

# WHO (ACCORDING TO STUDENTS) USES THE WRITING CENTER?: ACKNOWLEDGING IMPRESSIONS AND MISIMPRESSIONS OF WRITING CENTER SERVICES AND USER DEMOGRAPHICS

Aaron Colton  
Duke University  
[aaron.colton@duke.edu](mailto:aaron.colton@duke.edu)

## Abstract

This article analyzes the results of a spring 2019 survey of Georgia Tech undergraduates on their understandings and impressions of the services that the Georgia Tech Communication Center provides and the students the center sees most frequently. By comparing such understandings across participants' self-reported demographic and academic information—including race, gender, GPA, acquisition of English, first-generation status, transfer-student status, and center-user status—the article examines particular misimpressions within the Georgia Tech undergraduate community. In doing so, the article demonstrates how centers may consider students' own impressions of writing centers and center users in advertising, outreach, and communications. Consequently, I suggest that as centers shift away from non-directive pedagogies and implement inclusive and anti-racist philosophies and practices, those transformations alone may not counteract pervasive misimpressions about which students writing centers tend to privilege. I therefore argue that changes in center policies and practices must be combined with outreach efforts tailored to institution- and demographic-specific misimpressions.

In “Decisions...Decisions: Who Chooses to Use the Writing Center” (2016), an article following her study of the Temple University Writing Center's user demographics, Lori Salem concluded that the non-directive pedagogies often treated as orthodoxy in writing centers risk betraying the needs of centers' predominant users: “women, students of color, English language learners, and students with less ‘inherited merit’” (160). Whereas non-directive methods may hone the skills of students “who already have a pretty good idea of what kind of text they are expected to produce” (163)—typically a function of privilege and historical access to higher education—Salem found that for students unfamiliar with the norms of college-level writing, such methods yield few benefits. In light of these findings, Salem also challenged the tendency of researchers in writing center studies to attend primarily to students who do, at some point in their undergraduate or graduate education, visit their institution's writing center. “It is a peculiar feature of writing center research,” Salem wrote, “that there has been no meaningful investigation of the decision not to come to the writing center” (151). The advantages of such investigations, Salem posited, might help to allay the same deficits produced by non-directive pedagogies, including: an “accounting of the needs and

experiences of students who do not come to the writing center,” “new, and perhaps better, ways of talking with students about [center] services,” and data that might “help us shape our services to make them appealing to students who don't currently visit” (161, 162).

If a significant number of US writing centers do, in fact, act counter to the needs of the students they most often serve, then to what degree are the students who do not visit writing centers aware of that incongruity? And could a center's commitment to non-directive pedagogy contribute to students' decisions, whether intentional or unintentional, not to use a writing center? As I considered these questions in the fall of 2018, it struck me that they were each permutations of a more foundational question: *what do students think that writing centers do?*<sup>1</sup> As Salem notes, the institutional history of writing centers has long been a history of fighting against misperceptions, and chiefly against impressions of writing centers as “remedial” resources.<sup>2</sup> Survey a writing center's website, and one is likely to find a prominently placed list of services that a center *does not* provide, with “editing” often the first entry.<sup>3</sup> Given the commitment writing centers have thus demonstrated to conveying what Jackie Grutsch McKinney calls the “*writing center grand narrative*”—that writing centers are “*comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing*” (3)—it becomes necessary not only to deconstruct that narrative (as McKinney has in *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers* [2013]), but also to assess the ways in which that narrative's successful or unsuccessful dissemination affects the likelihood for students to become writing-center visitors.

Further, if it is true that non-directive pedagogies cater to high-performing, white, multigenerational college students, then do students see writing centers as used primarily by students of that background? And if historically underrepresented students in particular perceive centers as geared toward users unlike themselves, are they any more or less likely to avoid writing centers? While much headway has been made since Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski's 1999 article, “Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing

Center”—in which the authors critiqued writing-center pedagogy as an instrument of acculturation “into the cultures of the university” (44)—it remains unsettled whether students have come to view writing centers as multilingual, multicultural, anti-racist, or “postcolonial” in any meaningful sense. I argue, then, that researchers in writing center studies might consider the following questions: what do students think that writing centers do? Who do students consider the typical “writing-center user”? And how do those impressions correspond to students’ own propensity for use?

### Survey Design and Distribution

It was these questions that guided the design and distribution in the spring 2019 semester of an anonymized, online survey on the services and user demographics of the Naugle CommLab at the Georgia Tech Communication Center. The CommLab is a center staffed by both undergraduate and Ph.D.-holding consultants, who work alongside undergraduate and graduate students on communication-based projects in individual and multiple modalities. In the 2018-19 academic year, the CommLab held 1,921 consultations. Of the 1,798 individuals who visited the center (including those reserving the center’s presentation- and interview-rehearsal spaces), 81.6% were undergraduates; 14.8% were graduate students; and 3.5% were faculty, postdoctoral fellows, university staff, or others in the Georgia Tech community. Among visitors to the center, approximately 51.3% were male and 45.6% were female, and 59.1% were non-white minority students. 27.9% of visitors self-reported that English is not their first language. Given the CommLab’s user demographics and its service to a STEM-focused institution, as well as the moderate sample size of this study (103 responses), the inferences presented in what follows are limited to a specialized case study and are intended to provide grounds for future examinations within and across institutions.

To discern the relationship between undergraduates’ impressions of CommLab services and users, the survey was divided into two sections. The first queried the accuracy of students’ understandings of center services through three multiple-choice questions. It asked students whether there is a fee for having an appointment at the CommLab, which kinds of projects students may bring to a consultation, and which kinds of feedback a CommLab consultant might offer (e.g., editing; feedback on prewriting and outlining; and feedback on grammar, content, structure, and conventions) (see Appendix A, Q1-Q3).

Responses of “Yes” and “I’m not sure” to Q1, and responses of “Tutors at the CommLab will edit my work” to Q3, were coded as “misimpressions” of the center. (Responses to Q2 were saved for internal research into the genres of communication that students considered appropriate for consultations.) In the remainder of the first section, respondents were asked to approximate the user demographics of the CommLab, categorized in terms of academic performance, acquisition of English, and gender and race in comparison to Georgia Tech’s overall undergraduate population (see Appendix A, Q4-Q8). No questions on the survey required answers, and participants could exit the survey at any time.

The survey’s second section inquired into respondents’ own demographic information. In addition to gender, race (assessed by whether respondents identified as persons of color), acquisition of English, and academic performance (assessed by current GPA), the survey also asked respondents to report their current year at Georgia Tech, their major, whether they identify as first-generation college students, and whether they had transferred to Georgia Tech from another institution. The second section also posed a series of questions on respondents’ use of the CommLab, use of other academic services (on campus and off), and familiarity with writing centers in general. It queried whether respondents had ever had an appointment at the CommLab, if they had ever heard of a writing center before enrolling at Georgia Tech, whether their high school had a writing or communication center, which resources aside from the CommLab they had used for their own academic success (with a dropdown menu listing various resources on and off campus), and, if they had never visited the CommLab, their reasons (with a dropdown menu of twelve common explanations and an optional text-entry box) (see Appendix A, Q9-Q27).

In order to coincide with a time in which undergraduates were likely to have developed impressions of the CommLab, the survey was distributed to undergraduates, following IRB approval, on April 2, 2019. The survey closed on May 31, 2019, roughly three weeks after the conclusion of Georgia Tech’s spring semester. According to this timeframe, first-year students would have had almost one full academic year to acquire information (or misinformation) about the CommLab. The survey was distributed voluntarily via email by academic advisors (some of whom also serve as professors in various departments), instructors of pre-freshman summer courses, instructors of GT1000 (a one-credit course introducing university resources and foundational study skills), and instructors in the School of Literature,

Media, and Communication (including instructors of business and technical communication). Participants could take the survey on the device and in the location of their choosing.

## Participants

A total of 103 undergraduates responded to the survey. Of those who answered questions about their own demographic information, 57.9% were first years, 7.9% were second years, 14.5% were third years, 17.1% were fourth years, and 2.6% were fifth years. 53.3% of respondents identified as male, 45.5% identified as female, and 1.3% identified as non-binary.<sup>4</sup> 23.4% of respondents reported that English was not their first language, and 16.9% identified as first-generation college students. 11.7% of respondents identified as transfer students, and 31.2% identified as persons of color. The most prominent reported majors ( $n > 4$ ) were biomedical engineering, chemical and biomolecular engineering, computer engineering, computer science, industrial engineering, and mechanical engineering.

## Methods

As previously stated, responses to Q1 of “Yes” and “I’m not sure,” as well as responses to Q3 of “Tutors at the CommLab will edit my work,” were coded as misimpressions of center services. Given the multiple ways in which center practices, philosophies, or “grand narratives” may be described, misimpressions that center services carried costs were designated as the only misimpressions suitable for analysis. The finding that only 15.6% of respondents to Q3 marked “Tutors will edit my work,” whereas 36.3% of respondents to Q1 marked either “Yes” (1) or “I’m not sure” further supported this position (see Table 1 in Appendix C).<sup>5</sup>

Qualtrics analysis tools were used to evaluate demographic information and perceptions of center services and users. Perceptions of those who reported having never visited the CommLab were also compared against the perceptions of reported visitors; and impressions of center services and costs were compared by reported user demographics. Those demographics were further subdivided and compared by reported center use (e.g., the impressions of women who reported having visited the center were compared to the impressions of women who reported never having visited the center). Self-reported demographic markers compared by way of center use were: academic performance (reported GPA  $\leq$  or  $>$  3.0, with 3.0 widely considered a subpar GPA by Georgia Tech undergraduates), transfer-student self-identification,

first-generation self-identification, person-of-color self-identification, gender self-identification, and native-English-speaker self-identification.<sup>6</sup>

## Findings

A significant portion of participants carried misimpressions of CommLab services, with 36.3% of respondents to Q1 marking “Yes” or “I’m not sure” (see Table 1 in Appendix C). Students who reported never having visited the CommLab (“non-visitors”) were significantly more likely to hold this misimpression, with 47.4% of non-visitors responding “I’m not sure” to Q1. 100% of students who reported having visited the CommLab (“visitors”) responded “No” to Q1 (see Table 1 in Appendix B).

Respondents saw the CommLab as used predominantly by students who struggle in writing- and communication-based courses and not used by men in a proportion exceeding that of the overall student population at Georgia Tech. In response to Q7, 71.3% of participants guessed that CommLab users are “less than 62% men.” In response to Q4, 60% of participants guessed that most undergraduates who visit the CommLab struggle in courses that emphasize writing and communication. At the same time, 49.4% of respondents to Q5 selected 3.5 or 4.0 as the average GPA of a CommLab visitor, complicating the factors through which Georgia Tech undergraduates may view the center as remedial (potential factors may include grade inflation, institution-specific impressions of a “good GPA,” and how students understand the effects of “struggling in courses that emphasize writing and communication” on GPA at an institution where students typically take few such courses) (see Table 1 in Appendix C).

Non-visitors were more likely than visitors to see the CommLab as mainly serving students who struggle in courses emphasizing writing or communication. 64.9% of non-visitors marked “Yes” in response to Q4, as compared to 45% of visitors (see Table 2 in Appendix B). While falling short of statistical significance, non-visitors also marked the average GPA of an undergraduate CommLab lower than did visitors, with 53.6% of non-visitors estimating that GPA at 3.0 or lower, versus 40% of all visitors (see Table 3 in Appendix B).

Views on CommLab users’ acquisition of English were comparatively mixed, as were views on users’ race. 30.4% of respondents to Q6 guessed that the CommLab mostly holds appointments with native English speakers. 27.5% of respondents to Q8 guessed that the CommLab user base is greater than 49% white (see Table 1 in Appendix C). Non-visitors understood

the CommLab as gendered and racialized at roughly the same rates as visitors, and visitors were less likely than non-visitors to hold the view that CommLab users are primarily native English speakers. In response to Q6, Q7, and Q8, 35.7% of non-visitors saw the center as holding appointments mostly with native English speakers (versus 15% of visitors), 8.8% of non-visitors saw center users as more than 62% men (versus 5% of visitors), and 26.3% of non-visitors saw center users as more than 49% white (versus 25% of visitors) (See Tables 4, 5, and 6, respectively, in Appendix B). Neither non-native English speakers nor non-visiting non-native English speakers were more likely than their comparative native-English-speaking demographics to view CommLab users as mostly native English speakers, holding that view at 22.2% and 28.6%, respectively (See Table 4 in Appendix B).

In comparing the impressions of demographic groups filtered by visitor status, several outliers emerged:

- 85.7% of non-visiting non-native-English-speaking students marked that they are unsure whether there is a fee for visiting the center (as compared to 34.9% of non-visiting native-English-speaking students), as did 66.7% of transfer students, versus 30.9% of non-transfer students (see Table 1 in Appendix B).
- Compared to 60% of all respondents, non-visiting women (72%) and non-visiting students of color (70.6%) were the most likely to believe CommLab users struggle in courses emphasizing writing and communication (see Table 1 in Appendix C, Q4).
- Compared to 50.6% of all respondents, non-visiting low-performing students (61.1%), non-visiting first-generation students (66.7%), and non-visiting transfer students (62.5%) were the most likely to guess that the average CommLab user's GPA is 3.0 or lower (see Table 1 in Appendix C, Q5).
- Compared to 30.4% of all respondents, groups most likely to see center users as mostly native English speakers were non-visiting first-generation students (75%) and non-visiting men (45.2%) (see Table 1 in Appendix C, Q6).
- Compared to 27.5% of all respondents, groups most likely to see the CommLab's user base as greater than 49% white were non-visiting transfer students (55.6%) and

non-visiting students of color (41.2%) (see Table 1 in Appendix C, Q8).

The following outliers also emerged in comparing reported reasons for not visiting the CommLab between non-visitors and different non-visiting demographics (see Table 2 in Appendix C for all):

- Compared to 47.3% of non-visitors, 77.8% of non-visiting transfer students, 57.1% of non-visiting non-native-English-speaking students and 54.2% of non-visiting women marked that they had not visited the CommLab because they were unaware of it.
- Compared to 27.3% of non-visitors, 44.4% of non-visiting first-generation students marked that they had not visited because they did not have time.
- Compared to 23.6% of non-visitors, 33.3% of non-visiting transfer students, 33.3% of non-visiting first-generation students, 32.3% of non-visiting men, and 31.3% of non-visiting students of color marked that they had not visited because they usually do not complete their work early.
- Compared to 20% of non-visitors, 33.3% of non-visiting first-generation students marked that they had not visited because they use other resources.
- Compared to 12.7% of non-visitors, 33.3% of non-visiting first-generation students, 33.3% of non-visiting transfer students, 28.6% of non-visiting non-native-English-speaking students, and 18.8% of non-visiting students of color marked that they had not visited because they do not know how to make an appointment.

## Discussion

While Salem's 2016 findings challenge the prevailing attitude that writing centers ought actively to "correct" impressions of writing centers as remedial resources, the results of this survey add that, in the case of Georgia Tech undergraduates, such impressions have never been easily resolved. For all but one demographic group included in the survey, greater than half (and for most groups, greater than 60%) of respondents indicated that most CommLab users struggle in writing- and communication-based courses. Singularly exempt from this trend were students who reported having visited the center. Visitors to the center visit were 15% less likely than respondents

overall, and 19.9% less likely than non-visitors, to hold this view, seeing center-users as struggling in writing- and communication-based courses at a rate of 45%. Similarly, visitors were 13.6% less likely than non-visitors to mark the average CommLab user's GPA at 3.0 or lower, with 40% of visitors holding that view, versus 53.6% of non-visitors (see Table 1 in Appendix C). While demonstrating only a correlation, these data ostensibly suggest, unsurprisingly, that attending an appointment at a writing center registers among the most powerful forces in cultivating impressions of center services and users more accurate than those of non-visitors.<sup>7</sup>

These results indicate not only that students who visit the center are less likely to view the center as a remedial space—even while 45% of visitors do—but also that visitors are less likely to view the center as a space catering to male and native-English-speaking students. While only a minority of respondents (10%) viewed the center as serving male students at rate greater than 62%, visitors were half as likely (5%) to hold to this view (see Table 1 in Appendix C). Likewise, reported visitors were about half as likely to view CommLab users as mostly native English speakers. While 35.7% of non-visitors held this view, visitors did so at a rate 15% (see Table 4 in Appendix B). Given the significant portion of CommLab appointments that are held with self-identifying non-native English speakers—and that 45.6% of appointments are held with women—these findings indicate a correlation between visiting the CommLab and obtaining a more accurate view of the CommLab's services and user demographics, a point also corroborated by the fact that 0% of reported visitors were unsure whether there is a fee, or believed that there is a fee, for having an appointment at the CommLab.

By filtering responses according to visitor status and self-reported demographic information, the Georgia Tech undergraduate demographics most likely to view the center as remedial, racially biased, catering to high-performing students, and used predominantly by native English speakers also emerged. Self-identifying non-visiting women (72%) and non-visiting students of color (70.6%) were both more than 10% more likely than respondents overall to see center users as struggling in courses emphasizing writing and communication. Similarly, low-performing non-visitors (61.1%), first-generation students (61.5%), non-visiting first-generation students (66.7%), and non-visiting transfer students (62.5%) were all over 10% more likely than respondents overall (50.7%) to guess that the average CommLab visitor's GPA is 3.0 or lower. Contrastingly, non-visiting students of color were over

6.9% less likely than respondents overall to mark the average CommLab user's GPA at 3.0 or lower, doing so at a rate of 43.8% (see Table 1 in Appendix C).

At first glance, these data present contradictory attitudes; while non-visiting students of color largely viewed CommLab users as students struggle in writing- and communication-based courses, they also were among the least likely to estimate the average CommLab user's GPA as below 3.0. One way to reconcile this contradiction would be to suggest that non-visiting students of color differ from other student demographics in their average numerical impression of a “struggling” student's GPA. But it is also plausible that these views are not reflective of a single attitude but instead point to a complicated understanding of CommLab users' academic performance, one in which an intuitive feeling that “the writing center is not a place for me” may override students' impressions of who does, in fact, visit the center. In either case, these conflicting data indicate that for center administrators seeking to evaluate the equity and approachability of their sites and services, no single survey question is likely to yield results that bring to light the entirety of a respondent group's views. And further, it may in fact be contradictory answers such as these that underscore the demographic groups and topics most salient for subsequent, likely qualitative, investigations into equity and inclusivity at particular institutions.

On the subject of language, non-visiting men (45.2%)—as well as first-generation students (50%) and non-visiting first-generation students (75%)—were the most likely to understand CommLab users as mostly native English speakers, a view held overall at 30.4%. On CommLab users' race, non-visiting students of color (41.2%) and non-visiting transfer students (55.6%) were both over 10% more likely than respondents overall (27.5%) to guess that CommLab users are on average more than 49% white (see Table 1 in Appendix C). So while Georgia Tech undergraduates see the center as skewing remedial—and not used predominately by high-performing students, white students, men, or native English speakers—students who do not visit the CommLab may be more likely to view the center as visited chiefly by those unlike themselves. Specifically, self-identifying first-generation students were the most likely to see the CommLab as monolingual, and non-visiting transfer students and non-visiting students of color (who were also more likely on average to see users as high academic performers) were the most likely to see the center as serving white students.

Findings that transfer students and students historically marginalized in or excluded from higher education were more likely to see the CommLab as

geared toward white and native-English-speaking students were complemented by findings that the same demographic groups had a higher propensity to misunderstand the costs of center services. Low-performing non-visitors (47.4%), non-native English speakers (66.7%), non-visiting non-native English speakers (85.7%), non-visiting women (56%), non-visiting first-generation students (55.6%), and non-visiting transfer students (66.7%) were all over 10% more likely than respondents overall (36.3%) to report that they believe or are unsure whether there is a fee for visiting the CommLab (see Table 1 in Appendix C).

One possible explanation for the disproportionately high rate of non-native English speakers unsure or misinformed of appointment costs is confusion between the CommLab and the Georgia Tech Language Institute, another campus resource that does charge students a fee for enrollment in English-language courses. Nonetheless, pervasive confusion regarding the cost of center services (or lack thereof) was not anticipated given the large percentage of CommLab users that non-native English speakers constitute. Problematic but counterintuitive impressions such as these—combined with the above-average confusion on fees exhibited by students from every non-visiting demographic surveyed—indicate that even if a center’s user base is relatively multilingual, multicultural, or multiracial, that fact alone does not guarantee an accurate understanding among the student body of a center’s services or the diversity of its users. Even among the historically underrepresented student demographics that typically constitute the majority of a center’s users, misimpressions are likely.

In a broader sense, the data gathered in this study suggest that the factors that contribute to students’ complex understandings of language, power, and acculturation in the academy does not necessarily follow the work that takes place in writing centers, where grappling with academic norms is not merely permitted but frequently encouraged. Echoing Geller et al.’s contention that “writing centers are situated within institutions which are themselves implicated in the power structures that wittingly or unwittingly foster racism” (92), the present study emphasizes the pervasive influence that a writing center’s institutional context, and the multiple ways that different student demographics experience that context, bears on students’ impressions of writing-center services and users. So if, as Frankie Condon argues, it is the responsibility of writing centers to “deepen anti-racist commitments and to effect institutional transformation” (22), then it becomes imperative for centers implementing anti-racist and transformative

efforts to first inquire into the beliefs and knowledges that specific student populations hold about language and power in the academy and their home institutions. Otherwise, without capturing students’ specific and often divergent impressions, centers risk neglecting particular student demographics even as they attempt to foster inclusivity. In this study, for example, while non-visiting students tended to view the center as a space used predominately by students struggling in writing and communication, self-reporting students of color (both visiting and non-visiting) diverged in viewing the average CommLab user as having a GPA above 3.0 (see Table 1 in Appendix C). This finding implies that while the CommLab might communicate more effectively that the center does not solely work with students struggling in writing and communication, it must concurrently consider how such a message will be received by the students of color who already view the center as biased toward high-performing students. In this light, perhaps the major implication of this study is that in engaging with dissimilar impressions of center services and users, multiple lines of outreach and advertising, targeted to the dissimilar impressions of varying student demographics, are necessary.

The findings of this study also suggest that when it comes to encouraging newly enrolled students or non-visitors to make their first appointments at a writing center, centers should consider adjusting longstanding logistical policies and practices, especially on matters such as appointment-making and scheduling. Consider, for example, the variations in reasons for not visiting the CommLab between Georgia Tech undergraduate demographics. Non-visiting first-generation students (44.4%) were approximately 15% more likely than non-visiting students overall (29.3%) to report that they had not visited the CommLab because they don’t have time. Non-visiting men (32.3%), non-visiting students of color (31.3%), non-visiting first-generation students (33.3%), and non-visiting transfer students (33.3%) were all approximately 10% more likely than non-visitors overall (23.7%) to report not visiting because they do not complete their work early. Further, non-visiting non-native-English-speaking students (28.6%), non-visiting first-generation students (33.3%), and non-visiting transfer students (33.3%) were all over 15% more likely than non-visitors overall (12.7%) to report not visiting because they do not know how to make an appointment (see Table 2 in Appendix C). Not only do these findings demonstrate a need to communicate appointment-making procedures better across institutional offices and services (or even to alter those procedures), they also reveal the pressures faced by students that centers must acknowledge when determining appointment-making policies. While I

concur with Nancy Grimm's vision of the writing center as a "plac[e] where the academic community actively recruits new members" and "welcomes the creativity of those with multimemberships" (91), the present study indicates that such recruitments must also account for center policies that may seem far afield from matters of inclusion, such as whether or not to meet with students who bring assignments due the day of their appointment. This study suggests that to hold same-day appointments would be instrumental to making the center accessible to nontraditional students, who, compared to various non-visiting sub-demographics, were among the most likely not to visit the CommLab for reasons of time.

To return to the subject of center pedagogy, this study makes clear an imperative not only to examine, as Salem has, how a center's pedagogy may privilege traditional students while neglecting the needs of a center's user base, but also to complement such examinations with outreach and advertising efforts that recognize students' impressions, whether accurate or inaccurate, about privilege in writing centers. Put otherwise, an inclusive center pedagogy—which may counteract what Harry C. Denny calls the "everyday oppression" often staged in writing centers—is not only a matter of preparing staff to attend to situations where students "don't know what they don't know" about writing" (Salem 163), but also of realizing that what students don't know pertains to writing centers themselves and varies widely.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the CommLab, a center considered monolingual by only a minority of visiting and non-visiting students, there are deviations that must be acknowledged, such as the 75% of non-visiting first-generation students that saw center users as mostly native English speakers. Revising center pedagogy is therefore not merely a matter of enabling consultants to engage both directive and non-directive pedagogies—or pedagogies that, as John Nordlof writes, simultaneously "hol[d] together both directive and nondirective models" (59)—but also of communicating in general and targeted outreach that such changes have been enacted. While shifts in pedagogy are instrumental to building inclusive, anti-racist writing centers, those shifts alone appear unlikely to resolve pervasive and particularized understandings (or misunderstandings) of whom writing centers privilege.

A future expansion of this study, ideally multi-institutional, would thus inquire into the relationship between specific student demographics' impressions of writing center pedagogy and the propensity of those demographics either to visit or not to visit writing centers. While this study finds that understandings of center policies and user demographics vary in degree

between undergraduates who do and do not visit centers, it has yet to be determined whether the pedagogies engaged in writing centers—as well as the formal and informal communications about those pedagogies—are themselves actively discouraging students from returning to centers or from visiting in the first place. So, while it is imperative to implement pedagogical practices adaptable to the diverse users of writing centers, it is also negligent to attempt to do so without also examining how center pedagogies come to be known by students and affect the likelihood of different student demographics to visit writing centers. I therefore encourage new investigations into how various visiting and non-visiting student demographics understand center practices (and whom those practices privilege), how non-visiting students come to develop those views, and how those views affect the likelihood for students to visit writing centers for the first time or to become recurring visitors.

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#### Notes

1. This inquiry follows Genie Giaimo's 2014/2015 study of students' impressions of the Bristol Community College Writing Center (BCC WC), in which Giaimo queried: "What do students know about the writing center? What makes them likely to be attracted to its services? Are students developing as they attend sessions, and, if so, at what point in the visitation cycle?" (55).
2. On the institutional history of writing centers, see Boquet. See also Carino.
3. As with Salem's argument that writing centers should acknowledge that "[t]he idea of a 'remedial' writing center serving 'underprivileged' students is alive

and well” (164), researchers including Young-Kyung Min have argued that “‘No-Editing’ polic[ies] should be re-examined when it comes to ESL tutoring sessions” (21) in order for writing centers to support language acquisition.

4. The 1.3% of respondents identifying as non-binary reflected the answer of one participant. The size of this demographic category rendered it inapplicable for analysis in this study.

5. During survey distribution, Communication Center staff also began discussions regarding the discontinuation of anti-editing language from center communications, which complicated whether responses to Q3 would, in fact, indicate misunderstandings of center services.

6. In referring to writers who speak more than one language, the CommLab uses the term “multilingual.” To reflect responses to Q6 as accurately as possible (see Appendix A)—and to invoke the historical marginalization students who do not speak English as their first language have faced in US higher education—this article instead differentiates between non-native and native English speakers.

7. Giaimo found similarly that “[t]he average student who goes to the WC at least once a semester [...] has a higher knowledge score for the practices and location of the WC as compared with those who never use the BCC WC” (57).

8. Denny describes his observations of everyday oppression in writing centers as “natural and exercised without effort: wealthy (white) graduate students from elite undergraduate institutions stunned at the low ‘quality’ of urban students, faculty complaining about illiterate immigrants, instructors responding in offensive and abusive ways on papers, students parroting hate speech as effortless stock rhetoric, and tutors complaining about the hygiene of clients” (21).

9. ENGL 1101 and 1102 are required, semester-long courses in multimodal communication for all undergraduates at Georgia Tech. Students receive automatic credit for ENGL 1101 if they enroll with a score of 4 or 5 on the Advance Placement Exam in English Language and Composition or English Literature and Composition.

10. Data for survey questions involving demographic breakdowns of the 2018-19 Georgia Tech student body were gathered via Georgia Tech Enterprise Management’s LITE website. See LITE.

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## Appendix A

### Select Survey Questions

(Q1) Is there a fee for having an appointment at the CommLab?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

(Q2) Which of the following can you work on at the CommLab? (select all that apply)

- Science and engineering reports or proposals
- Essays and other humanities papers
- Resumes and cover letters
- Internship, job, or graduate school applications
- Individual and team presentations
- Posters, videos, and other audio/visual projects

(Q3) Which of these statements are true? (select all that apply)

- Tutors at the CommLab will edit my work
- Tutors at the CommLab will offer feedback on prewriting and outlining
- Tutors at the CommLab will offer feedback on my work's grammar, content, structure, and conventions (such as citations and formatting)

(Q4) If you had to guess, do most undergraduates who visit the CommLab struggle in courses that emphasize writing and communication (like ENGL 1101/1102)?<sup>9</sup>

- Yes
- No

(Q5) If you had to guess, what is the average GPA of an undergraduate CommLab visitor? (round to closest)

- 4.0
- 3.5
- 3.0
- 2.5
- 2.0
- 1.5
- 1.0

(Q6) If you had to guess, does the CommLab mostly hold appointments with native English speakers or students whose first language is not English?

- Mostly native English speakers
- Mostly students whose first language is not English
- About 50-50

(Q7) About 62% of GA Tech undergraduates identify as men. If you had to guess, CommLab users are:<sup>10</sup>

- More than 62% men
- Less than 62% men
- About 62% men

(Q8) About 49% of GA Tech undergraduates identify as white. If you had to guess, CommLab users are:

- More than 49% white
- Less than 49% white

- About 49% white

(Q9) What is your current year at GA Tech

- 1st
- 2nd
- 3rd
- 4th
- 5th

(Q10) Which gender do you identify as?

- Male
- Female
- Nonbinary

(Q11) Is English your first language?

- Yes
- No

(Q12) Are you a first-generation college student?

- Yes
- No

(Q13) Did you transfer to GA Tech from another institution?

- Yes
- No

(Q14) Do you identify as a person of color?

- Yes
- No

(Q15) What is your major?

- [dropdown list including all majors offered at GA Tech omitted for brevity]

(Q16) What is your current GPA? (round to closest)

- 4.0
- 3.5
- 3.0
- 2.5
- 2.0
- 1.5
- 1.0

(Q20) Have you ever had an appointment at the CommLab?

- Yes
- No

(Q21) Had you ever heard of a writing or communication center before enrolling at GA Tech?

- Yes
- No

(Q22) Did your high school have a writing or communication center?

- Yes
- No

(Q24) What resources aside from the CommLab have you used on- or off-campus for academic success?

(select all that apply)

- Parents or family
- Classmates or friends
- Faculty office hours
- Paid tutoring
- Georgia Tech Language Institute
- OMED (Minority & Education Development)
- Center for Academic Success
- I don't usually seek feedback on my schoolwork
- Other (please fill in)

(Q25) If you have not visited the CommLab, why not? (select all that apply)

- I don't have time to visit
- I was not aware of the CommLab
- I do not share my work
- I usually do not complete my work early
- I use other resources
- I don't know how to make an appointment
- I don't know if the CommLab will review my work
- The CommLab is at an inconvenient location
- The CommLab is not accessible to me
- I do not feel like my work needs to be reviewed
- I would not feel welcome or comfortable at the CommLab
- I have heard about negative experiences at the CommLab
- Other (please fill in)

(Q27) If you have a second major, what is it?

- [dropdown list including all majors offered at GA Tech omitted for brevity]

## Appendix B

## T-Test Tables

$p \leq 0.05$  considered statistical significance;  $0.06 \leq p \leq 0.1$  considered marginal statistical significance; data rounded to the nearest tenth

Table 1: Student responses to “Is there a fee for visiting the CommLab?” (Q1)

Student Group	N	Percent Answering “Yes” or “I’m not sure”	SD	T-Test Finding
Visitors	20	0.00%	0.50	p = 0.00 Non-visitors are statistically more likely to believe that there is a fee for having an appointment at the CommLab.
Non-Visitors	57	47.40%	0.58	
Non-Native-English-Speaking Non-Visitors	14	85.70%	0.48	p = 0.00 Non-native-English-speaking non-visitors are statistically more likely to believe that there is a fee for having an appointment at the CommLab.
Native-English-Speaking Non-Visitors	43	34.90%	0.36	
Transfer Students	9	66.70%	0.50	p = 0.03 Transfer students are statistically more likely to believe that there is a fee for having an appointment at the CommLab.
Non-Transfer Students	68	30.90%	0.47	

Table 2: Student responses to “If you had to guess, do most students who visit the CommLab struggle in courses emphasizing writing and communication (like ENGL 1101/1102)?” (Q4)

Student Group	N	Percent Answering “Yes”	SD	T-Test Finding
Visitors	20	45.00%	0.51	p = 0.07 Non-visitors are marginally statistically more likely to believe that CommLab visitors struggle in courses emphasizing writing and communication.
Non-Visitors	57	64.90%	0.48	

Table 3: Student responses to “If you had to guess, what is the GPA of an average undergraduate CommLab Visitor?” (Q5)

Student Group	N	Percent Answering GPA $\leq$ 3.0	SD	T-Test Finding
Visitors	20	40.00%	0.50	p = 0.13 There is no statistically significant difference between visitors and non-visitors.
Non-Visitors	57	53.60%	0.50	

Table 4: Student responses to “If you had to guess, does the CommLab mostly hold appointments with native English speakers or students whose first language is not English?” (Q6)

Student Group	N	Percent Answering “Mostly native English speakers”	SD	T-Test Finding
Visitors	20	15.00%	0.37	p = 0.03 Visitors are statistically less likely to guess that the CommLab mostly holds appointments with native English speakers.
Non-Visitors	57	35.70%	0.48	
Non-Native English Speakers	18	22.20%	0.43	p=0.19 There is no statistically significant difference between non-native English speakers and native English speakers.
Native English Speakers	59	32.80%	0.47	
Non-Native-English-Speaking Non-Visitor	14	28.60%	0.49	p = 0.26 There is no statistically significant difference between non- and native-English-speaking non-visitors.
Native-English-Speaking Non-Visitor	43	38.10%	0.47	

Table 5: Student responses to “About 62% of GA Tech undergraduates identify as men. If you had to guess, CommLab users are” (Q7)

Student Group	N	Percent Answering “More than 62% men”	SD	T-Test Finding
Visitors	20	5%	0.22	p = 0.55 There is no statistically significant difference between visitors and non-visitors.
Non-Visitors	57	8.70%	0.29	

Table 6: Student responses to “About 49% of GA Tech undergraduates identify as white. If you had to guess, CommLab users are” (Q8)

Student Group	N	Percent Answering “More than 49% White”	SD	T-Test Finding
Visitors	20	25%	0.44	p = 0.91 There is no statistically significant difference between visitors and non-visitors.
Non-Visitors	57	26.30%	0.44	

## Appendix C

## Percentage Responses

Table 1: Student responses to Q1, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, and Q8

Student Group	Unsure or believes there's a fee (Q1)	Users struggle in writing/comm (Q4)	User GPA ≤ 3.0 (Q5)	Users mostly native Eng. speakers (Q6)	Users > 62% men (Q7)	Users > 49% white (Q8)
All respondents	36.25%	60.00%	50.65%	30.38%	10.00%	27.50%
Visitors	0%	45.00%	40.00%	15.00%	5.00%	25.00%
Non-visitors	47.37%	64.91%	53.58%	35.71%	8.77%	26.32%
Low performer (GPA ≤ 3.0)	39.13%	56.52%	59.09%	27.27%	8.70%	30.43%
Low performer NV	47.37%	57.89%	61.11%	33.33%	10.53%	26.32%
Non-native English speaker	66.67%	55.56%	52.94%	22.22%	0%	11.11%
Non-native-English-speaking NV	85.71%	57.14%	53.85%	28.57%	0%	14.29%
Native English speaker	25.40%	61.02%	49.15%	32.76%	10.17%	30.51%
Native-English-speaking NV	34.88%	67.44%	53.50%	38.10%	11.63%	30.23%
Men	31.71%	56.10%	50.66%	35.00%	7.32%	29.27%
Men NV	40.63%	59.38%	56.26%	45.16%	9.38%	28.13%
Women	40.00%	62.86%	44.12%	25.71%	8.57%	22.86%
Women NV	56.00%	72.00%	50.00%	24.00%	8.00%	24.00%
POC	29.17%	66.67%	47.83%	33.33%	0%	33.33%
POC NV	41.18%	70.59%	43.75%	35.29%	0%	41.18%
Non-POC	37.74%	56.60%	50.95%	28.85%	11.32%	22.64%
Non-POC NV	50%	62.50%	57.50%	35.90%	12.50%	20%
Gen 1	38.46%	61.54%	61.53%	50.00%	0%	30.77%
Gen 1 NV	55.56%	66.67%	66.66%	75.00%	0%	33.33%
Transfer (all NVs)	66.67%	66.67%	62.50%	25.00%	0%	55.56%
Non-Transfer	30.88%	58.82%	48.53%	30.88%	8.82%	22.06%
Non-Transfer NV	43.75%	64.58%	52.09%	37.50%	10.42%	20.83%

Table 2: Select student responses by percentage to “If you have not visited the CommLab, why not?” (Q25)

<b>Student Group</b>	<b>I was not unaware of the CommLab</b>	<b>I don't have time to visit</b>	<b>I do not feel like my work needs to be reviewed</b>	<b>I usually do not complete my work early</b>	<b>I use other resources</b>	<b>I do not know how to make an appointment</b>	<b>I do not know if the CommLab will review my work</b>
Non-visitors (NV)	47.27%	27.27%	29.09%	23.64%	20.00%	12.73%	7.27%
Low performer (GPA ≤ 3.0)	47.37%	26.32%	21.05%	26.32%	15.79%	10.53%	10.53%
Non-Native English-speaking NV	57.14%	21.43%	21.43%	21.43%	14.29%	28.57%	7.14%
Native-English-speaking NV	43.90%	29.27%	31.71%	24.39%	21.95%	7.32%	7.32%
Men NV	41.94%	29.03%	32.26%	32.26%	22.58%	9.68%	6.45%
Women NV	54.17%	25.00%	25.00%	12.50%	16.67%	16.67%	8.33%
POC NV	37.50%	25.00%	18.75%	31.25%	12.50%	18.75%	12.50%
Non-POC NV	51.28%	28.21%	33.33%	20.51%	23.08%	10.26%	5.13%
Gen 1 NV	33.33%	44.44%	22.22%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	11.11%
Transfer NV	77.78%	11.11%	0.00%	33.33%	22.22%	33.33%	11.11%
Non-Transfer NV	41.30%	30.43%	34.78%	21.74%	19.57%	8.70%	6.52%