300 an hour? Gulp. Having never been paid to offer my opinion (professional or otherwise), I felt a tremendous pressure to determine and convey what should matter to them most as they began thinking about establishing a writing center.

So for the next many weeks, I diligently prepared for the meeting, meticulously considering how best to use my brief forty-five minute block of time (to be followed by a Q & A session). My audience consisted of faculty members from a wide variety of disciplines who were involved in a campus-wide initiative to incorporate Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). They hoped to support this effort with the creation of a writing center; although, as I soon learned, they didn't exactly know how or even why.

In this formative stage of their thinking, I ultimately decided that my role was to introduce them to the very idea of a writing center. For me, this meant

planning my presentation and creating a packet of handouts and illustrations surrounding three key topics: the history of writing centers, the seminal scholarship in the field, and, most importantly the need for a new writing center to have a theoretical foundation. I wanted them to know where we come from, where we stand, and where we are headed as a field. And I wanted them to consider this context as they determined their place within it. What they wanted, although they couldn't articulate it either before or during our meeting, was something altogether different.

"It's crucial to create a mission for your writing center that informs all other decisions you make when designing and running it," I mentioned.

"Yeah, mission, uh huh, philosophy, great," they said, practically in unison, "but how about the room? Do we need our own special room?"

"Even this very decision–*where* to do the work of a writing center–would be informed by that overall mission," I said. "The space that you have and the furniture that inhabits it speak volumes about the sort of work that goes on there."

"Can't we just pull up a table in the learning center?" asked one gentleman.

"Certainly, you could," I replied, "but you'd want to consider what sort of implications that would have."

"How could where you sit down with the student to do the work really make a difference? It's what you say to the student that matters," interjected a professor who was clearly unimpressed by my reasoning.

"*Of course*, the content of the consultation is the most important thing of all. My point exactly. It's just that we must carefully consider all else to preserve the integrity of that exchange," I answered. "A miscellaneous table in the corner of the learning center could send a message that we are just another remedial service for struggling students. At our college, we resist this association so that all writers (faculty included) feel welcome in the writing center. For us, it's important to eliminate anything that reinforces the master/apprentice model of education that we are trying to avoid."

"How does that work when faculty members use the service? Can they just drop off their work and come back later for your written feedback?" asked another professor in the crowd, drastically changing the subject back to something tangible. And so the conversation proceeded, being pulled from the theoretical to the practical and back again. The folks present weren't mean or hostile. It's just that they clearly weren't prepared to imagine this work as being informed necessarily by theory. Thus, they resisted my efforts to generalize and philosophize and, for the most part, looked at me through it all as if I had lobsters crawling out of my ears. Before I knew it, the session was over, and they were all scurrying back to their daily obligations.

I drove the first half hour back to work beating myself up for giving such a rotten, worthless presentation. "What was I thinking?" I began. "Why couldn't I articulate myself better?"; "Why didn't I just bring our floor plan, our supply needs, and a bulleted list of what we will and will not do for writers?"; "Why did I think I knew what they needed to hear?"; and the granddaddy of all questions plaguing me: "Why, oh why, did they pay me 300 bucks for *that*?" Initially, I felt embarrassed, guilty, depressed.

Trying to discern where I went wrong, I began to replay in my mind the many conversations I had with colleagues at my own institution throughout the past several weeks about what we have come to believe matters most when starting a writing center. Through the various stories and memories of our first few years at this institution, we recalled what had worked well and what had not. And, I asked the consultants what advice they would give to someone designing a new writing center. From these discussions, one central goal emerged–know who you are and what you want to be. We had been pulled ourselves in many directions as we set out to establish our writing center. In the process, we learned how important it is to be on board with a shared philosophy, which acts as a filter through which all planning and decisions should pass. Without such a mission, a new writing center could easily get sucked into the institutional abyss of being all things for all people and having no identity of its own.

The folks at this other college were poised to fall into just such a trap given that no one had a clear picture of what a writing center should be. They just knew that their students would be writing more than ever with the WAC initiative, and they hoped the writing center could help to ease the transition for faculty members unfamiliar with the teaching of writing. Without a sense of direction for their writing center, I reasoned, this could be disastrous. Their writing center would inevitably be at the mercy of the initiative, which would likely produce problematic demands and expectations. The writing center would be expected to come to the rescue of both students and teachers with little writing experience and produce an easy "fix." Very little learning would occur along the way.

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So, no, I convinced myself as I neared the turn off for my campus. No. I am not crazy. They asked for the information that I think is "most relevant at this stage in the process," and this is definitely it. The problem, I finally decided, was that I barely even scratched the surface of this issue in those 60 minutes we had together (which included 20 minutes for lunch). How could I possibly have done justice to all that I felt needed to be covered in such a small, distracted time frame? And how could I feel guilty that, in a matter of minutes, they hadn't had an adequate chance to wrap their heads around what to most of them were unfamiliar concepts–what I had learned, studied, and lived for over fourteen years?

It finally occurred to me that I should not have agreed to the suggested format for their ambitious request for information as this isn't the stuff of a casual lunch chat. In fact, it's a whole new way of thinking about institutional dynamics that takes far more than one hour to grasp. Even so, I took comfort in knowing that, at least, I had left them with plenty to consider about the importance of defining the writing center themselves rather than having it be defined by others. Far too many people charged with starting new writing centers are forced to learn the hard way because it hadn't even occurred to them to identify their institutional and theoretical claims at the outset. In that sense, I hadn't lead them astray at all.

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‹ **Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference**	**up**	**Sustaining Argument: Centralizing the Role of the Writing Center in Program Assessment** ›

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003–2011)

Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Sustaining Argument: Centralizing the Role of the Writing Center in Program Assessment

Spring 2011/Focus

by **M. S. Jewell**, *Case Western Reserve University: Cleveland, Ohio*

In "Why Assessment?" (2009), Gerald Graff argues that the critical conversations arising from regular program assessment are often as important as the actual findings themselves: outcomes assessment, he writes, is not only fundamental to measuring students' performance, but potentially "transformative" in terms of creating a recognizable dialogue about — and a more lively institutional culture of — good teaching (153). Agreeing with Graff's claim, I argue that writing centers should take an active, if not central, role in the assessment of writing program outcomes by positioning themselves at the center of the evaluation process. My experiences as a writing center director involved in our university's less-than-three-year-old writing program assessment has led me to this conclusion.

We currently assess our program through a university-wide interdisciplinary faculty evaluation of students' writing portfolios, compiled from essays that they write in their first three writing-intensive courses. Our **Writing Resource Center (WRC)** was drawn into conversations with writing program administrators to develop this newer evaluation structure due to its contact with a large number of student writers who found the commentary on their essays that they received by faculty assessing their portfolios under the older system to be inconsistent with the responses provided by the classroom instructors to whom the papers were originally submitted. When the evaluation system was restructured to focus less on the individual student writers and more on general program assessment, the WRC remained integrally involved in the process. We organized a two-week summer review process and participated in the evaluation, along the way providing the multidisciplinary faculty evaluation panel with essential context on the portfolio requirements and useful guidelines for assessing student writing.

How might the transformative, dialogic spaces opened up by program assessment be useful not only in terms of their pedagogical benefits, but for their rhetorical value in terms of increasing writing center visibility and bolstering institutional legitimacy?

Importantly, however, in addition to directly participating in assessment procedures, we have since spearheaded the communication of results to writing program and other campus administrators, and publicized the extent to which outcomes are met to faculty and students through outreach activities such as writing-center sponsored workshops. These activities have led me to reflect on the ways in which not only our own, but other writing centers might take advantage of the institutional discourses generated

by program assessment. How might the transformative, dialogic spaces opened up by program assessment be useful not only in terms of their pedagogical benefits, but for their rhetorical value in terms of increasing writing center visibility and bolstering institutional legitimacy?

Graff's essay on assessment grew out of his ongoing concern with what he terms "course-o-centrism" or the "curricular incoherence" arising from the lack of a clearly articulated connection between courses or faculty unfamiliar with larger curriculum outcomes. He suggests that this rather isolated view of teaching is upheld, in some respects, in the name of instructional autonomy. Given that a large number of faculty within and between disciplines remain unaware of the varying methodologies of their colleagues, maintaining "a kind of tunnel vision," ultimately it is the students who suffer: "When the assumptions of one course undermine those of the next or have no discernable relation to them at all," significant "educational damage" results for most students (Graff 156-57). Herein lies the value of regular outcomes assessment. Graff argues that outcomes assessment helps teachers determine if and what students are learning, identify as a group what it is students should be learning, and, finally, to work together as faculty to promote the sorely needed curricular coherence, a fundamentally more democratic way of promoting learning. After suggesting that faculty focus on finding common grounds for assessment by measuring students' abilities in argumentation, Graff concludes by citing the compelling personal testimony of an unidentified professor who writes that establishing assessment in his department has brought about the "richest, most intellectually engaging, and most useful faculty discussions" leading to improved practices and a tangible "buzz on teaching and learning" (164). Given their expertise in individualized instruction, it is exactly this buzzing culture of teaching and learning that writing centers are often in a unique position to cultivate and promote.

Promotion, however, entails at least some level of involvement. While an involvement in program assessment entails varying levels of commitment from writing center directors and associated staff, the argument for at least some level of participation in the process is not difficult to make, and it can have immediate benefits.The improved practices resulting from a collaboration between faculty working to assess classroom writing instruction and writing center staff can prove indispensable to giving the fullest possible picture of student writing and, therefore, promoting the best possible practices among both classroom and writing center instructors. In our writing center, as is the case with writing centers across the nation, we work with hundreds of students each week and are familiar with faculty writing assignments across campus. We witness a remarkable diversity in terms of learning styles and language proficiency, and are all too familiar with students' writing habits. Who better than writing center staff to collaborate with classroom instructors in the structured measurement of how well we are teaching writing to our students? Regardless of the level of participation, however, merely advocating for an involvement increases the center's visibility,

The improved practices resulting from a collaboration between faculty working to assess classroom writing instruction and writing center staff can prove indispensable to giving the fullest possible picture of student writing and, therefore, promoting the best possible practices among both classroom and writing center instructors.

(re)situating it as a vital instructional center, rather than a remedial lab for deficient students, or a marginalized "proofreading shop-in-the-basement" (North 444). Indeed, the benefits from the rhetorical re-framing of its roles merely in the terms and contexts of assessment can assist in positioning the writing center beyond the unfortunate, still hard-to-shake current-traditionalist dictum that its sole responsibility is to proofread, polish, and produce better papers as opposed to writers.

Yet, it should be noted that positioning the writing center as vital to understanding student writing, and therefore central to writing program assessment, diverges from the ways in which writing centers have typically self-represented with regard to their roles both in the program and in the institution at large. As Eric Hobson points out, writing centers have often distanced themselves from the traditional composition classroom in order to legitimize the type of instruction they perform (176). Such narratives of separation were often generated in response to the more "active marginalization" that writing center staff encountered within English departments when they were first establishing their centers (176). While Hobson acknowledges that there are certain benefits to students viewing the center as a more comfortable space where they can work on their writing and cultivate ongoing instructional relationships, he ultimately argues that "[d]istancing writing center activity from the writing classroom is a tactic that is overstated, overused, and, arguably, less accurate than it once was" (176-77). Indeed, when considering the benefits of increased collaboration with faculty and administrators (some of whom are responsible for budgets), and the potential for the writing resource center to be viewed as an indispensable service in both instructing and assessing student writing, Hobson's point could not be more valid. The rhetorical positioning of the writing center as a marginalized safe space seems to be irrelevant, at least at my university, to deterring the ongoing perception of the writing center as fix-it-shop and, if anything, has only served to perpetuate the problematic feminization of writing instruction. In making this latter claim, I am following from Sue Ellen Holbrook's description of the institutional characterization of composition as "nonintellectual, pedagogical, service-oriented work" that, as Susan Miller writes, is still largely perceived as "the counterpart, the handmaiden, and low-order basement attached to vernacular literary study" (Miller 523). In reality, writing centers are and always will be alternative instructional centers utilizing, in most cases, teaching techniques more suited to individualized instruction.

However, there is little value in privileging one means of teaching over another, particularly when the ultimate goal is to promote lasting learning among students who hardly benefit from such a compartmentalization. As Mark L. Waldo puts it, the relationship between writing centers and writing programs working more with students in classes should be "almost symbiotic" (170). As he writes, "[t]hese programs work in close association, each benefiting the other and both forwarding writing as a powerful tool for learning. A purposeful bonding, this type of relationship makes the program and center essential to the academic mission of the university, not peripheral to it" (170). Following this train of thought, I see little reason to frame our work as separate, particularly to the extent such perceived gaps in mission may result in writing centers being denied important opportunities to participate in important programmatic decisions. As mentioned earlier, my work as a writing center director co-leading a midsize research institution's writing program assessment forms the basis of my assertion. I have witnessed a burgeoning culture of

writing instruction slowly but surely begin to come about as a result of our alignment with program assessment, and have in seen several new spaces open up for the reframing of writing center work. Interestingly enough, the results of our interdisciplinary assessment focused on students' abilities in developing, expressing, and sustaining arguments in their fields. For our panel, as Graff suggested, this was the primary "common ground" on which we all agreed was vital to students' success as writers (162). As a result, the writing center has begun to generate a campus-wide focus on this higher-order concern, seeing in improving students' arguments an opportunity to reposition our own role on campus while simultaneously raising our institutional profile. We have sponsored workshops and faculty luncheon events and have produced materials designed to improve students' skills in critical claim making. Again, while all of these changes are small, the WRC is beginning to move away from its fix-it shop image to a vital instructional center. This is due in large part to our central involvement in outcomes assessment and, more importantly, to our promotion of that role to the campus community.

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Home » **Spring 2011 (Volume 8, Issue 2) - From Triage to Outreach: Raising the Institutional Profile of Writing-Center Work**

Writing in Context: Redefining the Writing Center as the Multidisciplinary Hub for Writing in the New Millennium

Spring 2011/Focus

by **Paulette Golden**, *Lone Star College - Montgomery: Conroe, Texas*

Adaptive communication methods for new technologies and looming budget cuts present the perfect opportunity to revisit and reassess the writing center's purpose within higher learning institutions. Writing centers should be the "hubs" of academic and professional discourse, places that celebrate the different written conventions of each discipline. One modest goal of a writing center should be to help students bridge the gap between different disciplines and areas of focus. Students may become frustrated by the conflicting messages received from professors when encouraged to communicate with detailed and descriptive prose in one class while conversely encouraged to communicate with crisp, concise bulleted lists in another class. To help students navigate such rhetorical challenges, the writing center should function as a centralized home of discourse that is able to explain and demonstrate writing in context.

This is not to say that writing tutors and administrators need to be specialists in all fields, but they should have an informed awareness of the differences in curricular styles, which include variances in purpose, audience, voice, and document type. For instance, when reading a student's lab report, tutors should be able to identify if the student has written in a style accepted within that particular field–does the purpose, audience, voice, and document type meet the standard expectations? With such knowledge of the expectations across the curriculum, tutors can help students understand writing in the disciplines, a concept rarely directly taught in the classroom. Within many classrooms, writing is taught in, as Gerald Graff says, a vacuum, isolated from other assignments and courses (8, 10). Isolated writing does not connect clearly for students to other courses and other assignments, much less to academic and professional writing at large. When students learn a certain style of writing, the assumption is that this style is the accepted style across campus and workplaces. Much to the confusion of these novice writers, not all disciplines or employers accept the same style of writing. "Students who have learned a one-size-fits-all approach will soon discover it does not fit the varied demands and diverse writing practices they need to be able to negotiate, not only across but within particular fields, to write effectively throughout their undergraduate careers and beyond" (Monroe 7). The writing center tutors should be able to help demystify the diverse writing practices students will encounter. By working with faculty members across the campus and learning about the different styles within each discipline, tutors and administrators can help writers enter the academic conversation and think critically about their audience, purpose, and so forth (Graff 8; Hillard and Harris 17).

As Jonathan Monroe writes in his article "Writing and the Disciplines,"

academically and professionally written documents are not one-size-fits-all texts (5). Every document written has a different style based on the context. Take, for example, expository essays, engineering documents, and business documents. A typical expository essay will likely open with an introduction that includes a thesis statement and possibly a summary of the contents, followed by paragraphs that support the point or points mentioned in the thesis, and a concluding paragraph that summarizes the essay (Bean 280). In contrast, an essay written in the field of engineering may begin with a letter of transmittal, followed by an abstract, an executive summary, a table of contents, body paragraphs that discuss the information presented in charts and tables, a reference list, and then an appendix. A writer of an engineering document will assume that the reader will not read the document from start to finish, but rather in sections, thus the need for an organizational style different from that seen in an expository essay. An engineering document must "convince other people of its validity in order to be accepted as knowledge. Only documents that do convince others are used. Documents that for any reason cease to be convincing cease being treated as containing knowledge" (Winsor 60). Each section of the document is an attempt to explain the situation and findings for the reader. A business document, on the other hand, is more apt to cater to the purpose of the document than to cater to the reader. A strategic business plan, for example, outlines the specific goals of a company and how the company will achieve those goals. Since such documents are tailored for purpose rather than audience, the style of writing differs from the expository essay and even the engineering document. In a business document, "a different, more relaxed tone prevails, despite the added verbiage this might cause" (Harris 124).

Since documents written in each field of study differ by purpose, audience, voice, and type, and since the complexity and diversity of contexts are uniquely heightened in the new millennium, a one-size-fits-all approach to composing essays does not apply to academic or professional writing. Context changes everything about the written text, most specifically the goal achieved by the text. The rise of "text speak" is just such evidence that the student's job, and thus the writing center's job, is even more challenging than in previous eras. In the new millennium, one of the most used forms of communication is texting. "Text speak" has the specific goal of *speed*, not to mention typically a 160 character limit, depending on the service provider. For decades, people have written in text speak and in some circumstances, such as with military personnel, spoken in text speak before the term was even coined. One engineer writing a note to another engineer would write in shorthand using jargon and acronyms with which both parties would be familiar. The goal is to get across the most information possible in the fastest and shortest way possible. A text message between two friends who are accustomed to each other's texting voice may send a message that reads: "Omw eta 15 *? Rpg o fps 2night? mayB cod?" The writer would likely not send this same message to a different friend who is unfamiliar with these particular acronyms. In this way, the goal remains the same, but the audience changes, shifting the style. The message, if spelled out in complete sentences, would read: "I'm on my way. I estimate my time of arrival to be 15 minutes. Would you like to get coffee at Starbucks? Do you want to play a role-playing-game or first-person-shooter tonight? Maybe we can play *Call of Duty*?" For a texter who is familiar with another texter's shorthand, what would be the point of spelling out all of the words or putting all of the words into complete sentences? This is a waste of time and character space.

The shorthand message may take an experienced texter 10-20 seconds to type,

while the complete message may take 1-2 minutes to type. With this said, a shorthand message within the context of a text message between two close friends is perfectly acceptable. This is not, obviously, an acceptable message

in an annotated bibliography written for a microeconomics class. The context would shift, and thus the goal, the audience, and the style.

Without some knowledge of the context, goal, and style within each document and each field, how is a student expected to navigate these shifts in the tide? Such knowledge is not intuitive. It is not surprising that when students move from one course to the next, they are confused by the writing expectations, unsure if they should argue a point, summarize sources, write concisely for speed, use vast detail, write a formal essay, compose an informal journal of free thought, or otherwise (Graff 9; Harris 124). Muriel Harris describes this well in her anecdote about a student she tutored:

> One rainy fall afternoon a student dragged himself into a writing lab…. he admitted that the paper lying limply in front of us was considered a disaster zone by the faculty member who taught his engineering course. As I read his paper, I admired the elegant sentences, the careful use of transitions, the introduction that led readers smoothly into the subject, the clear thesis statement, and so on. This would be an A paper in any composition course, but for his engineering instructor it was inappropriate and, therefore, poorly written (Harris 122).

The writing center should be the place that teaches students *how* to navigate the constraints of different writing contexts. For students and professors alike, the writing center should be the multidisciplinary axis of the institution. The writing tutors must understand what is valued in each discipline and be aware of the standard document types within those disciplines. How might the style of a resume objective statement differ from the style of a Facebook status update? How might the style of a white paper in a political science class differ from the style of a personal narrative in an English class? While it is not feasible to expect tutors to be specialists in every field of study and every type of document, a general knowledge of the values and expectations within each discipline should be enough to answer these questions. Tutors must recognize "…audience as a factor in determining if writing meets college-level standards, and that is to recognize the growing complexity of audiences in academia and beyond" (Harris 131). The expected knowledge of a tutor in a multidisciplinary writing center might be something along the lines of the typical documents, formats, citation styles, organization, evidence, detail, style and language within the fields of humanities, social sciences, natural and health sciences, business, and beyond. With such knowledge, a tutor can help a student shift from writing a business proposal with a first person and persuasive tone to writing a case study with professional jargon and qualitative and/or quantitative research data. Together, the tutor and student can explore "the roles and uses of writing in the field they are studying" (Hillard and Harris 15). The resources available to students through a writing center should help to develop the critical thinking and writing skills necessary within academic and professional communities. The knowledge gained should be transferable as students begin to identify contexts and the necessary stylistic adjustments.

For the writing center to become the multidisciplinary center of a campus, the tutors and writing center administrators must respect the expertise and specializations of the faculty by seeking their guidance on working with students within their fields. Jonathan Monroe, Director of Graduate Studies in Comparative Literature and former Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences, George Reed Professor of Writing and Rhetoric, and Director of the **John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines at Cornell University** emphasizes that even with the writing center as the axis, the "primary responsibility for and ultimate authority over writing rests with individual faculty situated in particular fields" (4). At all times, the writing center must acknowledge "the faculty who are the ultimate arbiters and authorities, latently if not manifestly, over what counts as effective writing in their respective fields" (4).With a multidisciplinary focus in the writing center, the faculty have an investment in the writing center, as they can assist in the training of tutors or provision of digital and print resources regarding writing in their field/courses. The assurance that tutors are knowledgeable in the faculty's writing style could be enough to increase the faculty investment in the writing center. Ongoing dialogue between the faculty and writing center staff creates a commitment to that discourse community that "cultivate[s] a sustainable sense of ownership among faculty that will benefit both individual departments and the curriculum as a whole" by supporting "faculty where they live and work, at the heart of their interests, in the disciplines" (Monroe 5). The writing center, in this way, builds a reputation for being cross-disciplinary conscious and competent in all levels of documents–undergraduate, graduate, professional.

The institutional profile of writing center work increases when faculty members have an investment in the training and tutoring process. Faculty must trust tutors to know how to work with documents across the disciplines. The biology faculty at both the graduate and undergraduate level, for instance, should feel confident that the writing center tutors know the expectations of writing within the sciences. If tutors are not trained to work with such texts, there is little incentive for the faculty members to recommend students to visit the center, support additional funding for the center, or offer advice or resources to the tutors. As a multidisciplinary hub, however, the writing center can increase faculty and staff buy-in, develop strong connections with community businesses and schools that may also want to send their students or employees to the writing center, and increase the awareness of students that different contexts require different styles of writing, especially given the growing number of contexts in the new millennium.

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