PRAXIS

a writing center journal

18.1 Inclusion in the Writing Center

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION: INCLUSION IN THE WRITING CENTER

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We here at *Praxis* are proud to present our fall issue, the last issue of this calendar year. Although this year will remain as the one with turmoil, confusion, and unrest, we at *Praxis* want to step back and reflect on writing centers' practices that ensure and guarantee a safe space for writers. The articles put together in this issue discuss ways through which writing center practices and policies may be improved to include groups of students and writers, previously neglected in the writing center spaces and scholarship.

In this issue, we acknowledge the dearth of supports and supportive policies for various kinds of writers in the writing centers, which include writers with disabilities, creative writers and writers who rely on online tutoring services for various reasons. This issue shows our audience some of the ways to improve our practices in all these fronts to truly commit to the promise of continuing to evolve and improve.

Along the same lines, we at *Praxis* are proud to announce the Summer 2021 Special Issue on the topic of re-envisioning the writing center narratives under a lens of responsibility and, to generate a more thorough understanding of what the work might entail for those invested in social justice and anti-racist work in the writng centers. We will have Anna Sicari and Romeo Garcia as guest editors for the special issue and the deadline to submit manuscripts for publication in the special issue is January 15, 2021. The Call for Papers can be found here.

We open with Sipai Klein's and Lauren DiPaula's column, "The Tutor Exchange: A Multi-Institutional Tutor Education Project." In their column, Klein and DiPaula reflect on the pilot of their cross-institutional tutor education project, aiming to engage with writing center tutors as tutor-researchers. The authors show how such a project can provide tutors with an opportunity to become further involved in the writing center community and to see the similarities and differences present across centers.

Staying on the topic of inclusion with J. M. Dembsey's "Naming Ableism in the Writing Center," where the author leans on a work of art to engage in a deep analysis of ways writing centers have remained disengaged with the disabled writers. Dembsey moves on to discussing the concepts of interdependence and access intimacy through which the writing centers can move from a culture of ableism to a culture of access.

In "Writing Center Tutors' Attitudes towards Tutoring Creative Writers," Havva Zorluel Özer reports on the results of a mixed-methods survey research. The study examines the background factors that influence the writing center tutors perceptions and concerns about tutoring such writing. This article argues for the value of genre awareness pedagogy and improvisation practices to help tutors work with any genre in writing centers.

Ana Wetzl and Pam Lieske consider the quality of online tutoring services, especially for students attending regional campuses. In "The Benefits and Limitations of Online Peer Feedback: Instructors' Perception of a Regional Campus Online Writing Lab," Wetzel and Lieske use their study of writing instructors' perceptions of their campus's tutoring options to provide insight into their campus-based online tutoring services. Based on their study, the authors indicate the need for more resources to improve campus-based online tutoring services.

Our issue closes with Alicia Brazeau's and Tessa Hall's focus article, "A Pedagogy of Curation for Writing Centers." This piece borrows insight from the field of curation to discuss how writing center spaces speak to us and our writers, and how spaces and objects and visitors interact in critical, even pedagogical ways. The authors assessed their writing retreat program through a curation pedagogy and found a new understanding of how materials and spaces functioned.

Finally, we here at *Praxis* want to take a moment to formally welcome our new Assistant Editor, Kiara Walker to *Praxis* this semester. She is a fourth-year doctoral student, specializing in rhetoric. As an assistant editor, she is looking forward to firsthand experience with helping to maintain an academic journal as well as the opportunity to support the work and mission of writing centers through *Praxis*.

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THE TUTOR EXCHANGE PROJECT: A MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL TUTOR EDUCATION PROJECT

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The Tutor Exchange Project[1] is a multi-institutional tutor education project that encourages reflective practice by connecting tutors with each other and with research in the field. In the Exchange, we ask tutors from different universities to meet online[2], where they share their own expectations, experiences, and lessons learned; to search for and read articles on a self-selected topic about writing tutoring; and to compose a reflection on what they learned about their topic and the research process. The Exchange is an opportunity to encourage tutors to raise questions, explore the literature first-hand, write about their own practice and what they read, and, as importantly, do so while partnered with a peer tutor from another center, which may be very similar and also very different.

Our project builds on Lauren Fitzgerald's 2012 keynote speech at IWCA, whereby she moved us to view tutors as tutor-researchers and to incorporate this perspective into writing tutoring education. As Fitzgerald and Melissa Ianetta expound in *The Oxford Guide to Writing Tutors*, writing center research needs to assume that "there are no conversations in writing center studies that peer tutors cannot fruitfully address" (11). We believe that the Exchange helps move a peer tutor closer to not only being "a practitioner of tutoring writing but also researcher and theorizer of it" (Fitzgerald and Ianetta 87). While participating in the process of interviewing, reading, and reflecting, tutors engage in key aspects of the research process.

The core of the Exchange project is the interview, whose main purpose is to help the tutor-researchers move forward in the research process, but there is another purpose as well: to teach how to ask different types of questions. This is worthwhile for the tutor-researchers because questioning is, as Isabelle Thompson and Jo Mackiewicz point out, "a major tutoring strategy used in writing center conferences" (62). Participants are therefore provided with resources on questioning at the start of the project. In the interview, participants find out about each other's experiences at their respective centers and help each other develop ideas for their own individual research projects. In terms of the interviews the Exchange provides participants the opportunity to ask questions for both interviewing and tutoring purposes and to use those questions to help each other reflect.

We understood that the Exchange might not make participants perfect tutors or perfect researchers, or even that it might not spark instant connections, but we hoped that it would plant the seeds for reflective practice, which is essential to the research process. As in Mark Hall's study that asked tutors to engage in reflective blog posts in order to develop a writing center community of practice, tutors in this study reflect through interviews and through shared writing that serve as "opportunities for participation and enculturation" ("Theory In/To Practice" 84). Reflective practice aims to help tutors identify practices, assumptions, and blind spots. By starting with expectations and lessons learned, participants enter the conversation on their own, bringing their own untold lore. From that observation point, they are prompted to reflect on the conversation of the field.

Subsequently, as participants extend their own tutoring experiences to their findings within the literature, they continue reflecting on the conversation in written form by composing a research narrative in what John Bean calls an "intellectual detective story" (92). In such writing activity, the thinking process of the tutors is prioritized as they integrate and evaluate their experiences, the conversations with another tutor, and the readings. This, in turn, helps tutors develop their ideas while their voices are emphasized. The final draft of the research narrative, as the culminating process of the Exchange, therefore, brings together the other elements and enables tutor-researchers to explore joining the exchange of ideas in the field writ large.

The Exchange

We piloted this project with six different tutors over two semesters. What follows are the steps taken during the piloted version of the project that led to our initial conclusions. Overall, there are two main components to the project: the interview and the narrative.

Step 1: Individually, each participating tutor reviews the instructions and materials on how to prepare for an interview and how to search for articles in writing center

literature. Participants are also asked to develop a research question or identify a research topic.

Step 2: The tutors interview each other with questions aimed at establishing rapport, and at introducing the pair to each other's tutoring experiences that relate to their research question or topic. That is, this interview guides the tutors to better understand their interview partners, with questions about the tutor's background, the other writing center's actors and environment, and basic assumptions about writing tutoring.

Step 3: The pair continues the project by each locating at least three articles in writing center literature on their respective research topic. The pair is provided with a list of publications from within the field so that they can more easily locate sources.

Step 4: The tutors each draft a research narrative. In that narrative, they compile their notes from the literature and, possibly, the interview, and they compose a first-person narrative detailing the thinking process and possible solutions to the research question or research topic. The prompt for the tutors encourages them to emphasize the research process and to narrate their thinking and the events surrounding their research.

Step 5: The tutors revise their respective drafts and submit them individually to the researchers.

What We Found from the Pilot[3]

The participants we studied held three interviews during our pilot semesters of the Exchange. These interviews discussed the topics of plagiarism, time management, and unfamiliarity with the writer's subject matter. One tutor, Jay, wanted to understand how to problem-solve situations when a paper may be plagiarized; another tutor, Lela, wanted to understand how tutors can help writers manage their time during the writing process and how tutors can help themselves manage time during a session; and another tutor, Kylie, focused on strategies tutors can use in sessions when the tutor is unfamiliar with the paper's subject.

The Tutors Reflected

We observed participants reflecting on their chosen topic and making connections between the literature and the interview as well as between their own tutoring experiences and the chosen topic. For example, in her research narrative, Lela describes how her interview partner, Heather, manages time. Lela explains how, for Heather, "time does play a huge factor in how to set up an appointment," which is why Heather sets an agenda at the start of a session. Furthermore, as a way of reducing the concern of not addressing every reviewable element in the paper, Lela says that she will adopt Heather's emphasis on inviting writers to visit the center again at the end of her sessions.

The Tutors Practiced Researching

In their research narratives, tutors discussed how they waded through the challenges of navigating writing center literature and the articles they read. We saw that Lela and Kylie made explicit connections between articles they read, and while Jay was able to summarize what he read, he also struggled to connect the readings to his own tutoring experience. In Lela's narrative, she explained how she determined certain articles to be relevant to her own research, which informed us that she paid attention to the relevance of the articles to her topic. Similarly, Kylie spent time thinking about whether the articles she was finding pertained to her research questions.

The Tutors Felt an Empathic Connection

We observed an empathic connection among the tutors. Jay may have expressed that connection best when he noted in his research narrative that "Asking a fellow experienced [tutor] helped me realize that I am not the only one who may handle these situations." Lela similarly acknowledged that the conversation with her interview partner gave her the opportunity to compare her own experiences at the center when she said "Through her [Heather's] answers to the interview questions, I was able to gain a better understanding of the similarities and differences between the two centers and I was able to gain some insight into how a different tutor deals with time management in consultations." She realized that, with the similarities and differences, there was much to learn.

Conclusion

We view the themes in this short column as a prototype for future collaborations at other centers that furthers cross-institutional work, such as Mark Hall's *Around the Texts of Writing Center Work*. Additionally, this project enables us to break the grand narrative of writing center work that Jackie Grutsch McKinney outlines in *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*, the narrative we tell about our work in writing centers that simultaneously unites us and holds the possibility of dividing us (88). By telling stories about how we are different, she suggests, we can enlarge the idea of who we are as a field (Grutsch

McKinney 86). This project might be an ideal place where tutors will find community and see how, as a community, we both come together and diverge.

From these early iterations of the Exchange, we observed participants reflecting on their own tutoring practice, reading about their self-selected writing topics in the field's literature, and, as importantly, making connections between what they learned and what they practice in terms of the centers to which they belong and other tutors in their respective community. These three recurring themes encapsulate major movements in the project. Nonetheless, we saw room to enrich the experience in future iterations, which is why for the next iteration, we made available a set of questions focused on rapport building for interview partners. We also added a second interview where participants could share their final thoughts and gain some feedback from a peer tutor. Even in the early versions, though, we saw that one benefit of the Exchange is to help tutors develop reflective practice and to encourage curiosity for research. Observing how tutors scaffold, motivate, and guide themselves through the research process and move closer to the tutor-researcher role that they can have within our community is an exciting starting point.

Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to the generosity of our tutors at Clayton State University and Georgia Southwestern State University who participated in the online pilot. There are many individuals who helped create a supportive space for this project as it developed over the years from a face-to-face to an online format. These include the administrative teams and tutors at Agnes Scott College, Clark Atlanta, Emory University, Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State University, Gordon State College, Mercer University, Spellman College, and University of West Georgia, who believed in the early iterations of this project.

Notes

1. This project was approved by Clayton State University's IRB (Proposal # 20180323001).

2. In our particular partnership, we overcame the hurdle of geographical distance between our institutions by designing the Exchange as an online, video interaction. We worked on the assumption that tutors would have a rich enough interaction through video interviews for them to reflect on their own practice and questions about writing tutoring.

3. In In order to analyze the research narratives, research notes, and transcripts, we coded our data individually and then came back together to reach consensus on the codes and themes. Though we did have some agreed upon codes at the beginning of the process from the language in our research questions themselves—such as *reflection, research process, belonging, challenges, quality,* and *attitude*—we allowed more codes to emerge as we read through the data. We discuss our results here using pseudonyms for the tutors.

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NAMING ABLEISM IN THE WRITING CENTER

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Abstract

Taking inspiration from Maria R. Palacios' poem "Naming Ableism," this article attempts to name some of the ways that ableism has and continues to manifest itself in writing center discourse. Topics discussed include writer "independence," diagnosis of disabled writers, impairment-specific practices, negative discussions of disability in writing center literature, incorrect use of the word "accessibility," inaccessible space, and access fatigue. This article concludes by suggesting that writing centers can move from a culture of ableism to a culture of access by applying concepts of interdependence and access intimacy. Readers are given suggestions for how to move forward, based on their role(s) within the writing center community.

> "Ableism is the fact that you're afraid to tell the truth." – Maria R. Palacios

We need to tell the truth: writing center discourse has a long history of discriminating against disabled people. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided the most recent example. Prior to the pandemic, writing center organizations offered little support for online writing center work, and some writing centers were still avoiding or limiting online writing support (e.g, Brubaker; Reardon; Widen and Prebel), despite evidence that online tutoring can benefit disabled writers in addition to writers of color and multilingual writers (Camarillo; Ries; Schultz). Only after an international pandemic threatened the health, safety, and education of nondisabled, white, and/or monolingual writers did the writing center community take quick interest in promoting and implementing online writing center work.

Many scholars have already challenged writing centers to better consider the needs of disabled writers and tutors in their pedagogy and training (e.g., Babcock; Hitt; Kiedaisch and Dinitz; Kleinfield; Rinaldi). Allison Hitt, Kerri Rinaldi, and Jean Kiedaisch and Sue Dinitz have even critiqued discussions of disability in writing center literature. In this article, I build upon these critiques to connect writing center norms with discrimination against disabled people and to clearly give this discrimination a name: ableism. This article will attempt to name ableism in the writing center, taking inspiration from Maria R. Palacios' poem "Naming Ableism." In this poem, Palacios describes the overwhelming, interconnected, and repetitious ways that disabled people experience ableism throughout their lifetimes. Several lines in Palacios' poem clearly overlap with writing center work, such as an entitlement to deny help to others; attempts to "fix" or diagnose individuals; incorrect use of the word "accessibility"; and use of inaccessible spaces. In each section, I begin with lines from Palacios' poem to help name some of the ways that ableism has and continues to manifest itself in writing center discourse. I end this article by offering some first steps to incorporate accessibility, interdependence, and access intimacy into local writing center work and the larger writing center community.

Entitlement and Independence

> "Ableism is when I ask you for help and you feel entitled to choose for me." – Palacios

Whether for brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, or proofreading, when writers come to the writing center for help, many writing centers feel entitled to choose what is best before even working with them. Most prominently, the writing center community has chosen that writers should be independent. Michael A. Pemberton explained this choice back in 1994:

> True, we offer help and assistance to blocked or struggling or novice writers, but our goal is to foster 'independency,' to empower writers with the tools they need to work through texts themselves, not to rely on others inordinately for help with their writing. (64)

This goal of independence likely evolved from the mantra of "better writers, not better writing" and shaped preferred writing center practices: reading out loud, asking indirect questions, focusing on global issues, and avoiding editing and proofreading are all tactics to encourage writers to work independently and not depend on the writing center.

What many writing center professionals have neglected to recognize is that "independence" is an ableist myth (Chatterjee; Mingus). All people depend on others consistently across their lifetimes. Mia Mingus explains:

> The myth of independence reflects such a deep level of privilege, especially in this rugged individualistic capitalist society and produced the very idea that we could even mildly conceive of our lives or our

> accomplishments as solely our own. ("Access Intimacy, Interdependence and Disability Justice")

For example, anyone involved in writing center work has depended on others to hire them, teach/mentor them, publish articles and books, host conferences and webinars, and answer questions on the Wcenter listserv. Those with masters or doctoral degrees have depended on thesis chairs and dissertation committees who likely edited their thesis or dissertation for them. Published authors, including myself, have depended on colleagues, peer reviewers, and editors to edit their articles or books for them. And yet writing centers hold writers, particularly student writers, to a higher standard and expect them to eventually write on their own, undermining the claim that all writers need readers and negating the very need for a writing center.

According to Dom Chatterjee, "Reaching for this unattainable goal of total independence harms all of us – and most impacts disabled folks." In the writing center, a false idea of independence can encourage writing tutors to limit or deny help to disabled writers under the guise that they have to "earn" their success by doing it all themselves. In Rebecca Day Babcock's research, for example, Squirt is a writer with a learning disability who needs direct help but receives indirect help from her tutor instead. Babcock notes: "[Squirt's] aggravation with the assignment was compounded by her impatience with Newby's nondirective tutoring technique. Squirt wanted to be given answers, not to be asked questions. In one session, Squirt answered, 'I don't know' to Newby's questions *twenty-eight times*" (155, emphasis mine). The "seasoned" tutor (86) in this example chose to apply an "independence"-producing approach that was contrary to the writer's needs. There is no agency for writers when tutors choose not to help them or decide they should meet a mythical standard of independence.

Some writing center scholars have admitted that writers aren't *truly* independent, but still draw an arbitrary line at "too dependent" (Healy; Nolt; Walker). Dave Healy, for example, makes a strong argument against Pemberton's view of independence, but still concludes that "dependency can be debilitating" (3). As recently as 2011, Kim R. Nolt argued that "overindulging students" is a "dangerous trap" (14) and that tutors can "skillfully apply their training to *plan their escape* from overly dependent students" (15, emphasis mine).

This disdain for dependence can be linked to a disdain for disability. Mingus argues that many people know "disability only through 'dependence,' which paints disabled bodies as being a burden to others, at the mercy of able-bodied people's benevolence" ("Access Intimacy, Interdependence and Disability Justice"). This benevolence is documented in a published Wcenter listserv conversation from 1993, where one contributor breaks down three profiles of dependents in their center: (1) the ESL dependent, (2) the *disabled* dependent, and (3) the very unsure writer (Crump). While the very unsure writer is noted as being non-aggressive and needing nurturing, the ESL dependent and disabled dependent are described as smart, aggressive, and manipulative. In 2001, Karen Sisk similarly describes an ESL and disabled writer as manipulative for wanting too much help, while also noting that independence "is *our* goal for all students" (7, emphasis mine). Entitlement in the writing center community has encouraged tutors and staff to preference their own goals, to question whether disabled writers actually need the help they request, and to judge and blame disabled writers who have sought their help.

Diagnosis

> "Ableism is believing I need to be fixed. Ableism is you refusing to fix what's really broken." – Palacios

Instead of reflecting on how writing center practice can be more accessible or inclusive, many writing centers have chosen to identify impairments and then tailor practices based on the impairment, rather than on the person. Following the medical model of disability, writing center literature has provided lists of characteristics for recognizing dyslexia (Corrigan; Lauby), learning disabilities (Mullin; Schramm), and "mental disorders" (Jackson and Blythman; McDonald; Stevenson), along with listing strategies specific to these impairments. This trend continues in the *Writing Center and Disability* anthology published in 2017. In the foreword, Hitt argues against both diagnosing and linking practice to impairment:

> In response to inaccessible best practices, writing center scholarship has often adopted an impairment-specific approach to disability. This approach focuses on identifying the characteristics of a particular disability diagnosis and then developing practices that are specific to those characteristics. There is a robust field of disability studies theory and pedagogy that pushes against the medical model, which positions disability as an impairment that must be diagnosed and treated. Learning about and attending to the material needs of disabled student writers is vital, but the development of impairment-specific practices—although well intentioned—does not honor the

> complexities, nuances, or strengths of disabled student writers. ("Foreword," vii-viii)

In contradiction to both Hitt and their own arguments, two articles in the anthology encourage diagnosis and give impairment-specific practices. While Marie Stevenson argues against a medical approach to disability, she also argues that tutors "need to be able to recognize when students' cognitive functioning has been impaired" and then provides impairment-specific strategies for anxiety and depression (83). Similarly, Sue Jackson and Margo Blythman admit that "diagnosis should be left to trained professionals" before proceeding to list "key warning signs in student behavior" that can be used to diagnose writers with mental health impairments (244, 245). One of their warning signs is a writer who "appears to be 'lazy' or shows lack of commitment" (246)—a tip that is subjective and encourages disability stereotypes.

Hitt, Rinaldi, Margaret Price, and Stephanie Kerschbaum, among others, have strongly argued that pedagogical strategies and even accommodations should not be tied to specific impairments. Linking strategies to impairments poses three problems. First, the strategies are implied to work mostly for writers with that specific impairment, when the same strategies could also be useful for other disabled writers and nondisabled writers. For example, John Corrigan's suggestions for working with dyslexic writers include using a hands-on approach, breaking down information in steps, telling writers to write how they talk, and complementing strong areas in their work. None of these strategies are unique only or mostly to writers with dyslexia. Second, all writers with the same impairment are implied to benefit from the same strategies. In reality, writers will experience impairment and disability in different ways and will have different needs. Lastly, in order to apply impairment-specific practices, tutors must know that a writer has that specific impairment, which leads back to diagnosis.

While Stevenson and Corrigan both identify as having the impairments they discuss in their articles, they don't explain why tailoring practices to their impairments is preferable over fixing what's really broken—writing center pedagogy. Both authors actively push tutors towards diagnosing and/or encouraging diagnostic testing without acknowledging that some writers may not want to be diagnosed or may view their disability as a private matter. Diagnosis is also completely unnecessary in a writing center context. Rinaldi explains:

> What my disability is, quite frankly, is none of your business. My disability does not impact my knowledge of my self. I will tell you what I need, and you don't need to know my disability so that you can make that decision for me. (12–13)

Discomfort with Disability

> "Ableism is when your discomfort becomes a bigger barrier than a flight of stairs." – Palacios

Diagnosis and impairment-specific practices encourage approaching disability not as an identity but as an individual "problem" that causes discomfort with the unknown, either in the form of not knowing if a writer is disabled, not knowing the writer's disability, or not knowing how to work with them because of their disability. In the 1980s and 1990s, some writing center scholars debated whether their tutors had the proper training to support disabled writers or whether they should refer these writers to other departments or "experts" instead (Lauby; Mills; Mullin; Sherwood). Helen Mills even argued that disabled college students should be placed in separate classrooms, because they need too much extra help, and "The regular students feel they are being held back or deprived of the teacher's attention" (3). In other words, some writing center scholars have supported *segregated* classrooms and academic support services to ease their discomfort.

Writing center literature also documents discomfort in the form of frustration, avoidance, and even fear. Anne Mullin reflects that her tutors became frustrated when writers with learning disabilities took too long to sort through their belongings or spent too much time venting during their appointments. Babcock notes in her research that "some of the tutors […] actually shied away from and tried to avoid tutoring the deaf women" (1). And in 2009, Katherine Schmidt et al. claim it is normal and expected to fear disabled writers:

> Feeling out of your element the first time you work with a deaf student-writer is not only normal—it's expected. For you as a hearing consultant, the experience can evoke the same kind of anxiety that working with a senior-level student-writer on a paper in a discipline with which you are completely unfamiliar evokes: *fear may overtake your ability to read, speak, and think like a writing consultant*. (9, emphasis mine)

In the examples above, writing center staff were so focused on themselves that they neglected to consider how their discomfort may impact disabled writers. Disabled writers come to the writing center for assistance with their writing, and in doing so, may have to deal with a tutor's impatience, frustration, or fear; or with being diagnosed without their consent. It is naïve to believe that a disabled writer cannot recognize these

emotions and tactics, which may be all too familiar to them. When writing center professionals become concerned with the "problem" of disability, they forget they are working with actual people.

Nondisabled Lens

> "Ableism is our story told by nondisabled voices captured through a nondisabled lens." – Palacios

In writing center scholarship, several (seemingly) nondisabled writing center tutors and administrators have written *about*, rather than written *with*, disabled writers. These authors use a nondisabled lens to overgeneralize and offer "lessons" about helping disabled writers, without including the disabled writer's voice. Here are three examples.

Joe is a learning disabled writer who is the focus of a *Writing Lab Newsletter* (*WLN*) tutor's column in 1991 (Schramm). Joe is scheduled to work with a tutor who has bought into stereotypes of learning disabled writers and had "pictured the arrival of a clumsy, stooped shouldered student with unkempt hair, papers sticking out of his notebook, totally disorganized" (9). Joe does not fit this stereotype, so he surprises his tutor by being "very intelligent" with a "wide and advanced vocabulary" (9). Despite Joe's intelligence, his tutor uses a checklist of learning disability characteristics (provided in the article) to better understand how to work with Joe, rather than just asking Joe himself. Joe's tutor suggests he record and re-play his verbal ideas during the session, but his tutor later complains that it is "tedious and time consuming" (9). Joe doesn't return for his last two sessions, and his tutor blames this on one of the diagnostic characteristics for learning disabilities. Joe's story is used to argue that tutors can help writers to "compensate for their learning disabilities" (9).

In 1996, Byron appears in an article in *The Writing Center Journal* (*WCJ*)(Sherwood). Byron has a brain injury, but his tutor later diagnoses him with an additional disability, since he suspects that Byron "*suffered* from a number of what we now call learning disabilities" (49, emphasis mine). Byron's story is eerily similar to Joe's. Byron also records himself thinking aloud and replays the tapes during his session, which his tutor describes as unnerving, unsettling, and frustrating (49). Eventually, Byron also stops coming to his appointments. Byron had such an impact that his tutor notes spending "several years dreading another encounter with a student with severe learning disabilities" (55). Byron is described as his tutor's "most glaring failure" (49), and his story is used to argue that some people just can't be helped.

Lastly, in 2001, Inna makes a brief appearance in a *WLN* article (Sisk). Inna has a visual impairment and is an ESL writer. She is alleged to have told different stories to three different people in order to receive additional help. As such, she is labeled by a writing center administrator as "*masterful at manipulating* not only faculty and staff, but also tutors and other students into providing more than the assistance clearly outlined in our Writing Center Contract" (7, emphasis mine). Inna's story is used to argue for better communication between writing centers, instructors, and disability offices about the extent to which disabled writers should be helped.

While these disabled writers appear in our scholarship, they don't get to hold the role of co-authors or even as participants in IRB-approved research projects, leaving several important questions unanswered. Why did Joe and Byron stop attending their writing center appointments? Could they tell that their tutors were frustrated by the methods they needed to participate in the session? Did Inna purposely tell different stories, and if so, why did she feel that was necessary? And how does she feel about being called "masterful at manipulating"? The perspectives of these writers could have encouraged the authors to better reflect on their assumptions about disability and to consider how the writing center might have been a barrier for these writers. Instead, the authors expanded their resumes at the expense of disabled writers who likely don't even know they appeared in a publication.

Denial of Existence

> "Ableism is when you can pretend disabled people don't exist." – Palacios

While writing center scholarship acknowledges that disabled *writers* exist, several writing center scholars have written about disability as though disabled *tutors* and *professionals* don't exist. In other words, the negative writing center scholarship that I've quoted and cited is written as though disabled people will never read it, as though writing center scholars can't be disabled. In the previous section, the cited authors assumed that readers would identify with frustrated writing center staff, rather than identifying with Joe, Byron, or Inna. The authors did not act independently here: they likely sought advice from colleagues or mentors, and their *published* articles were approved by multiple reviewers and editors who also didn't recognize disabled people as an intended audience for writing center publications. Writing center journals and books have played a role in publishing and distributing these problematic articles and by doing so, have given credibility to ableism.

Julie Neff's "Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center" is a prime example. In this article, learning disabled writers are compared to "normal" and "average" learners and are associated with an onslaught of negative terms, including "problem," "compensating," "debilitating," "malfunction," "defect," and "failed" (82-87, 92). Despite this, Neff's article was originally published in an edited collection in 1994 and was re-published three times in *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* from 2003 to 2011. In another example, Mary McDonald invokes the stereotype of violence to encourage diagnosis and impairment-specific practices for writers with "severe mental disorders." Even still, her article was published by *WLN* in 2005 and then re-published in 2008. A peer-reviewed publication should make sure that offensive, inaccurate, and stereotypical arguments are not given credibility through publication, yet some writing center journals and edited collections have created a "safe" space for ableism to persist across decades.

Incorrect Use of "Accessibility"

> "Ableism is when words like affordable and accessible are too good to be true." – Palacios

In addition to publishing ableist work, several writing center publications have not accounted for disabled professionals in their very design. In *Open-Access, Multimodality, and Writing Center Studies*, Elisabeth L. Buck analyzed the archives of *WCJ*, *WLN*, and *Praxis* for accessibility. In her analysis, Buck applies a broad understanding of access that considers usability for the general user: "Access is consequently not only a matter of whether digital records are obtainable, but involves the extent to which they are easily navigable and straightforward" (59).

On the one hand, this definition of access leads Buck to rightfully critique *WCJ* for being unaffordable, unobtainable, and thus inaccessible by not providing a free public archive. Scholars can read and download unlimited articles from *WCJ* only if they belong to institutions with a subscription to JSTOR. Some participants in Buck's research note that *WCJ*'s archives were not available to them through their institutions, and they had to turn elsewhere for their research. Other avenues to *WCJ* exist but are limiting. A paid annual subscription to the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) will give only partial access to the most recent *WCJ* issues, and a paid individual subscription to JSTOR limits the number of article downloads per year. Restricting information based on finances or employment negatively affects any disabled scholars who are unemployed or work outside of academia due to ableism (Price).

On the other hand, a broad understanding of accessibility leads Buck to erroneously conclude that *WLN* is accessible just because their archives are free and generally easy for her to navigate:

> What can be said for *Writing Lab Newsletter* specifically is that its content is almost wholly accessible, with the exception of a few missing issues throughout the publication's history. This access enables multiple discoveries about not only a topic's trajectory, but about how the journal itself evolved both visually and in terms of its content." (60)

Buck's claim of accessibility in *WLN* is too good to be true, as her analysis neglects to consider whether the archives are accessible to disabled users specifically. Elizabeth Brewer, Cynthia L. Selfe, and Melanie Yergeau have critiqued composition studies for continuing to design texts and digital resources that are inaccessible to disabled writers and scholars, such as scanned PDFs that can't be read by screenreaders and videos without closed captions. My own analysis of writing center journal archives reveals a similar state of inaccessibility, as of September 2020. On *WLN*'s website, 44% (165 out of 376) of the PDFs in the archives are scanned images, and none of the online webinars have edited closed captions. On *Praxis*'s website, the first eight volumes are available only through a program called ISSUU, which is not screenreader friendly (Demirgian). I could not analyze *WCJ*'s archives due to lack of access.

Before labeling a document, product, or service as "accessible," scholars must consider the experience and needs of disabled people specifically. Information can be publicly and freely available, but still not provide everyone with the same opportunity to conduct research (Dolmage). For example, *WLN*'s scanned image PDFs contain 46% (18 out of 39) of their articles on disability, meaning that scholars with disabilities may not be able to access scholarship on disability. Scholars using screenreaders or similar technologies may be excluded not only from reading past scholarship but also researching the history or trends of writing center scholarship over time.

Inaccessible Space

> "Ableism is when you make plans that do not include accessible venues, accessible spaces so it becomes easier to erase me from your list." – Palacios

In *Mad at School*, Margaret Price discusses conferences as a genre that often poses barriers for disabled professionals. She states,

> Professional organizations as a whole do not prioritize the inclusion of persons with disabilities at conferences; and where inclusion is attempted, it tends to imagine the disabled conference-goer as a person in a fairly narrow defined position, with little concern for the flexibility of design that could enable access-as-practice. (124–125)

Professional writing center organizations are no exception and tend to design conferences around the expectation that attendees will be nondisabled.

In the past 10 years, I've experienced several noteworthily inaccessible writing center conferences in the United States, but a regional conference from 2018 stands out the most. Accessibility issues began at the registration table when printed programs were not provided, without prior notice. The conference program was only available as an inaccessible PDF embedded on the conference website. Attendees who needed or preferred a print program were told to travel to the university library and pay to print out the conference booklet themselves. Attendees were also expected to walk for at least 15 minutes to the keynote and then stand on a flight of stairs to wait in line for lunch. These planning decisions did not account for lack of smartphones, laptops, battery life, or data access; use of screenreaders or speech-to-text programs; mobility impairments; non-normative walking paces; chronic pain; or stamina. Even worse, the conference organizers had access to multiple disability-focused departments and disability studies scholars at their institution. The conference design was so inaccessible that it sparked the two years of research that led to this article.

In addition to providing inaccessible conference programs and using inaccessible venues, writing center conferences follow the tradition of being exhausting and grueling (Price). Attendees go to back-to-back sessions all day, while navigating unfamiliar locations, supervising accompanying staff, and preparing for their own presentations, along with balancing their usual teaching load, administrative tasks, or coursework. Furthermore, in the presentations, information is almost always presented quickly and orally, and resources to follow along and take home are rarely given, even for presentations on diversity, inclusivity, or disability. Because information is only shared in that time and space, missing a conference session, or missing the conference as a whole, means missing out on the conversation.

The expectation of physical presence at physical avenues further erases the participation of many disabled professionals. Melanie Yergeau et al. explain that "many mental and physical disabilities make such [physical] presence difficult or impossible." The writing center community has avoided virtual conferencing to the extent that they have avoided online writing consultations. Many writing center associations did not offer a virtual conference option until the COVID-19 pandemic affected *all* of their members. The end result is that post-pandemic many disabled scholars will continue to be excluded from participating in conferences and similar onsite professional development opportunities.

Access Fatigue

> "Ableism is expecting me to shoulder your ableist beliefs because the weight of my differences are too heavy for you to carry." – Palacios

In each of the previous sections, disabled people have had to shoulder ableist beliefs within writing center culture. When a writing center believes that all writers should be independent and benefit from a pre-determined set of practices that promote independence, disabled writers at that center assume the burden of requesting accommodations. They may have to self-disclose to writing center staff when they would otherwise prefer not to. They may have to provide proof of a diagnosis, which means paying for testing, waiting for acceptable proof, and completing paperwork to register with the disability support office (Kleinfield). Even after all this work, accommodations may still be limited to what is "reasonable" under the law, at least in the United States. If writers don't disclose, they must then shoulder being diagnosable by checklists in writing center literature. If disabled writers try to self-advocate for additional help or if they rely "too much" on the writing center (which is likely funded by their tuition), they are labeled as aggressive and manipulative.

When writing center conferences are designed for nondisabled attendees, some disabled professionals similarly have to shoulder the weight of disclosure. Writing center conferences have placed the responsibility for access on disabled attendees (Price). In other words, disabled attendees are expected to request accommodations while conference organizers are not expected to plan accessible conferences and conference presenters are not expected to design accessible presentations. Writing center professionals have further had to spend time and energy fighting ableism in writing center literature. Several scholars have self-disclosed their own disabilities in order to fight against the idea

that disabled writers should be treated differently or diagnosed (Hitt; Rinaldi). And yet the work continues.

All of this extra work is exhausting and leads to what Annika Konrad calls access fatigue (*Arguing for Access*). Asking for access is not as simple as stating one's needs and having these needs met. Instead, those with access needs have to perform consistent rhetorical labor to convince, educate, and remind others that their needs should be met. This labor is exhausting, leading many disabled people to decide which events and exchanges are worth the energy and which are not. Saving energy might mean not going to the writing center, not using a particular writing center journal, or not attending a writing center conference, because all of these scenarios require arguing with people who view access as someone else's responsibility. It's time to share that responsibility instead.

Call for Culture of Access

> "Ableism is when you turn your head the other way and say that your able-bodied privilege is not privilege and refuse to see that *your* privilege is the face of *my* oppression." – Palacios

Now that this article has named some of the ways in which writing center culture has been and continues to be ableist, writing center professionals cannot continue to turn their heads the other way. As a community, we need to move from a culture of ableism to a culture of access, where participation is not dependent upon privilege, or a pandemic. We also need to be careful that we don't just approach access as a method to increase consumption but instead as a way to transform the methods of participation. Brewer, Selfe, and Yergeau explain:

> A culture of access is a culture of participation and redesign. To put it simply: There is a profound difference between consumptive access and transformative access. The former involves allowing people to enter a space or access a text. The latter questions and re-thinks the very construct of allowing. (153–154)

There are three big steps the writing center community can take to change who is "allowed" to participate in our spaces. First, we need to acknowledge that writing centers are not inherently accessible. In a 2018 book review of the *Writing Centers and Disability* anthology and *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors*, Mike Haen claimed that writing center studies has had an "*ongoing commitment* to issues of inclusivity and accessibility" (218, emphasis mine). I disagree. While individual authors and professionals have been committed to accessibility, the larger discipline has not, as my article has shown. We must accept this truth before we can move forward.

Second, we need to embrace the concept of interdependence, which "challenges the independence/dependence binary by assuming that all humans are inherently and necessarily dependent on each other, regardless of their abilities at various moments in time" (Konrad, *Arguing for Access*, 115). As part of interdependence, we recognize that we all depend on others and others depend on us: we don't accomplish anything alone. For Konrad, embracing interdependence has been empowering, giving her patience and helping her to build collaborative relationships with other people. She explains:

> All our lives, we are conditioned to be as independent as possible. Living with a disability has forced me to ask myself, do I really want to live that way? Most of the time, I find that my experiences are richer because I need to involve another person. […] If I relied only on myself, even if I weren't visually impaired, I would never have been exposed to those ideas and I wouldn't have had the opportunity to connect with another person. ("What Disability Has Taught Me")

Third, from interdependence, we can move towards creating what Mingus has named "access intimacy." Mingus explains access intimacy as "that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs" ("Access Intimacy: The Missing Link"). Access intimacy, then, operates as the opposite of access fatigue: we can acknowledge others' access needs, work to meet these needs, and share responsibility for creating access, without expecting self-disclosure, documentation, or other forms of justification. We can also anticipate common access needs—such as captioning, sign language interpretation, screenreader-friendly materials, breaks, and quiet spaces—and incorporate them from the beginning without requiring people to ask. Access intimacy can happen with both disabled and nondisabled people, with people you don't yet know, and with people who don't have "a political understanding of disability, ableism or access" (Mingus, "Access Intimacy: The Missing Link"). Mingus elaborates:

> Access intimacy is interdependence in action. It is an acknowledgement that what is most important is not whether or not things are perfectly accessible, or whether or not there is ableism; but rather what the impact of inaccessibility and ableism is on disabled people and our lives. In my experience, when access intimacy is present, the most powerful part is having someone to navigate access and

ableism with. ("Access Intimacy, Interdependence and Disability Justice")

Access is a shared responsibility among us all. We all have a role to play in moving from a culture of ableism to a culture of access. Here is what each of us can do, depending on our role(s).

Tutors, Consultants, and Coaches

If you are a writing tutor, consultant, or coach, you and the writers you work with are equally dependent on each other for knowledge and growth. Writers are dependent on you for feedback and insight, and you are dependent on writers to understand their needs and to reflect upon your approach as an educator.

The key to accessible pedagogy is that it is *flexible* to the needs of the learner (Hitt). Instead of making all the choices before you even meet a writer, you can involve the writer in the decision-making process. Rinaldi and Manako Yabe suggest negotiating learning and communication needs with writers, including your own needs as a tutor, consultant, or coach. You can begin each session by asking questions about the writer's needs and preferences, which eliminates any perceived need for diagnosing or knowing one's disability. Rinaldi suggests asking, "How would you like to work together? What works best for you?" If the writer doesn't yet know what they need, that session is an opportunity to explore different strategies and find what does and doesn't work for that writer.

Training Leaders

If you train writing center staff, then staff are dependent on you for their approach to writing tutoring, and you are dependent on them to revise your own understanding of writing center work. You can design training and learning opportunities that are centered around disability, accessibility, and interdependence, as a way to encourage flexibility and refrain from establishing a pedagogy that necessitates making exceptions or accommodations. You can normalize disability by assigning articles written by disabled tutors (e.g., Rinaldi, Yabe) and avoiding articles that discuss disability in problematic ways through a nondisabled lens. The course itself can also be designed accessibly, by presenting information verbally and visually, choosing materials that are screenreader-friendly, sharing videos with closed captions, and offering options for participation in discussion and coursework. Your training can even encourage group projects, to align with the collaborative and interdependent nature of the writing center.

Directors, Coordinators, and Managers

If you direct, coordinate, or manage a writing center, then writers and tutors are dependent on you to foster an accessible and inclusive community, one that can be there for them if they have no other support systems. And you are dependent on writers and tutors to better understand the communities you are serving. Conducting an inclusivity audit, similar to Elizabeth Kleinfield's, is a place to start. An inclusivity audit invites others to analyze your physical space, digital space, pedagogy, services, hiring practices, training, and other areas that may create barriers. Developing an inclusivity committee is also an opportunity to develop interdependence with other departments, such as the disability support center, office of inclusion, or student-led organizations.

As you apply suggestions from such a committee, remember that just like pedagogy, flexibility is key to increasing access. Flexibility may mean providing options for scheduling and cancelling appointments, relaxing no-show or late policies, and offering services in different locations, formats, and modalities. Flexibility may mean conducting interviews in-person, over phone, over chat, or email. And instead of valuing high GPAs or letters of recommendation, you can recruit tutors who can foster access intimacy with writers and who have their own access needs.

Researchers

If you conduct human subjects research, you are dependent on participants to collect your data, and your participants are dependent on you to create an accessible study design they can participate in. More primary research is needed to include disabled voices in writing center work and to challenge and disprove assumptions, rather than create new ones. Even if your study is not focused on disability specifically, disabled people should still be eligible to participate, and your study design should allow them to do so. For Konrad's dissertation, participants could choose to be interviewed in-person, over telephone, over video call, or over email. Providing multiple options for participation will increase the number of people who can participate and increase the diverse perspectives that will be included in your study.

Conference Presenters

If you present at conferences, you are dependent on attendees to engage with your work, and attendees are dependent on you to present information clearly and accessibly. As a presenter, you should always expect that disabled people will attend your session and design your session accordingly. The very beginning of your session can address accessibility by letting attendees know how

they can follow along with you and welcoming them to do whatever they need to be comfortable and participate. Your presentation can account for verbal and visual needs by sharing your slides and other presentation materials, providing a written transcript of your talk, verbally describing images, clarifying the beginning and end of direct quotations, and only using videos with edited closed captions (Composing Access Project).

You can share electronic copies of your materials by using a free website builder, such as Wordpress. I initially used a free Wordpress site to create blog posts for each of my conference presentations and link attendees to my PowerPoint slides, a Word document version of my transcript, and an HTML-version of my transcript, which can work better with mobile devices and tablets. A website also gives you a memorable URL to distribute during your sessions and holds your conference materials in one place for those who could not attend. As writing center culture moves toward accessibility, your presentation can inspire others to lead their own sessions more accessibly.

Authors

If you write an article or book for publication, readers depend on you for information, and you depend on readers to use and cite your work. Similar to conference presentations, you should expect that disabled people will read your work. If you're nondisabled and planning to write about specific disabled writers or staff, invite them to co-author with you or to participate in a research study so their voices can be included in your work. Furthermore, stories of disabled writers/staff should not be shared without their consent: if you've written about a disabled person in a way that you wouldn't share directly with them, then you shouldn't be trying to publish it. Even if your work does not discuss disability specifically, you can attempt to anticipate how your work may impact disabled writers and tutors.

You can also be mindful of the publication you are submitting to and how accessible or available that publication will be to a disabled audience. While prestige is attractive (I've fallen for it as well), you owe your audience the opportunity to read your work regardless of ability, disability, institutional affiliation, or financial status. If you're writing an article, consider publications that share work for free and in HTML, such as *Praxis*, *The Peer Review*, *The Dangling Modifier*, *Another Word*, and *Composition Forum*, to name a few. If you're writing a book, The WAC Clearinghouse and University of Michigan Press publish books online for free. Jay T. Dolmage, for example, published *Academic Ableism* both in print and for free in HTML through the University of Michigan Press.

Interdependency is realizing not only how we can better depend upon and support each other but also how to *resist* those in positions of power. Journal and book editors depend on authors and readers. Thus, authors can refuse to submit to less accessible journals, and readers can refuse to buy subscriptions until such journals take appropriate steps to be more accessible.

Journal and Book Editors

If you're a journal editor or book editor, professionals are depending on your publication to stay current in writing center studies, and you are dependent on the engagement of authors and readers. In your position, you can actively recruit reviewers with disabilities and from disability studies who can provide assistance and education to those wanting to publish on disability. In addition, you can work towards prioritizing usability for disabled readers and making your publication available in a variety of formats, including free in HTML and Microsoft Word documents. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, for example, has published its issues for free in HTML since 2000. Writing center journals should similarly provide accessible ways for readers to access their archives. *WCJ* can work towards a free public archive, both *WCJ* and *WLN* can offer HTML alternatives to their PDFs and print publications, and *Praxis* can stop using ISSUU and make their older issues available in HTML. While such projects don't happen overnight, building this access could be possible within the next few years. If the archives continue to grow in their current state, it will only take longer to remediate for accessibility.

Writing Center Organizations

Lastly, if you serve in a writing center organization, you need members, and your members need to feel represented by your organization and need an accessible environment in which they can connect with other professionals. Writing center organizations who host conferences should expect that disabled people will attend and should prepare accordingly. You can advocate for an accessibility committee in your organization to help design and budget for accessibility from the beginning of conference planning. You can also encourage a greater virtual conference presence in your organization. Virtual participation and websites for publicly sharing conference materials can help to mitigate the financial, physical, and mental barriers of onsite conferences and increase the participation of disabled scholars.

Conclusion

"Ableism is the fact that you don't even try." – Palacios

With any article like this, you may assume that the author has always been enlightened on the topic, but that is certainly not the case here. I was not aware of the content of this article even five years ago. I do not identify as disabled at this point in time, I am not an expert in ableism, and I still have much to learn. Even still, I've made an effort to notice the impact of ableism around me, and it's disheartening to notice the impact so prominently in writing center work. Once enough of us start noticing, we can work towards change on a larger scale. There is always the risk that we won't do enough. I've struggled with that in writing this article: there are works I haven't read, works I haven't cited, and connections I haven't made yet. I'm exhausted, but I still tried. And that's all we can ask of each other: to at least *try*.

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TUTORING CREATIVE WRITERS IN THE WRITING CENTER

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Abstract
In this article, I report on the results of a mixed-methods survey research on writing center tutors' attitudes towards tutoring creative writers. I analyze thirty-two tutors' perceived level of confidence in tutoring poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction writing, examine the background factors that influence their perceptions, and describe their self-identified concerns about tutoring such writing. I conclude the article with a discussion of the implications for tutor training, arguing for the value of genre awareness pedagogy and improvisation practices to help tutors work with any genre in writing centers.

> "Nearly everyone who writes likes – and needs – to talk about his or her writing, preferably to someone who will really listen, who knows how to listen, and knows how to talk about writing too." (pg. 439-440.)
> —Stephen M. North, The Idea of a Writing Center

Writing centers stand as influential sites of learning that respond to the enduring needs of writers North observed over decades ago. In the center, tutors work with writers who seek one-on-one support in writing in a broad range of contexts. The National Census of Writing data show how far writing centers have come in tutoring writing that goes beyond the traditional term paper to include a wider variety of genres such as PowerPoint or other software presentations, posters, new media writing, discussion lead planning, etc. No matter what they work with, tutors "can help reduce the students' anxieties, self-doubts, and insecurities that can lead to writer's block, a sense of failure, and poor self-esteem" (Murphy and Sherwood 16) through the establishment of a positive interpersonal relationship with writers. Tutors can help writers to reflect on, generate, and organize ideas, think about their options, and develop control of their writing processes (Gillespie and Lerner). Given the value of the services writing centers offer, the scholarship suggests that writing centers can become an essential resource for creative writers who can benefit from sharing their works in progress with highly skilled, dedicated, and enthusiastic writing tutors (Cassorla; Hime and Mowrer; LeBlanc; Pobo). While creative writers, like many other writers, are welcomed in writing centers, a review of the literature demonstrates that there is limited empirical data that document the work tutors perform with this particular writing center clientele. In this article, I build on the extant foundation of knowledge through an examination of writing center tutors' attitudes towards tutoring creative writers. In what follows, I first provide background on the intersection between creative writing and writing center pedagogies. I then review the scholarly conversations surrounding the topic of tutoring creative writers drawing on the writing center literature. Following that, I describe the survey research I conducted and report on the findings of this research. I conclude the article with a discussion of the implications for training tutors toward working with any genre in the writing center by incorporating genre awareness pedagogy and improvisation practices into tutor training.

Creative Writing and The Writing Center

The history of creative writing programs dates back to the early twentieth century when creative writing entered the curriculum and was accepted for academic credit at the University of Iowa (Bishop; Mayers). From that day forward, creative writing programs have gradually developed in other higher education institutions across the country (McGurl). Throughout the history of creative writing instruction, workshop has been the dominant pedagogy in creative writing classrooms (Bizzaro). The workshop pedagogy, in which students submit one or more pieces of their work for classroom critique, continued to be the primary pedagogy in creative writing instruction until around 1990s when teachers of creative writing began to question its underpinnings (Bizzaro; Leahy et al.; Mayers). The problems with workshop pedagogy included but not limited to the little attention given to "work in process, or revision" (Leahy et al. 14) because it was traditionally designed as a product-oriented practice (Mayers).

To move creative writing instruction beyond the reliance on a single teaching method that eschewed the process of writing, creative writing experts took on explorations into innovative pedagogical approaches and practices. For instance, in their edited collection "Creative Writing Pedagogies for the Twenty-First Century", Alexandria Peary and Tom Hunley brought together creative writing and composition scholars to offer neoteric alternatives to the workshop pedagogy. As a possibility, some authors suggested the adaptation of writing center pedagogy in creative writing

classrooms to replace the product-centered workshop approach with a more process-oriented practice. Kate Kostelnik argued that writing centers' conversation-between-peers approach is a powerful practice that can provide creative writers with opportunities to reflect on their texts in progress and engage in productive conversations about their works. This not only implies the potential of writing center pedagogy in creative writing instruction, but also calls attention to the fact of writing centers being effective sites of collaborative learning for creative writers to get assistance with their writing.

With the rise of the creative writing programs in the U.S. higher education institutions, the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) announced that more creative writing students would be expected to visit writing centers to receive feedback on their writing (Tutoring Creative Writing Students). Although there isn't any empirical evidence that shows whether there is a growing demand for tutorials on creative writing, it would not be unusual to encounter creative writers in the centers because, like many other writers, creative writers often seek a community in which they could discuss their writing and receive feedback to improve as a writer. In this regard, the services that writing centers offer can respond to the needs of creative writers, by providing them with a community of audience who will listen to and talk about their work. Tutors can help creative writers focus and stimulate their thoughts, draft and revise their texts, and appreciate the process-based nature of writing activity (Cassorla; Le Blanc; Pobo). As Kenneth Pobo remarked, any question that tutors ask creative writers about their writing, for example, why they chose a certain word, what they tried to communicate in a stanza, or what ideas they wanted to convey in the piece, would be helpful to improve the work in progress.

While the writing center scholarship acknowledges that tutors can support creative writers' growth as skillful writers, the discussions of how to tutor creative writers remain inconclusive in the literature. On the one side, there are scholars who argue that creative writers' needs differ from "those of the typical writing center conferee" (LeBlanc 1) and that tutors must be aware of the peculiarities of "creative writing, which are not identical to the global issues of thesis-driven writing" (Hime and Mowrer 1). On the other side, there are scholars who take a perspective that "what applies in freshman composition, technical writing, journalism, and advanced prose writing also applies in creative writing" (Pobo 5). To Pobo, for example, all types of writing focus on similar rhetorical questions (e.g. Who is the audience? What is the purpose? How is content dealt with? How are vocabulary and phrases used?) and creative writing is no exception. Jennifer Hime and Karen Mowrer, however, consider tutoring creative writing as "a sensitive task that goes beyond mere clarity, organization, and style" (1). Consequently, there is a diversity of opinions as to the methods of tutoring creative writing. Despite such diversity, writing center practitioners are consistent in their agreement that writing centers are important resources for creative writers who have much to gain from the services that the centers offer.

To facilitate the growth of creative writers, there are some materials available for tutors' use in the writing centers. For instance, Hime and Mowrer provide a useful guideline that presents eight questions to consider when tutoring creative writers. These questions guide tutors' discussions with creative writers as well as foster dialogic exchange and effective communication in tutorials. Additionally, Purdue University's OWL provides helpful resources for working with creative writing students (Tutoring Creative Writing Students). The OWL particularly addresses beginning poetry and fiction writers. It defines the challenges that beginning poets and fiction writers frequently encounter in their writing and suggests strategies to address these challenges in tutorials. It contains examples to illustrate possible tutor responses to different tutoring situations, and offers useful materials such as handouts, books, web sites, PowerPoint presentations to guide discussions with creative writing students.

The literature reviewed thus far addresses the topic of tutoring creative writers through discussions of what role writing centers can play in addressing creative writers' needs, in what ways tutoring creative writing is similar to or different from tutoring traditional essay writing, and which methods tutors can use to help creative writers. When it comes to empirical work, however, reviewing the writing center literature reveals a scarcity of research in current scholarship. In one, and to my best knowledge only, empirical inquiry, Leah Cassorla studied tutor attitudes toward tutoring creative writers and found that the tutors were most comfortable with tutoring creative non-fiction and fiction writers, whereas they were least comfortable with tutoring poetry writers. Of 71 tutors, two claimed that they received specialized training for tutoring creative writers and many stated that a combination of tutoring experience, workshops, and their creative writer identities represented the training they had for tutoring creative writers. Reporting a gap between tutor reports on the need for specialized training and the canonized theory that claims the opposite, Cassorla pointed to a need to further investigate tutor attitudes for a better

understanding of the ways in which tutors respond to situations where they are expected to talk about and offer advice on creative pieces. The current study is a response to this call, bringing the perspectives of tutors on tutoring creative writers.

In attempt to scrutinize the research on the tutoring of creative writers published in flagship journals in the last decade, I reviewed the articles in the *WLN: A Writing Center Scholarship* from 2010 (volume 34, issue 4-5) to 2020 (volume 44, issue 9-10), *The Writing Center Journal* from 2010 (volume 30, issue 1) to 2019 (volume 37, issue 2), and *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* from 2012 (volume 9, issue 1) to 2020 (volume 17, issue 3). Unfortunately, I found no systematic, empirical documentation of tutoring creative writers in these publications. As afore-reviewed, only a handful of studies addressed the topic of tutoring creative writers in the writing center literature, but these studies are outdated, being published over a decade ago. In the current study, I strive to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this topic by describing and analyzing writing center tutors' attitudes towards and concerns with tutoring creative writers. To this end, I seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What are writing center tutors' attitudes towards tutoring creative writers?
2. To what degree do different background factors influence writing center tutors' attitudes towards tutoring creative writers?
3. What concerns do writing center tutors have about tutoring creative writers?

Answering these questions is important for writing center theory and pedagogy because it is a critical step in understanding the nuances of how tutors approach tutoring creative writing, whether and how their approaches are influenced by various factors, and whether they have any concerns with tutoring this specific type of writing. Worth noting, the current study, a partial replication of Cassorla, differs from the stated study in at least three ways: 1. it uses a nonparametric test to examine whether and how experience in tutoring creative writers affects tutors' attitudinal responses, 2. it runs associational statistics to investigate whether there is a relationship between tutors' levels of confidence in tutoring poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction writing and their background factors – frequency of reading and writing creative writing, years of creative writing instruction received, years of tutoring in the writing centers, frequency of tutoring creative writers,[1] and 3. it brings tutors' voices into light, enabling us to hear their concerns.

Methods

Participants

Using a convenience sampling method, I contacted thirty writing center directors via email after generating a list of available writing centers with director contact information on the university writing center websites. I asked the directors to forward the email which had an invitation letter and an anonymous link to a Qualtrics survey to tutors working at their writing centers. Thirty-two (*N*=32) writing center tutors participated in the survey at the end of data collection procedure.[2] Due to the anonymity of the data set, we do not know how many institutions the participants came from;[3] however, we know that at least four writing center directors responded that they agreed to forward the survey to tutors who worked at their writing centers. All of the tutors were first language (L1) English speakers. Twenty-one tutors identified as female, 10 tutors identified as male, and one tutor identified as other. Twenty-two tutors were aged between 18 and 24, five were between 25 and 34, one was between 45 and 54, and four were 55 and over. Twenty-three tutors were undergraduates, six were postgraduates with four being masters and two being doctoral students, and three were faculty and/or administrative staff. The peer tutors were enrolled in a variety of majors including English, screenwriting, professional and technical writing, psychology, Middle Eastern studies, speech-language pathology, criminology, accounting, neuroscience, mathematics, biology, and biochemistry. Eleven tutors reported that they had less than one-year tutoring experience, 13 tutors had one or two years of tutoring experience, four tutors had three or four years of tutoring experience, and four tutors had more than five years of tutoring experience. The majority of tutors (*N*=22, 69%) reported that they had experience in tutoring creative writers. Three tutors reported that they have tutored creative writers one or two times, 10 tutors have tutored creative writers three to five times, two tutors have tutored creative writers six or seven times, and seven tutors have tutored creative writers eight or more times. Types of creative writing that tutors have tutored in writing centers included poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, as well as video game and screenplay writing.

Instrument

I designed an online survey with self-report scales to collect data in this study (see Appendix A). The survey included two sections. The first section intended to measure tutors' attitudes towards tutoring creative writers. It comprised nine statements, two multiple-

choice questions, and an open-ended question. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-scale in order to reflect their levels of agreement on the statements. The specific instruction for participants to rate the statements was: "Please think for a second about tutoring a creative writer who needs help with their poetry, fiction (short story, novel, screenplay, drama), or creative non-fiction (autobiography, memoir, personal essay). Read the statements below and select the option that best reflects your level of agreement on each statement". The second section addressed demographic background of the participants. The survey was workshopped and validated with a group of researchers in the field of Composition and Applied Linguistics before being distributed to the participants. Although the survey did not force the participants to answer all the questions, there weren't any missing values which made it possible to generate reliable analysis.

Data Analysis

Figure 1 in Appendix B illustrates the analytical procedures used to answer the research questions in this study.

To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics were measured for the 5-point Likert-scale items through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. To answer the second research question, two statistical tests were run. First, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to see whether and how having experience in tutoring creative writers influenced tutors' attitudinal responses.[4] Second, a Spearman rho test was computed to measure the relationship between tutors' levels of confidence in tutoring creative writers and different background factors.[5] To answer the final research question, participants' qualitative responses were thematically coded.

Results

This section documents the results organized by research questions.

What are writing center tutors' attitudes towards tutoring creative writers?

Descriptive analysis was conducted to measure tutors' attitudes towards tutoring creative writers. Table 1 (see Appendix B) presents the means, medians, variances, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores for reported levels of agreement on the attitude items.

For each attitude statement, a Mean score was calculated based on the respondents' rating on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In these results, the Mean scores varied from as low as 2.41 to as high as 4.62. The Mean distribution of the items were interpreted rounding the Mean score to the nearest whole number. For example, while 3.25 would be 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 3.75 would be 4 (somewhat agree). Based on a reading of the table in this way, descriptive analysis results indicated that tutors were undecided whether creative writer tutors should tutor creative writers (M=3.40) and whether they can use the same tutoring methods in tutoring creative and non-creative writing (M=3.34). Tutors somewhat disagreed that tutoring creative writing is more difficult than tutoring non-creative writing (M=2.41). Tutors ranked highest confidence in tutoring fiction writing (M=4.62), followed by creative non-fiction (M=4.50) and poetry writing (M=3.25). With respect to the need for specialized training, they ranked highest poetry writing (M=3.75), followed by creative non-fiction (M=3.00) and fiction writing (M=2.93).

Apart from the scale items, two multiple-choice questions addressed tutors' attitudes towards tutoring creative writers:

1. Do you think writing centers should tutor creative writers?, and
2. Do you think tutors need specialized training to tutor creative writers?

On a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from "1 – definitely not" to "5 – definitely yes", 25 tutors (78%) reported that writing centers should definitely tutor creative writers and six tutors (19%) said "probably yes", while one tutor (3%) said "probably not". In response to the second question, 18 tutors (56%) reported that tutors need specialized training to tutor creative writers. Ten tutors (32%) remained neutral, three tutors (9%) wrote that tutors probably don't need specialized training, and one tutor (3%) reported that tutors definitely don't need specialized training to tutor creative writers. A Mann-Whitney U Test was used to compare tutors who had experience working with creative writers to those who did not for their attitudes towards the need for specialized training to tutor creative writers. No significant difference was observed between the two groups of tutors, U=82.0, p=.132.

To what degree do different background factors influence writing center tutors' attitudes towards tutoring creative writers?

A Mann-Whitney U Test was selected to see the influence of experience with tutoring creative writers on tutor attitudes. Table 2 (see Appendix B) presents the mean ranks, sum of ranks, U values, and p values of Mann-Whitney U test comparisons made between tutors who have and don't have experience in tutoring creative writers in writing centers. The groups represent

tutors who responded "yes" and tutors who responded "no" to the dichotomous question "Have you ever tutored creative writers in a writing center?".

As seen in the results, tutors were uncertain whether they can use the same tutoring methods when tutoring creative and other types of writing. However, further analysis showed that tutors' experience in tutoring creative writers influenced their attitudes. A Mann-Whitney U test indicated that the attitude towards using the same tutoring methods when tutoring creative and other types of writing was greater for tutors who have tutored creative writers (*Mdn*=4) than for tutors who haven't (*Mdn*=2), *U*=62.5, *p*=.042. In other words, tutors with experience tended to agree, while tutors without experience tended to remain neutral that general tutoring methods apply to tutoring creative writers. While the inexperienced tutors' neutrality is not surprising considering that they were not knowledgeable enough to make an informed choice, experienced tutors' perspectives lend support to the literature promoting that tutoring creative writing is no different from tutoring any other type of writing (Pobo). This mediates against the literature discussing that the needs of creative writers differ from those of the typical writing center clients, therefore the tutoring methods (Hime and Mowrer; LeBlanc). The Mann-Whitney U test also revealed that the attitude towards tutoring creative writing to be more difficult than tutoring other types of writing was greater for tutors who have not tutored creative writers (*Mdn*=3) than for tutors who have (*Mdn*=2), *U*=60.0, *p*=.050. These results suggest that as tutors gain experience in tutoring this particular genre of writing, they develop a sense of authority and power and become more confident in working with creative writers. However, when they lack the experience, they remain undecided about the difficulty of the task.

To assess the degree of correlations between tutors' confidence in tutoring creative writers and different background factors, Spearman rho test was computed because the data on input variables were ordinal. Table 3 (see Appendix B) presents the Spearman rho correlations measuring variables related to tutors' levels of confidence in tutoring poetry writing and background factors.

To investigate if there was a statistically significant association between tutors' confidence levels in tutoring poetry writing and background factors, the Spearman rho statistic was calculated. There was a significant positive correlation between tutors' levels of confidence in tutoring poetry writing and frequency of reading poetry (*r*=.39, *p*=.024), frequency of writing poetry (*r*=.41, *p*=.017), years of creative writing instruction received (*r*=.40, *p*=.021), years of tutoring experience (*r*=.50, *p*=.003), frequency of tutoring creative writers in writing centers (*r*=.51, *p*=.003).

Table 4 (see Appendix B) presents the Spearman rho correlations measuring variables related to tutors' levels of confidence in tutoring fiction writing and background factors.

To investigate if there was a statistically significant association between tutors' confidence levels in tutoring fiction writing and background factors, the Spearman rho statistic was calculated. There was a significant positive correlation between tutors' levels of confidence in tutoring fiction writing and frequency of reading fiction (*r*=.40, *p*=.021), years of tutoring experience (*r*=.42, *p*=.015), frequency of tutoring creative writers in writing centers (*r*=.41, *p*=.020).

Table 5 (see Appendix B) presents the Spearman rho correlations measuring variables related to tutors' levels of confidence in tutoring creative non-fiction writing and background factors.

To investigate if there was a statistically significant association between tutors' confidence levels in tutoring creative non-fiction writing and background factors, the Spearman rho statistic was calculated. There was a significant positive correlation between tutors' levels of confidence in tutoring creative non-fiction writing and years of tutoring experience (*r*=.46, *p*=.007), frequency of tutoring creative writers in writing centers (*r*=.39, *p*=.026).

What concerns do writing center tutors have about tutoring creative writers?

In the survey, the participants were asked an optional open-ended question: "What are, **if any**, your concerns with tutoring creative writers?" Of the total number of survey respondents (N=32), 27 tutors (84%) answered this question. A breakdown of the collected responses revealed five themes:

1. While the tutors demonstrated diversity in their concerns with tutoring creative writers, many (33%) reached an agreement over genre unfamiliarity as a major issue in tutoring creative writers. In talking about the role of genre knowledge in tutoring, one tutor said, "if a tutor is unaware of genre conventions, or is completely unfamiliar with creative writing, they may lead writers astray when giving advice". Another tutor opined:

> Creative writing is unlike the typical class assignments we see in the center because it lacks clear conventions of the genre. When helping a student with a research paper, opinion article, or rhetorical analysis, I can rely on my knowledge of that genre and its typical requirements. With

> creative writing, there are inherently fewer boundaries and guidelines. While this is a great chance for a writer to explore their written voice, it can leave a tutor wondering how to advise them.

2. Focusing attention on how creative writing is personal, several tutors (26%) discussed the challenges of tutoring such writing. While one tutor pointed to the affective issues saying, "creative writing is often much more personal and writers may be more vulnerable", another expressed the pedagogical difficulty that can be experienced in such work and wrote that "creative writing is subjective and it's difficult to say what's right or wrong". One other tutor further described the difficulty of such work:

> It can be hard to offer advice to individuals who are working on creative pieces because creative pieces are such a product of the individual. Sometimes there is no objective way of making creative work better and that makes tutoring hard.

3. Emphasizing the importance of specialized training for tutoring various types of writing, some tutors (15%) observed that creative writing did not often appear in the agenda of tutor training and staff meetings in the writing center. A tutor suggested that "it helps for tutors to get specialized training for many genres/disciplines, not just creative writing". Elaborating on that issue, another tutor remarked:

> Writing centers tend to focus the training given to their tutors on traditional essays and that is what a lot of experienced tutors have seen the most of in their actual work. Because of this lack of exposure, tutors are likely to be unfamiliar with the peculiarities of creative writing.

4. Even when the training issue is resolved, in the view of some tutors (11%), it may not be sufficient enough to prepare tutors for the instances of creativity due to the fact of creative writing being uncommon in the writing center. To illustrate, a tutor said, "theory and training are good, but a lack of consistent interaction with creative writers hinders my ability to grow and adapt my methods". Sharing this view, another tutor reported, "I don't see many creative writers, so there's not a lot of exposure to creative writing. Thus, there's not a lot of opportunities to develop specific skills in tutoring creative writers."

5. For a few tutors (11%), the lack of clear assignment guidelines came up to be a major problem in tutoring creative writers. Describing the problem in detail, a tutor said:

> In many cases, tutees have a writing prompt or assignment direction that they need to follow from a class/teacher to complete the assignment. However, in some cases, students come to the writing center for help on their creative writing, which is merely a hobby for them and not for a class. They want to illicit or showcase more emotion or description in their writing and for some tutors, an assignment with no particular requirement can be a unique challenge because the props of an assignment sometimes steers the direction for the tutor in terms of how they want to go about assisting or aiding the student's writing.

6. There were also practical concerns about tutoring creative writers, as one of the responses went:

> My first thought is length. It may not be possible to critique a whole fiction or non-fiction piece in just one session. If it's an excerpt from a longer work, the tutor may get caught up asking questions that have been covered in the parts the tutor hasn't read.

Discussion and Implications

More than half of the tutors in this study believed that they need specialized training for tutoring creative writing. Tutors rated poetry the highest and fiction the lowest in terms of the need for specialized training probably because they were least confident in tutoring poetry and most confident in tutoring fiction writing. These results align with previous research (Cassorla) and raise important questions to ponder. What causes tutors to have less confidence in tutoring poetry compared to tutoring fiction and creative non-fiction writing? While answering this question is beyond the scope of this study, to provide more explanatory analysis, I looked into the data and found statistically significant relationships between tutors' confidence in tutoring poetry and different background factors such as reading and writing poetry. The present correlations suggest that Pobo's observation that "many readers of 'creative' work, if they are not creative writers themselves, feel it is often difficult to discuss such work with that writer" (5) relies on the creative writing genre that is being discussed. It might hold true for situations in which tutors work with poetry writers because, as this study indicates, self-identification as a poetry writer reinforces confidence in tutoring poetry. However, tutors' fiction and creative non-fiction writer identities do not influence their confidence in tutoring these genres. In other words, tutors do not need to be fiction or creative non-fiction writers themselves to feel confident in tutoring these creative writing genres. This implies the

need for more in-depth analysis of the assumptions, reasons, experiences, and insights which might be critical to understand the differences in attitudes toward various types of creative writing.

The results shared above lead us to the ever-unfolding debate over generalist vs. specialist tutors in writing center scholarship. A handful of empirical studies examining the influence of disciplinary expertise on tutoring sessions found that tutors' familiarity with the conventions of the discipline leads to more effective sessions with more focused and useful feedback (Dinitz and Harrington; Kiedaisch and Dinitz; Mackiewicz). However, the general conception is that although expertise permits specialist tutors to apply their knowledge of writing in the discipline when assisting writers with discipline specific course assignments, it is more attainable and desirable to equip generalist tutors with skills to work with writers from an array of disciplines. Likewise, while I recognize that specialist tutors can offer discipline-specific writing support at the centers, my approach to the debate over generalist vs. specialist tutors is far from a dichotomous view. I neither argue for having creative writers tutor their peers nor suggest that if writing center directors train "tutors to be good facilitators, to use questioning to help students clarify their ideas, and to guide students through the writing process, they could help almost any student on almost any paper" (Kiedaisch and Dinitz 63). Instead, I argue for what Kristin Walker called a "middle ground between the poles of generalist and specialist" (28), and I consider the tutors' neutrality, regardless of experience, on the role of expertise in tutoring creative writers as a gesture of their position in the middle ground as well.

The question that needs an answer is how tutors can respond to the needs of writers working on assignments from an array of disciplines, including creative writing. Although research shows that specialist tutors with disciplinary expertise could conduct more productive tutoring sessions (Dinitz and Harrington; Mackiewicz), we must remember that it is not logistically practical to pair writers from diverse backgrounds with tutors in the same discipline in the centers that welcome drop-in students. Whereas this concern is certainly sound, we cannot ignore the limitations of generalist tutors in their ability to counsel writers on discipline-specific papers (Kiedaisch and Dinitz). Both approaches, therefore, have certain drawbacks that make us question their value to writing center practice. An alternative consideration would be to offer specialized training as part of the typical writing center training, which is what the tutors in this study wished to receive in order to tutor creative writing. However, considering the very heavy agenda of tutor training meetings, it would be utopian to cover each and every writing situation that might be encountered in a tutoring session. How could we expect peer tutors then to better address the needs of writers from diverse disciplines, writing in a variety of genres?

Incorporate Genre Awareness Pedagogy into Tutor Training

As discussed by several writing center scholars in previous research (Gordon; Walker), a genre theory can help transcend the traditional debate over generalist vs. specialist tutors because it "provides 'generalists' and 'specialists' with a tool to analyze discipline-specific discourse" (Walker 28). Along the same line, I hereby argue for going beyond the dualist approach to tutoring and applying genre theory to writing center practice to reinforce tutors' abilities to accommodate writers from unfamiliar disciplines. As found in the qualitative analysis results, the tutors in this study were most concerned about their unfamiliarity with the conventions of creative writing genres. Teaching genre awareness might help tutors feel more prepared to work with a variety of unfamiliar genres including creative writing. Should tutors be taught genre awareness in tutor training sessions, they can develop their understanding of the rhetorical nature of genres and to act purposefully in diverse tutoring situations that they will encounter in the center. In her relatively recent book chapter on genre pedagogies, Amy Devitt argues for teaching genre awareness as a way to mitigate issues with teaching particular genres, which is associated with reinforcing formulaic writing. Devitt suggests that "genre awareness pedagogy treats genres as meaningful social actions, with formal features as the visible traces of shared perceptions. Analyzing the contexts and features of a new genre provides an inroad to understanding all genres" (152). To foster tutors' skills to understand contextually any genre that they might tutor, writing center specialists can consider the adaptation of genre awareness pedagogy to tutor training.

Facilitate Opportunities for Improvisation in Tutor Training

While a strong understanding of genres can provide tutors with access to strategies of helping writers work through various rhetorical situations, the challenge for all tutors is to handle diverse range of writer backgrounds, practices, and experiences with writing. This indicates that it is time to revisit Sherwood's argument for training the tutor as the artist. By recognizing the artistic aspects of tutoring, tutors can "learn to cope with and embrace surprise, to spontaneously meet unexpected circumstances, to improvise appropriate and effective help for writers, and

to remain open to what researchers call "flow" experiences" (Sherwood 53). While it would be unrealistic for writing center directors to prepare tutors for all the quandaries and situations that they might encounter in the center, an achievable task would be to use improvisation in training tutors as artists who can trust their intuitions to make decisions in their tutoring work and learn to embrace the unexpected. As Steve Sherwood remarked,

> by incorporating practice tutorials and improvisational exercises into training, we can give tutors some preliminary (and safe) experience with unusual and challenging situations. Such stage-managed experiences may, in a limited way, help to prepare them for the real thing – and provide a foundation on which to build their own techniques and philosophies of tutoring (65).

When tutors understand the act of tutoring as an act of art, they will find the courage they need to take risks in their work of tutoring. A key to cultivating tutors' artistic abilities, improvisation brings pedagogical benefits to training tutors for varied tutoring situations. Bringing together genre awareness pedagogy and improvisational practices in tutor training programs can generate effective conversations of tutoring and enrich writing center pedagogy, theory, and work. These implications for tutor training have value as they can help address concerns related to tutoring unfamiliar genres including creative writing in the writing center.

Limitations

As with all empirical inquiries, this study has its limitations. One limitation of the study is the potential self-selection bias as I recognize that those who had experience in tutoring creative writers were more inclined to take the survey. Due to this limitation, this study could only draw speculative conclusions about tutors' general approaches to tutoring creative writing genres because the participant sample may not be representative of most centers. It is also possible to assume the impact of demographics on the attitudinal outcomes. For instance, considering the role of experience in shaping tutors' attitudes, postgraduate and faculty tutors may have different orientations toward tutoring creative writing than undergraduate tutors, the analysis of which would be undependable because the small number of postgraduate (N=6) and faculty (N=3) standing tutors made it impractical to compare these groups. Furthermore, the current study surveys a small number of participants (N=32) which decreases the generalizability of the results. However, despite the small sample size, the study offers insights on writing center tutors' attitudes toward tutoring creative writers and draws significant correlations between tutor attitudes and different background factors. Moreover, the dearth of research on tutoring creative writers enhances the value of this study despite its sampling limitation because the study offers a way of investigating tutor attitudes toward tutoring creative writers in the writing centers. Another limitation of the study is that it focuses on tutoring poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction writing. It does not include other forms of creative writing such as songs, video games, screenplays, etc. which were reported among the types of creative writing that tutors encountered in their writing centers. Consequently, while this study covers poetry, fiction, and non-fiction, it does not establish results related to tutoring an inclusive range of creative writing genres.

Future Research

To move forward with tutoring creative writing, I suggest that more research be done to address the limitations of the current study. For instance, further research that draws on larger sample populations would address the small sample-size limitation and produce more valid generalizations. To have more confidence in study results, it is important that writing center researchers carry out replication studies in different contexts with different tutors. As discussed by Dana Driscoll and Sherry Perdue replication is critical in writing center research because if "several writing centers conduct the same study and learn the same thing by replicating each other's work in their unique settings, we can say with some certainty that this concept can be applied to writing centers more broadly" (124). Besides taking on replication research, future studies might include a broader set of creative writing genres in their examination of tutor attitudes. Empirical inquiry into what motivates creative writers to visit the writing centers, what type of concerns they raise, and what type of suggestions tutors make in tutorials can shed light to the nature of interactions taking place between writing center tutors and creative writers. More research is needed to provide insights into occasions when tutorials include talking about a piece of creative writing such as poetry, fiction, non-fiction writing, etc., in light of which implications can be drawn to develop strategies that tutors can use when working with creative writers.

The results rendered from the analysis of the data answered the research questions that were asked in the current study. However, they raised new questions that should be answered for a better understanding of the issues discussed here. What are writing center tutors' lived experiences with tutoring creative writers? What

types of resources do tutors rely on when tutoring creative writers? Which approaches are useful in tutoring creative writers? How do tutors contribute to the development of creative writing skills? For what purposes do creative writers visit the writing centers? How do tutors and creative writers negotiate creativity in writing center tutorials? What kinds of conversations take place in such tutoring sessions? Are creative writers satisfied with the help they receive at the writing centers? How do writing centers prepare tutors to support creative writers? I hope that this research will encourage the writing center community to explore the nuances of these questions and the implications that they suggest in order to move forward building effective pedagogies and practices in the center.

Notes

1. The variable "experience in tutoring creative writers" may sound closely connected to the variable "frequency of tutoring creative writers" however the former categorizes participants into two groups by experience (with experience/without experience) whereas the latter quantifies the level of experience in tutoring the target population. Such quantification is conducive to computing the nonparametric associational statistics because a Spearman Rho test assumes that "data on both variables are at least ordinal" (Morgan et al. 149).

2. I collected all the data from participants in accordance with and under the supervision of Indiana University of Pennsylvania's IRB board.

3. I acknowledge that the survey is problematic in that it does not provide information about the institutional context that the participants came from. Such information is crucial to reveal the representativeness of the tutors across institutions. I recommend adding a background question to the survey in order to address this limitation in future replication studies, if any.

4. There are several statistical methods to compare two groups of participants (in this study, the two groups refer to tutors with and without experience in tutoring creative writers). For instance, I could have used a T-test to compare experienced and inexperienced tutors' attitudes towards tutoring creative writers, if I found that the data on tutors' responses to attitude items were normally distributed. However, with the finding of non-normally distributed data, I employed a Mann-Whitney U test, an alternative to the T-test when the data set follows a non-normal distribution.

5. A Spearman rho test serves to compute associational statistics for ordinal data (Morgan et al.). In this study, I measured Spearman rho to examine the correlations between tutors' levels of confidence in tutoring creative writers and different background factors. While there are various associational statistics, the Spearman rho correlation was used in this study due to the ordinal nature of the data set (e.g. frequency of reading creative writing varies from 0 to 8 or more times monthly, from low to high). The Spearman rho test differs from the Mann-Whitney U test in that it is used to establish relationships between variables, rather than compare two groups or samples. The former indicates the extent to which two variables move in the same direction (e.g. tutors' confidence in tutoring poetry increases as their frequency of reading poetry increases, or vice versa), whereas the latter indicates the degree of difference in means between two groups or samples. In other words, Spearman rho is a test of sameness, whereas Mann-Whitney U calculation is a test of difference.

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Appendix A: Survey

Section 1: Attitude Items

Please think for a second about tutoring a creative writer who needs help with their poetry, fiction (short story, novel, screenplay, drama), or creative non-fiction (autobiography, memoir, personal essay). Read the statements below and select the option that best reflects your level of agreement on each statement.

1=Strongly disagree, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Strongly agree

a. I can use the same tutoring methods when I tutor creative and other types of writing.
b. Tutors who are creative writers themselves should tutor creative writers.
c. Tutoring creative writing is more difficult than tutoring other types of writing.

Please respond to the following statement using the scale below.

1=Strongly disagree, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Strongly agree

I feel confident that I can tutor…

a. poetry writing
b. fiction writing
c. creative non-fiction writing

Please respond to the following statement using the scale below.

1=Strongly disagree, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Strongly agree

I need specialized training for tutoring …

a. poetry writing
b. fiction writing

c. creative non-fiction writing

Do you think writing centers should tutor creative writers?

- Definitely not
- Probably not
- Might or might not
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

Do you think tutors need specialized training to tutor creative writers?

- Definitely not
- Probably not
- Might or might not
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

In the text box below, please answer the following question.

What are, **if any**, your concerns with tutoring creative writers?

Section 2: Background

What gender do you identify with?

- Female
- Male
- Other

Which category below includes your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55 and over

What is your first language?

If you have a second/foreign language, please specify it.

What is your major?

I am a/an …

- Undergraduate student
- Master's student
- Doctoral student
- Faculty member
- Other (please specify)

How many years of creative writing instruction have you received in your education?

- None
- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- More than 5 years

Please respond to the following question using the scale below.

a = 0 , b = 1-2, c = 3-5, d = 6-7, e = 8 or more

How many times each month do you read …

a. poetry?

b. fiction?

c. creative non-fiction?

Please respond to the following question using the scale below.

a = 0 , b = 1-2, c = 3-5, d = 6-7, e = 8 or more

How many times each month do you write …

a. poetry?

b. fiction?

c. creative non-fiction?

How long have you been tutoring in a writing center?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5 years
- More than 5 years

What training have you had to tutor creative writers? Please select all that apply.

- None
- Regular writing center training
- Specialized training for tutoring creative writers
- Workshops
- Other (please specify)

Have you ever tutored creative writers in a writing center?

- Yes
- No

How many times have you tutored creative writers in a writing center?

- Never
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times
- 6-7 times
- 8 or more times

What kind of creative writers have you tutored? Please select all that apply?

- Poets
- Fiction writers
- Creative non-fiction writers
- Other (please specify)

Appendix B: Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Methods of analysis

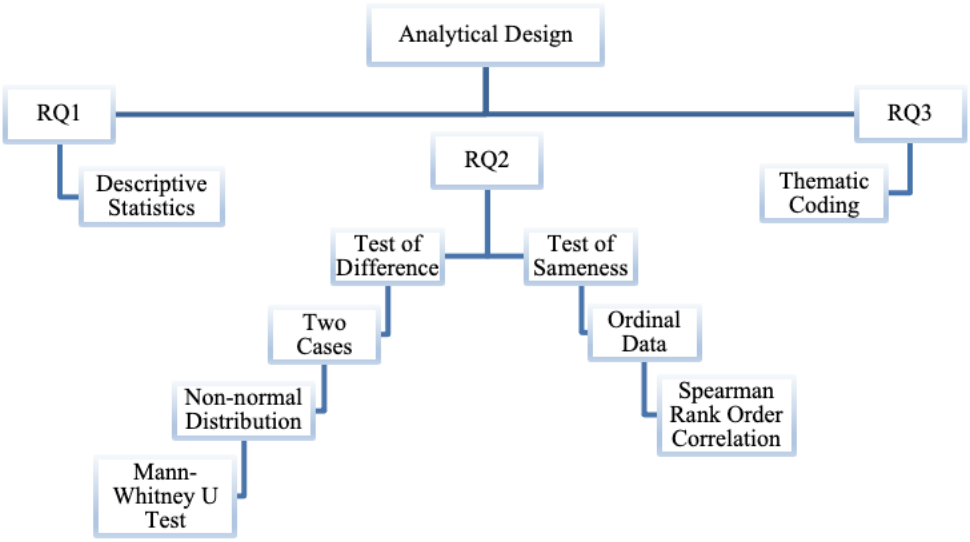

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Tutors' Attitudes towards Tutoring Creative Writers (N=32)

Item	Mean	Mdn	Var	SD	Min	Max
Tutors who are creative writers themselves should tutor creative writers.	3.40	4.00	1.539	1.24069	1.00	5.00
I can use the same tutoring methods when I tutor creative and other types of writing.	3.34	4.00	1.394	1.18074	2.00	5.00
Tutoring creative writing is more difficult than tutoring other types of writing.	2.41	2.00	1.585	1.25895	1.00	5.00
I feel confident that I can tutor...						
…fiction writing	4.62	5.00	.242	.49187	4.00	5.00
…creative non-fiction writing	4.50	5.00	.839	.91581	1.00	5.00
…poetry writing	3.25	4.00	2.129	1.45912	1.00	5.00
I need specialized training to tutor...						
…poetry writing	3.75	4.00	1.161	1.07763	1.00	5.00
…creative non-fiction writing	3.00	3.00	1.226	1.10716	1.00	5.00
…fiction writing	2.93	3.00	1.415	1.18967	1.00	5.00

Note. Scale: 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Somewhat disagree, 3 – Neither agree nor disagree, 4 – Somewhat agree, 5 – Strongly agree.

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U Test Comparisons (N=32, Yes=22, No=10)

Item	Grouping	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*p*
I can use the same tutoring methods when I tutor creative and other types of writing.	Yes	18.66	410.50	62.500	.042*
	No	11.75	117.50		
Tutors who are creative writers themselves should tutor creative writers.	Yes	15.77	347.00	94.000	.500
	No	18.10	181.00		
Tutoring creative writing is more difficult than tutoring other types of writing.	Yes	13.86	291.00	60.000	.050*
	No	20.50	205.00		

Note. * Statistically significant difference (p=/<.05).

Table 3: Correlations between Tutors' Levels of Confidence in Tutoring Poetry Writing and Background Factors (N=32)

Background Factors		Confidence in Tutoring Poetry Writing
Frequency of reading poetry	Spearman Rho Correlation	.397*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024
Frequency of writing poetry	Spearman Rho Correlation	.418*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017
Years of creative writing instruction	Spearman Rho Correlation	.406*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021
Years of tutoring	Spearman Rho Correlation	.507**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003
Frequency of tutoring creative writers	Spearman Rho Correlation	.512**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003

Notes. 1. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), 2. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Correlations between Tutors' Levels of Confidence in Tutoring Fiction Writing and Background Factors (N=32)

Background Factors		Confidence in Tutoring Fiction Writing
Frequency of reading fiction	Spearman Rho Correlation	.406*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021
Frequency of writing fiction	Spearman Rho Correlation	.150
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.413
Years of creative writing instruction	Spearman Rho Correlation	.161
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.378
Years of tutoring	Spearman Rho Correlation	.426*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015
Frequency of tutoring creative writers	Spearman Rho Correlation	.410*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.020

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Correlations between Tutors' Levels of Confidence in Tutoring Creative Non-Fiction Writing and Background Factors (N=32)

Background Factors		Confidence in Tutoring Creative Non-Fiction Writing
Frequency of reading creative non-fiction	Spearman Rho Correlation	.243
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.181
Frequency of writing creative non-fiction	Spearman Rho Correlation	.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.852
Years of creative writing instruction	Spearman Rho Correlation	.123
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.501
Years of tutoring	Spearman Rho Correlation	.466**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007
Frequency of tutoring creative writers	Spearman Rho Correlation	.393*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026

Notes. 1. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), 2. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Benefits and Limitations of Online Peer Feedback: Instructors' Perception of a Regional Campus Online Writing Lab

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Abstract

The socioeconomics of the working-class area where our open-admission regional campus is situated have resulted in a struggle to prepare and retain our underprepared students. The campus tutoring center is central to our retention efforts; to address the needs of our population, we offer both face-to-face and online tutoring. The article reports the findings of an empirical study that looks at writing instructors' perception of these tutoring services, with emphasis on the online component. The study reveals the participants' preference for online versus face-to-face tutoring, which has been driven by their students' socioeconomic characteristics. It also shows a clear preference for the campus online tutoring service that is favored by our instructors over eTutoring, a tutoring service serving students from many Ohio universities. Despite their support for the campus-based online tutoring, our participants pointed out several areas of improvement, such as the need to focus more on higher-order concerns and to address the delays in tutor response. The research emphasizes the need for more tutor training and, more importantly, more resources to be directed toward campus-based online tutoring services.

As universities increasingly embrace online instruction, tutoring centers find themselves having to respond to the needs of remote students. Our[1] university, which consists of a main and seven regional campuses, has three online writing labs (OWLS): one at the main campus, one at a large regional campus, and one at our small regional campus, which has been operating the T. OWL since the early 1990s. Additionally, our students have access to eTutoring, a service provided by a consortium of Ohio universities that employs both students and post-graduation professionals. Our students are indeed fortunate to have several tutoring options, and we both recommend or require them to use the online labs. We wonder, however, whether other professors from our campus share the same enthusiasm about these tutoring options, particularly about our T. OWL. At the end of the Spring 2019 semester, we used an online survey to inquire into our colleagues' perception of various tutoring options, including the face-to-face services provided by our campus tutoring center. We were surprised to see that our research participants not only embraced online tutoring as a way to respond to the particularities of our student population, but they also showed a clear preference for our T. OWL. While they considered eTutoring an option for students looking for more perspectives on their writing, they nonetheless valued T. OWL more because they were familiar with how the T. OWL operates as well as the institutional knowledge our T. OWL tutors draw from when providing feedback to their tutees.

The result of our research follows. We first describe our student population and the tutoring services offered by our small regional campus. Next, we review the challenges that come with tutoring underprepared students, especially when tutoring happens asynchronously online. We then discuss our instructors' perception of the tutoring services provided by our online tutors. While some of what we learned about online tutoring from our instructors is specific to our campus, other conclusions and insights are universal and can be adapted to other institutions. The research is particularly timely as universities consider extending online instruction through fall 2020 and beyond in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our hope is that this article helps teachers think through how and in what ways online tutoring can be used in their classroom while it also provides writing and learning center professionals an opportunity to consider and reflect upon the challenges and rewards that come with offering online tutoring services.

Background Information

Our Students: Under-resourced and Underprepared

Before we discuss the data provided by our research, we need to explain the most important reason why we prefer online over face-to-face tutoring: our student population is both severely under-resourced and underprepared both in terms of material resources and time, and makes driving to the campus for tutoring rather difficult. Our campus serves both rural areas in Northeast Ohio and urban centers in Warren, Ohio, located half a mile from the campus, and Youngstown, Ohio, approximately twenty minutes away. Both rural and urban families used to enjoy the economic and social benefits that came with a booming steel and car industry, but the area has been on a continuous downward slope since the late 1970s. After the first massive layoff, known as "Black Monday," that

occurred on September 19, 1977, over 22 steel mills closed in the next twenty years, impacting other industries and all aspects of residents' lives. The recently closed General Motors plant just a few miles away from our campus represents the latest of numerous manufacturing closures that have resulted in brain drain, as our educated residents have been forced to relocate for better opportunities elsewhere, leaving behind low-wage employment that does not require a college degree (Linken and Russo). According to the 2017 Census, the median household income for the urban area near our campus is $29,241, and only 13.6 percent of residents holds a bachelor's degree or higher.

The loss of revenue and the brain drain have also altered the quality of education provided by the local schools. Warren's and Youngstown's public schools have mirrored the downward spiral of the local industry as they are currently rated F for academic preparedness for college and rarely see a rating higher than D (Ohio Dept. of Ed., "Youngstown"; Ohio Dept. of Ed., "Warren City") Additionally, the Youngstown public school district has been in academic emergency since 2010 (Ohio Dept. of Ed., "Youngstown"). With such deplorable secondary education, it is no wonder that the students who enroll at our open-admission campus end up placing in developmental courses. Most semesters, almost half of the students taking composition at our campus are placed in English 01001 and English 11002, the first and second semester developmental writing course, respectively. These two courses make up the developmental writing equivalent of English 11011, our mainstream first year writing course. Table 1 (See Appendix A) provides the enrollment data for English 11011 and English 01001 and 11002 As seen in Table 1 many of our students are not prepared to take regular college writing courses. Additionally, we noticed that many of our students had to take the first developmental writing course multiple times before they could pass it, while others never completed the course and dropped out. This further emphasizes the lack of academic preparedness affecting our student population.

Our Tutoring Services

Considering that most of our students come underprepared, they need more support from knowledgeable peers than the average American student. Recognizing the challenges of educating this population and, again, ever mindful of retention, our campus has several services in place to assist students including the Learning Center whose primary task is to support students academically outside of class. Staffed by undergraduates, graduates, and faculty, the Center offers a quiet study area and face-to-face and online tutoring. In the last ten years, we have employed as many as nine and as few as four English tutors each term. This varies depending on the number of hours assigned to each tutor, but the goal is to have complete coverage for English tutoring during our business hours (Monday-Thursday 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Friday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.). Some of our tutors are graduate students, but most are undergraduates from a variety of majors. In spring 2019, for example, our tutors were undergraduates majoring in English (four tutors), Business (one tutor), and Nursing (one tutor). This variation in the tutors' academic interests represents one of the strengths of the program because it makes feedback less homogenous. Our tutors are all strong writers who come with excellent recommendations from campus professors and boast high GPAs ("Learning Center Employment").

Students requesting electronic tutoring submit their papers using an online form linked to a listserv that instantly distributes the submission to the English Coordinator and the English tutors. The first available English tutor then takes the submission, reviews it, provides suggestions for revision, and sends the paper back to the tutee. This cycle can take up to forty-eight hours although most essays are reviewed more quickly; however, during key points in a term, such as near midterms or finals week, the response time may be lengthened slightly. Next, the tutee may choose to revise and resubmit the paper to be reviewed a second time by a tutor. This tutoring cycle can continue until the tutee is satisfied. In this way, the T. OWL largely mirrors what occurs with other tutoring services such as eTutoring where students may submit the same paper, in varying stages of completion, up to three times for feedback, although there is no such limit for T. OWL. The difference is that given the size of its organization, eTutoring students may receive feedback from three different tutors while the same T. OWL tutor often reviews the same paper again and again.

Tutoring Underprepared Students

Getting our students to use the Learning Center can be a struggle for various reasons ranging from the desire to be self-reliant that is characteristic of Rust Belt communities to the lack of familiarity with the concept of tutoring, as the local high schools do not have learning or writing centers. Our campus professors, however, are our allies in the struggle to match our struggling writers with a tutor. This is why instructors' perspective on online tutoring is particularly relevant because they are instrumental in their students' decision to seek tutoring. Recently, Wendy Pfregner et al. collected longitudinal data from another regional

campus at our university where they followed 349 remedial student writers whose instructors were committed to making tutoring part of the writing process. Pfregner et al. found that students who were required to visit their campus's writing center were more likely to "pass their second-semester writing course (69.4% versus 79.6%) and less likely to withdraw (14% versus 8.5%)" than students who were not required to seek tutoring; moreover, students who frequented the writing center in their first semester tended to visit in subsequent semesters (Pfrenger et al. 24-5). Pfrenger et al.asserted that students' repeat visits to a campus writing or learning center "shifts educational attitudes and behaviors in advantageous ways" (26). In other words, making the Learning Center part of these students' writing process not only results in a better grade for that specific paper, but it leads to more profound changes in how students perceive their college experience.

Working with tutors in a comfortable environment helps students develop writing skills and gain confidence in their academic abilities—t hings sorely lacking in all beginning college writers but especially in remedial writers such as ours. In his report on the impact of learning assistance centers on community college students' success, Keith Wurtz speaks to this point. He states that "fifty-four percent of entering community college students" are not college ready, much like our regional campus students who end up enrolling in remedial writing courses, yet these same "students are three times more likely to successfully complete their course if they obtain help for the course in an LAC [Learning Assistance Center] and two times more likely to persist to the subsequent term" (Wurtz 2, 6). Clearly, the impact of face-to-face and online tutoring continues even after the course ends and can be a tool used in the fight for retention.

Moreover, working with a peer writing tutor gives students the benefit of working with an expert without the pressure of having to interact with the course instructor. While it may be difficult for writing teachers to hear this, "in practice, instructor feedback, particularly written feedback, is often ineffective, especially when instructors are overwhelmed by the demanding nature of writing assignments" (Cho and MacArthur 329). Vague, directive, and even canned responses that are not specific to a student's paper may be the result as well as an over attention to surface errors like punctuation and formatting. Student reviewers, on the other hand, tend to "use the same language [as their peers] without using professional jargon" and "share similar knowledge, language, and experiences" (Cho and MacArthur 329). As a result, the tutors and the tutees communicate with each other in ways that writing students and their instructors often do not. In a large-scale study of 708 students across sixteen disciplines, Kwangsu Cho et al. found that when at least four carefully trained peer reviewers assessed a piece of student writing, "the reliability and validity of peer reviews" was comparable to that provided by an instructor (891, 898). Peer or student feedback is also often more concise and positive in nature than that generated by writing teachers, and "non-directive feedback [by peers] might be associated with greater psychological safety" (Topping 342). Peer feedback certainly supports the development of writing skills and can be done well when tutors are involved. In their survey of the research on peer review, Kwangsu Cho and Charles MacArthur claim that though research on the topic is limited, "peer revising is . . . generally positive" (328).

We understand how important it is for our students to hear a peer's feedback, which is why we organize in-class peer reviews. At the same time, however, we have noticed that our students often struggle to provide useful reviews because they are underprepared themselves and thus hesitant to express an opinion when they do not feel like an authority. Consequently, a tutor's feedback may be more beneficial for a student whose in-class peer reviewer may have limited writing skills. For instance, our students tend to focus more on obvious lower order concerns such as format and grammar, and forgo more relevant concerns such as critical thinking, writing cohesive paragraphs, thesis development, and citation. Our tutors, however, are coached by the English Coordinator to focus on higher order concerns; this occurs both during the initial post-hire one-on-one training, and in the group training that occurs twice a semester. During these sessions, tutors receive training about best practices in face-to-face and online tutoring and discuss the rubrics that our professors use to assess our students' writing. For instance, the rubric for assessing the end-of-semester portfolio in English 01001 recognizes the importance of good command of the English language, but it puts significantly higher emphasis on higher order concerns such as developing a central idea and providing evidence for claims (Appendix B). The most important tutor training occurs during the first week of the semester when the tutors and the coordinator spend four hours discussing face-to-face and online tutoring. The second training occurs right after midterms and focuses on problem-solving regarding specific papers or tutees they have encountered. Because both training sessions are held in a group setting, tutors are provided the

opportunity to reflect on and learn from their own and one another's work.

In addition to offering a certain degree of expertise when it comes to writing, the tutors can also rely on the institutional knowledge they have developed from being students and Learning Center staff. Because of the campus's small size, most tutors have worked with their tutees' professors, and even if they have not taken a class with a particular instructor, fellow tutors likely inform them about the types of prompts and papers a specific writing professor requires. With only fourteen full-time and adjunct English instructors, it is not difficult for tutors to gain information about their tutees' primary audience, i.e. their professors. Moreover, our Learning Center is a social and academic hub for students and tutors; students go there to do their homework, and tutors from all disciplines can often be seen socializing during down time. When a student comes in for assistance, a tutor may move to a quieter location near a row of computers to work, but that sense of community and solidarity remains, and, as suggested above, our campus writing tutors have unique knowledge of a professor's writing pedagogy, personality, and grading habits. This allows tutors to communicate "inside" knowledge directly to their tutees; moreover, if the tutor was a previous student of a professor, he or she is even more acutely aware of the context and challenges under which the tutees write.

Student Population and Online Tutoring

Our students can visit the campus Learning Center for a drop-in face-to-face session, but access is a problem because spending extra time on campus to work with a tutor may not be an option for our population. Many students are older adults coming back to complete their education while also working and raising a family; younger students are equally as busy with most of them holding part-time and even full-time jobs, which means they may not have the time to visit the Learning Center. The campus has also welcomed College Credit Plus (CCP) students who want to complete their college composition requirements while they are still in high school or even junior high. Some CCP composition courses are held at the local high school, which means that the students have little motivation to set foot on our campus, let alone the Learning Center.

Additionally, some of our students prefer online courses and are seldom, if ever, on campus. Online composition courses are quite popular with our students; in the fall of 2019, our university system offered fifteen online sections of English 11011, the first semester freshman composition course, each with a cap of 19. There was only one open seat across all online sections by the time of the drop date. During the same year, our university also offered twenty-six online sections of second semester freshman composition, English 21011, with only six open seats remaining at the time of the drop date. This means that 770 students chose to take an online freshman composition course ("Schedule of Courses"). This is a jaw-dropping number and works to show just how popular online writing classes are at our university. Online instruction is now more relevant than ever considering the campus shut down in mid-March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 virus and continues to be closed at least until the fall 2020 semester.

As the university increased the online and CCP course offerings in the last six years, we noticed a spike in the number of submissions to the T. OWL. When Joe Dudley created the T-OWL in the early 1990s, the Learning Center handled only a handful of online submissions each semester. This changed in the last four years. Between the beginning of the spring 2017 and the end of the spring 2019 semesters, the Learning Center received 586 online submissions ("OWL Submissions Report"), a significant number for a campus with only a little over 2200 students ("Facts & Figures"). Moreover, the increase in submissions continues to accelerate. In Spring 2018, the Learning Center received 67 online tutoring requests; that number almost doubled in Spring 2019 to 120, and it is climbing even higher as a result of the COVID-related campus closure. Even the number of summer session submissions doubled from 19 in Summer 2018 to 52 in Summer 2019.

Challenges for Our T-OWL

The high demand in online tutoring means that the number of OWLs has caught up with the number of face-to-face sessions, but we still find ourselves putting the needs of our online tutees on the back burner. The Learning Center does not require appointments for either form of tutoring, so it cannot anticipate the need for either on a specific day. Tutors are trained to give precedence to tutees who physically come to the center for help over those who submit their essays electronically. We choose to delay reviewing an OWL rather than to turn away a student who walks into the Learning Center because we understand how difficult it is for our population to find the time for a face-to-face session. Moreover, new hires are not required to participate in OWL tutoring during their first semester in the Learning Center because they first observe more experienced tutors when they review OWLs, and they undergo one-on-one training with the Learning Center

English Coordinator. This means that only more experienced tutors can review OWLs, and since they review submissions in between face-to-face sessions; often submission may not be reviewed until the day after or even later. The goal should be to assist all writing students equally and in a timely manner, but students who ask for feedback electronically may be at a disadvantage both in terms of how readily they receive feedback as well as the quality of feedback provided. After all, tutors who rush to complete OWLs at the end of the day, or when they have a few minutes in between tutee sessions, may not be providing the best feedback.

There are also ethical issues emerging from online tutoring. The peer feedback we provide in the Learning Center for both face-to-face and online tutoring is directed by the tutees, and tutors are always trained to follow their lead. This is important as it would be unethical for a tutor to take charge of a tutee's paper. As Peter Carino explains, writing centers' endorsement of nondirective peer feedback and collaborative learning originated as a response to charges of plagiarism or over-editing by tutors as well as the fact that writing centers sit on the bottom of the academic hierarchy without "academic status" and without any formal role in instruction (96-102). Carino goes on to praise nondirective questioning by tutors to their tutees, claiming that "nondirective tutoring can cue students to recall knowledge they have and construct new knowledge that they do not" (103). Cultivating an atmosphere of positive, nondirected feedback and open communication is the primary aim of the T. OWL, as we attempt to replicate in the online environment what transpires in a face-to-face setting.

However, providing nondirective feedback is particularly challenging in online settings where the tutor-tutee dialogue is limited. To aide with this issue, we require our tutees to complete a submission form to inform the peer tutor of their main concerns for the paper. The form includes a checklist with various writing issues such as organization, thesis development, or plagiarism, and tutees are obligated to address the higher order or lower order concerns that the tutees list. Additionally, while tutees are advised to share the writing prompt and any feedback by their professor with the peer tutor, it can still be difficult for tutors to ask questions and open a dialogue that answers the tutees' and the professors' concerns.

Our Research Study: Instructors' Perceptions of T. OWL

We rely on the professors' support to get students to use our Learning Center services, including the OWL, so their perception of the OWL's effectiveness is important. Up until the end of the Spring 2019 semester, there was no process in place to receive feedback from instructors regarding the Learning Center. The only times the English Coordinator would hear from a professor was when problems occurred, such as when there was a delay in the tutor's response to a specific paper, or when a professor saw and did not like a tutor's written response to one of his or her student's papers. After the conclusion of the spring 2019 semester, however, we decided to survey our full time and part-time instructors using an anonymous online questionnaire about our tutoring services (See Appendix C). We collected a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, mostly about the T. OWL. Eight out of the twelve instructors invited to participate in the study completed the survey. Most of the participants have extensive experience delivering writing courses, with four instructors having taught for more than seven years at our campus. Only one participant had under two years of teaching for us.

The Results of Our Study

Online Tutoring Gains Ground against its Face-to-face Equivalent

The most interesting finding emerging from the study is the instructors' preference for online over face-to-face tutoring. We anticipated that the participants would prefer the more traditional face-to-face tutoring because of the benefits that come with its synchronous nature such as the immediacy of tutor feedback and the tutee's ability to ask and answer questions. According to the survey data, however, all eight participants reported that they recommended online tutoring to their students, while only five of them also mentioned face-to-face tutoring. This may come as a surprise considering that our university has more opportunities for face-to-face tutoring as all eight campuses offer it, while only three provide OWL assistance. However, the student population and the type of courses in which they are enrolled may explain the preference for online tutoring. Three of the instructors surveyed taught online courses, and another three taught their face-to-face college writing courses in a high school classroom often miles away from our campus. Considering how difficult it would be for these students to access face-to-face help due to location, it makes sense that the instructors would recommend online tutoring. Online courses, after all, appeal to students who need flexibility and cannot generally travel to the campus.

While the participants in the study preferred online to face-to-face tutoring, they all seemed to choose the

T. OWL over eTutoring. In fact, only one of the participants recommended or required the students to use eTutoring. This may be the result of the instructors' familiarity with the campus English Coordinator and the tutoring staff handling OWLs; some of the professors had the tutors in their course and may even have recommended them for Learning Center employment. In contrast, submissions sent to eTutoring are read and reviewed by unknown tutors residing in unknown locations, though, to be fair, eTutoring has recently tried to hire at least one eTutor from each campus with which it is affiliated; our campus, for instance, contributes with a Science tutor. Yet, the tutor reviewing our students' papers is not from their home campus and may not understand the context in which these students write. There is also a degree of accountability with the T. OWL that is not present with a remote service such as eTutoring; the professors know exactly whom to talk to when they want to inquire into a particular tutoring session, and at times the Learning Center English coordinator adjusts tutor training based on feedback from instructors.

It is also possible that the instructors surveyed for this study are not fully informed about the services available from eTutoring while they hear about the T. OWL through emails, course visits, and in English department meetings. Unless they take it upon themselves to keep up with the changes in eTutoring services, it is unlikely that they would know, for instance, that eTutoring has grown to a consortium of forty-three Ohio colleges and universities in 2019, up from fifteen in 2010, and that it now offers a live chat feature where students can ask tutors in real-time specific questions related to their writing ("Ohio Launches"; "eTutoring"). While the goal of eTutoring is to make free tutoring of writing and other subjects available to all college students across Ohio, it is important to note that availability and utilization are two different things. Unfortunately, statistics on student use of any of eTutoring's services is not available online and could not be obtained through email inquiries, so it is impossible to know exactly how many writing students actually use it. Reliability is another concern to consider. During a two-month period in the summer of 2019, eTutoring stopped receiving submissions only to resume service on August 26th ("eTutoring"). If instructors and students are not certain that an online tutoring service is available, particularly a more big-box tutoring service like eTutoring, they likely will turn to their local writing or learning center for assistance.

The chat option that eTutoring recently launched is, however, an intriguing development because it offers the tutees a way to ask questions and take charge of the tutoring session. We have learned, though, that even when synchronous/live online tutoring is available, students may not use it. As previously stated, in addition to the T. OWL, there are two other tutoring centers at our university that offer both face-to-face and online tutoring. One of them also has a live chat feature, but Jeanne Smith, the director of the tutoring center at our university's main campus, states that the "chat is used fairly infrequently, historically making up less than 10 %" of tutoring sessions." We also tried offering chat tutoring on our campus during the last eight weeks of the spring 2020 semester, but there were no inquiries on the part of the students who preferred to submit their paper to the asynchronous T. OWL instead. This is hardly surprising; as we saw with the T. OWL, it can take years, and sometimes even decades, for our students to embrace new technology.

While regular advertisement of our campus's online writing lab may have impacted our participants' decision to send their students to T. OWL, the most important reason why this is preferred over eTutoring may be the institutional knowledge that comes from tutors and tutees sharing the same space. The campus tutors may have a better understanding of what a tutee needs based on their previous experience tutoring students taking the same course or a similar course with the professor. It is not unusual to walk by a tutor busy with an OWL submission and hear her mumble to herself: "All right…. it's a paper for Professor L. Let's see the thesis. Ummm. This will not work. I'd better tell the tutee to revise this three-point thesis. I know L. does not like that." This institutional knowledge is passed from one tutor to another during the first group training of the semester when the tutors have approximately one hour to share their observations about tutoring during the previous semester. A similar discussion occurs during the mid-semester group training as well. Additionally, the tutors help one another with the OWLs. On Monday afternoons during the Spring 2019 semester, for instance, the two English tutors on the schedule shared the same table as they both reviewed OWLs, exchanging occasional comments and asking each another questions. These conversations allowed the tutors to tailor their feedback not only to meet the tutee's expressed needs, but to what they knew the professor valued as well. It would be difficult for the eTutoring staff to duplicate this kind of knowledge considering that they work independently and serve students from many Ohio universities.

OWL Feedback Problems: Focus on Lower Order Concerns

Although it was clear that all instructors who participated in the study valued the T. OWL, they

nonetheless emphasized the need to see a shift in the tutors' feedback. Four out of the eight participants were concerned about the tutors' tendency to focus on lower order concerns and brought up what one called a "lack of substantive feedback" that they had noticed in the tutors' reviews in addition to their tendency to address lower order concerns, particularly grammar. When asked what aspects of their students' writing they wanted the tutors to address, instructors focused mostly on the quality of the content and the way the paper was organized, listing issues such as thesis development and organization, with only two instructors pointing to lower order concerns such as grammar. Considering the instructors' focus on higher order concerns, it makes sense that they were unhappy to see the tutors commenting on grammar mistakes in their feedback.

Our online tutors' excessive focus on lower order concerns is not new and has been documented in a 2015 conference paper written by four out of the seven tutors employed by the Learning Center at the time. Stephanie Gotti et al. set out to understand the type of feedback tutees receive when they submit their papers to our T. OWL. For this empirical study, the tutors randomly selected twenty student papers submitted in the first half of the fall 2015 term, and they looked at whether the feedback provided targeted lower or higher order concerns. Findings showed that most comments peer tutors gave to tutees focused on mechanics, with only a smattering of comments focused on content and argument development (Gotti et al.). Specifically, forty-two percent, or 186 out of 440 comments, were comments pointing out mistakes in grammar, punctuation, and spelling (Gotti et al.). The findings of the Gotti et al. study anticipate our participants' concerns four years later and suggest that additional tutor training may be warranted.

What could be causing this focus on lower order concerns? It may have resulted from several factors including the tutees' tendency to directly ask for feedback about grammar, spelling, and punctuation when they submit their papers. It seems like there is a disconnect between what professors deem important and what the tutees think their professors want them to do; the instructors participating in our research study were aware of it. When we asked them to share their expectations for a tutoring session, one of them wrote: "I am hoping for higher order concerns such as organization, thesis, expert use of sources. Unfortunately, most students end up just with a proofread paper. I am guessing that it is because that is what my students ask for." This aligns with results from another study done by Laurel Raymond and Zarah Quinn who found that "writers visiting . . . [their] center tended to request attention to more sentence-level concerns" than attention to "larger-level concerns' like argument (73). Between the beginning of the Spring 2017 and the end of Spring 2019 semesters, our T. OWL received 433 requests for help with grammar/punctuation/spelling, and only 239 students asked for help with the thesis statement ("OWL Submissions Report"). Chart 1 (See Appendix A) shows the concerns that the tutees expressed when they submitted their paper to be reviewed by an OWL tutor.

Tutees' concerns with surface errors highlights the limitations of asynchronous online tutoring. In face-to-face tutoring sessions, our tutors are trained to spend the first few minutes of the session clarifying with the tutee what issues carry more weight when drafting and revising, but there is no easy way to educate tutees about higher order concerns when responding to OWL submissions. The linear nature of the feedback provided during the online tutoring session prevents or makes difficult any dialogue with the tutee, and therefore the tutor has no opportunity to check the tutees' comprehension of revision needs, or to explain to the tutee what aspects of the paper are more important than others. In addition, research shows the limited interactions specific to online tutoring makes it difficult to build the rapport that helps student writers feel safe and valued, which is instrumental in making the exchange between tutor and tutee meaningful. As Joseph McLuckie and Keith Topping explain, rapport between student and tutor makes it more likely for student writers to ask clarifying questions on the feedback provided to them—again, a difficult feat if students and tutors are exchanging information in a linear, asynchronous fashion.

We also know that many tutees often lack the ability to recognize what problems their papers have and what needs to be revised. Lindsey Jesnek explains that "many freshman and sophomore students who enter lower level composition classrooms do not have a clear idea of what is expected in their writing, nor do they have a clear sense of what to look for in the revision of their own writing" (21). As a result, they may not know what to ask to work on in a tutoring session and/or request assistance with what seems easiest: grammar. According to Raymond and Quinn, writing "tutors are often faced with the difficult task of integrating tutor and writer goals; they must focus their sessions in ways that fulfill the students' requests for the paper at hand while maintaining an emphasis on facilitating the long-term development of the writer" (65). In other words, they have to determine, without back and forth interaction, how to provide suggestions that can lead to immediate revisions and long-term learning about writing.

Unfortunately, the feedback given may end up addressing lower order concerns simply because that is what tutees want, and since tutors are instructed not to commander a tutoring session, they merely comply. In short, while tutors' advice should be a delicate balance between student want and student need with the ultimate goal of developing writing and critical thinking skills, this is hard to achieve especially since detecting and explaining mechanical errors is often an easier task for both tutees and tutors.

Another Challenge: Length of Tutoring Cycle

Another struggle for T. OWL has been providing feedback in what the students and their instructors consider a timely manner. When we asked our participants to share with us the most common complaints on the part of their students, we were not surprised to see a couple of answers about how "It takes too long for feedback." Considering that tutees can get immediate help when they walk in for a face-to-face session, waiting up to forty-eight hours to hear back from T. OWL may seem excessive. While most papers are reviewed on the same day that they are submitted, at times the tutees have to wait until the next day or even longer when the submission is sent during the weekend. For example, during the fall 2019 semester, 77 submissions were reviewed by an OWL tutor within 24 hours. During the same semester, between our closing time on Friday, November 30, 2019, and Monday, December 3, 2019, we had eleven submissions, with ten coming in after closing hours on Friday and one sent in on Saturday ("OWL Form Fall 2018"). Nine tutees received feedback on Monday, but two had to wait until Tuesday because the tutors scheduled on Monday did not have enough time to finish all OWLs while handling face-to-face sessions as well. Waiting from November 30 to December 3 or 4 may seem extreme, especially as this is close to the final exam week, so it is understandable why that may frustrate both students and instructors. At the same time, while the papers can be submitted at any time online, their handling depends on the physical space of the Learning Center to be open and adequately staffed.

Additionally, the longer wait can occasionally be explained by the challenges posed by technology. The submission guidelines on our website direct the tutees to submit only Microsoft Word and rich text format documents, but that requirement is often overlooked, and the tutors end up with files that they cannot view. This is particularly a problem for CCP students who send us google documents because that is the program provided by their high schools. In such cases, the tutors must contact the tutees to ask for access to the document. Additionally, some of the students fail to enter a working university email address in the online submission form. This adds one more step to the tutoring process as the tutor must then ask the English Coordinator to figure out the student's correct university email address by searching the directory or contacting the professor. During the fall 2018 semester, for instance, 16 out of 120 submissions were delayed or never reviewed because we did not have the student's correct information. It seems like our questionnaire participants, however, are aware of these issues; one noted that "Students try to submit the wrong file types and forget that they need to use their [university] email (this is something that I, as the instructor, need to address more carefully). Also, some students forget their [university] credentials and never make the effort to stop in and reset them." Asking for the students to resubmit and figuring out the correct email address takes time and may contribute to the excessive wait that these students experience.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While we were revising this article, the United States was beginning to see the implementation of the first measures promoting social distancing as a response to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Our university suspended instruction for three days to allow professors to convert face-to-face instruction to online instruction; for the English tutors in the Learning Center, this transition was seamless because they were prepared. They had been tutoring online for years. They continued to support our tutees from a distance and felt like they were needed more than ever, considering that the students' access to their instructor and their peers had suddenly changed and, in some instances, may have decreased considerably, as instructors scrambled to learn how to make their Blackboard course more interactive. The OWL submission process remained a constant in a time where everything else seemed to shift in unexpected ways; although the tutors worked from home, the quality and timeliness of their feedback stayed consistent.

Our small study suggests that online peer tutoring is a desirable option for students who find it difficult to travel to campus for face-to-face tutoring even in times when campuses are not threatened by a deadly virus. Online tutoring, though, works best when peer tutors and tutees share the sociocultural characteristics specific to a particular location and ideally are from the same campus. While use of eTutoring may be a good idea for students looking for more perspectives on their writing, their instructors show a clear preference for our campus

OWL when they need help with their writing. Campuses should, therefore, invest more in training online peer tutors from their home campus rather than use outside eTutors or no online tutors at all.

Moreover, as online tutoring submissions increase in numbers, small campuses like ours need to change how we allocate resources, so we fairly respond to our students' needs. Generally, face-to-face tutoring takes precedence over OWLs simply because it is difficult to turn away a student walking into the Learning Center in order to respond to an OWL. Yet, this is unfair to the OWL tutee who is waiting for the email with the tutor's review. So far, however, we have not been able to find a solution to this problem and reviewing OWL submissions is left for the down time in between face-to-face sessions. Having a designated OWL tutor might help, should the administration be willing to pay for such services remotely. Prior to this semester, our administration understood the need for an OWL tutor, but they insisted that he or she would work from the physical location of the Learning Center. When we tried it, we ran into another problem: the OWL tutor ended up being sucked back into face-to-face tutoring during peak times in order to alleviate long wait times. In a small tutoring center such as hours, making the OWL tutor remote is a must. Moreover, the eight weeks of the spring 2020 semester were proof that the English tutors can effectively perform their OWL duties while off campus; this provides a strong argument in favor of remote tutors that the administration may consider more thoroughly in the future.

Another suggestion is to promote the continuous exchange of information between the Learning Center English Coordinator and instructors who can ensure that their students complete the submission forms and upload the essay drafts and writing prompts in format that peer tutors can access. Regular email messages to faculty and students informing them that submissions submitted late on Friday afternoon will not be read until the following week should also be considered. This same information can be posted on the Learning Center website as an additional reminder that response times may be delayed due to the high volume of online submissions on the weekends, especially during midterms and finals. The Learning Center should also carefully review and revise the OWL submission guidelines, so they clarify and emphasize important procedural information. Additionally, evaluation of tutoring services by students and instructors can help to improve the quality of tutoring provided, particularly if this information is gathered anonymously and with the help of open-ended questions.

Finally, writing and learning centers need to do a better job of documenting what they do. Though it takes time away from directly helping students, there can be real value in writing and learning centers collecting accurate statistics such as the number of online and face-to-face tutoring sessions, the amount of time tutors spend on each session or in an online review of a paper, the peak times for online and face-to-face tutoring, and the number of same-draft submissions. When coupled with data on student retention and withdrawal rates, grades awarded in writing classes, and grade point averages, writing and learning center coordinators can use this type of longitudinal data to demonstrate to administrators the qualitative value of both online and face-to-face tutoring and that similar attention and resources should be devoted to each. It is only through methodical and strategic documentation that writing or learning centers have a chance to receive the funding and staffing that they and their students deserve.

Notes

1. Ana is responsible for tutor training, scheduling, and oversight of English tutors in the campus Learning Center. She also helps to arrange visits to instructors' classrooms to promote Learning Center services. Pam is responsible for scheduling English classes for full-time and part-time instructors on our campus and is a champion of the Learning Center.

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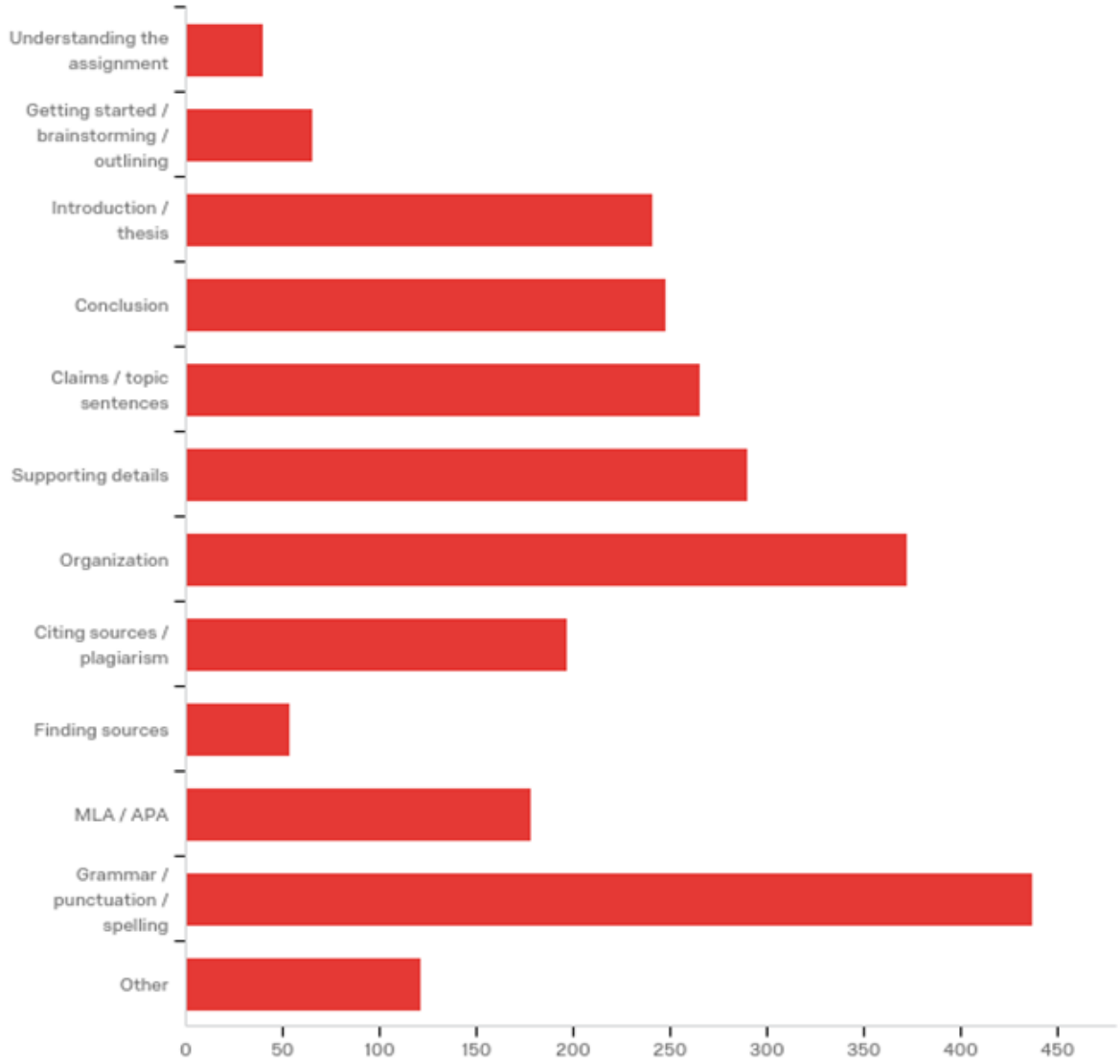
Appendix A

Table 1: Data provided by Institutional Research ("Enrollment Report")

Semester	Developmental Writing		Mainstream Composition
	Students in 01001	Students in 11002	Students in 11011
Spring 2016	48	99	155
Fall 2016	137	52	239
Spring 2017	60	133	103
Fall 2017	130	45	230
Spring 2018	57	86	97
Fall 2018	125	41	243
Spring 2019	36	91	91
Fall 2019	85	40	184

Chart 1. Q5 - Areas in which you are struggling/ What do you need help with? (click all of the boxes that apply)



Data from "Owl Submissions Report"

Appendix B

KSU T.
ENG 01001 Intro Stretch
Portfolio Grading Rubric

Section and student number _____
Student's instructor _____

In order to pass the portfolio, two of the three essays must earn a YES score for each of the following questions. If the question is not applicable, cross out YES/NO and write NA.

1. Does the essay answer the prompt, and does it meet basic requirements, such as length and use of sources, as detailed in the prompt?

   Essay 1 YES NO Essay 2 YES NO Essay 3 YES NO

2. Is the thesis an arguable claim—no fact, strategy language, or rhetorical question—and does it sit at the end of the introduction or first paragraph?

   Essay 1 YES NO Essay 2 YES NO Essay 3 YES NO

3. Does the essay consistently support the thesis? Answer YES if the essay's thesis is supported 50% of the time or more.

   Essay 1 YES NO Essay 2 YES NO Essay 3 YES NO

4. Does the essay contain evidence, such as specific examples and thoughtful explanation, to support the thesis or topic sentences?

   Essay 1 YES NO Essay 2 YES NO Essay 3 YES NO

5. Is there a clear distinction between introduction, body, and conclusion?

   Essay 1 YES NO Essay 2 YES NO Essay 3 YES NO

6. Are more than ¾ of paragraphs unified and developed and make one point that supports the thesis?

   Essay 1 YES NO Essay 2 YES NO Essay 3 YES NO

7. Does the essay's organization make sense?

   Essay 1 YES NO Essay 2 YES NO Essay 3 YES NO

8. Does the essay adhere to MLA formatting and rules for in-text and end-text citations?

Essay 1 YES NO Essay 2 YES NO Essay 3 YES NO

9. If quotations, paraphrases, or summaries are used in the essay, are they well integrated? If quotes are just plopped down, or sources appear out of nowhere, answer NO.

Essay 1 YES NO Essay 2 YES NO Essay 3 YES NO

10. Are grammatical, punctuation, and word choice errors kept to a minimum? Can readers still understand the essay's train of thought, or are the errors too distracting or annoying? (If more than ½ of the essay is hard to understand, answer NO)

Essay 1 YES NO Essay 2 YES NO Essay 3 YES NO

Portfolio assessment: **PASS** **or** **NOT PASS** (circle one)

Brief comments:

Appendix C

Online Tutoring

Thank you for participating in this anonymous survey. The goal is to understand how effective our tutoring services are and what we can do to improve them. The first few questions are designed to collect demographic information, and the rest of the survey is about eTutoring and the online submission service/ online writing lab (OWL) within the Learning Center at Kent State University at Trumbull.

How many years have you taught courses for Kent State University at Trumbull?

- ☐ 1 year or less
- ☐ 2-3 years
- ☐ 4-6 years
- ☐ 7-9 years
- ☐ over 10 years

Which of the following courses have you taught? You can check more than one box:

- ☐ English 01001 Intro to Stretch
- ☐ English 11002 Stretch I
- ☐ English 11011
- ☐ English 21011

Where do your college courses take place? You can check more than one box:

- ☐ In a high school
- ☐ On the Kent State at Trumbull campus
- ☐ Online

Do you require or recommend tutoring to your writing students?

- ☐ Require
- ☐ Recommend
- ☐ Neither

Which type(s) of tutoring do you require or recommend?

- ☐ Face to face (F2F)
- ☐ Online
- ☐ Other _____

What percentage of your students (current and prior) submit their papers to the Trumbull OWL?

- ☐ 0%
- ☐ Up to 25%
- ☐ Up to 50%
- ☐ Almost all students
- ☐ Other _____

What percentage of your students (current and prior) submit their papers to eTutoring?

- ☐ 0%
- ☐ Up to 25%
- ☐ Up to 50%
- ☐ Almost all students
- ☐ Other _____

In general, what are you likely to recommend to your students for peer review when they write a paper? You can check more than one box:

- ☐ Review with a peer taking the same course
- ☐ Review with a family member or friend
- ☐ Review with an English tutor during a face-to-face (F2F) tutoring session
- ☐ Review with an English tutor during an online asynchronous tutoring session
- ☐ Other _____

What do your students seem to prefer: face to face or online asynchronous tutoring?

- ☐ Face to face
- ☐ Online eTutoring
- ☐ Online Trumbull OWL

What do YOU generally expect Trumbull OWL tutors to address in an online tutoring session?

What are the top 3 student comments about using online Trumbull OWL tutoring?

What are some of the benefits and problems that your students have reported with using online Trumbull OWL tutoring?

What are some of the benefits and problems that YOU have noticed with your students' using online Trumbull OWL tutoring?

Please suggest 2 ways to improve your students' online tutoring experience with Trumbull OWL.

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A Pedagogy of Curation for Writing Centers

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Abstract

While scholarship on the spatial rhetoric of writing centers (including Lunsford, Connolly, et al., and McKinney) has demonstrated the importance of evaluating how writing center spaces speak to us and our writers, the field of museum curation offers new insights for writing centers on how spaces and objects and visitors interact in critical, even pedagogical, ways. Contemporary curatorial scholarship has shifted the focus of curation from simple care for the artifacts to a care more broadly focused on a conversation among artifacts and people (including artists, subjects, visitors, and curators). Adopting a curatorial approach to writing center work, we interrogated how we and our writers interact with one another and with artifacts in the spaces we developed. This article delineates how a pedagogy of curation helped us analyze the complex interlocution among all the (living and material) constituents present in a writing center event, and our constellations of artifacts, spaces, and people. Assessing our retreat program through a curation pedagogy, we found a new understanding of how materials and spaces functioned, and how our and our writers' responses to them unconsciously shaped our practice.

> "What do we mean by curation? From the viewpoint of someone without a formal background in museology, the term for me is bound up with the idea of care. . . . . Central to this thought process must be the audience, whether museum visitor or researcher. Care of the objects, curation in its broadest sense, is entirely bound up with care for our users and a concern for the almost limitless purposes to which they may put the museum's collections."
> —Heather Lane, Coming in from the Cold: Curation at the Polar Museum

> "The caring I am most interested in is of a different nature, and it is this that I believe is a curator's most substantial role. To curate is, for me, to understand what objects may tell us."
> —Claire Warrior, What is a Curator?

> "Enabling visitors to make discoveries, to have that flashbulb moment where they see a connection they have never seen before, realize the significance of something they have not thought significant previously – that's the curator's job."
> —Robin Osborne, Curation in a Cast Gallery

Museum curators spend a great deal of time thinking about, caring for, and managing spaces. The statements above reflect contributions made by museum curators to *The Art and Science of Curation*, a project facilitated through the University of Cambridge Museums and Botanic Gardens which seeks to reflect on the role of the curator in a changing museum studies landscape. At first glance, museum curation and writing center work may not seem to have much in common. Yet, when we read the reflections contained in *The Art and Science of Curation,* particularly the contributions by Heather Lane, Claire Warrior, and Robin Osborne, we were struck by the relationship all three describe between curator, space, artifacts, and audiences. Lane, Warrior, and Osborne highlight the role that a curator plays in using spaces and artifacts to help facilitate the emergence of an artist's vision and the meaningful opportunities for interaction between audiences and artifacts. Writing centers are also engaged in unavoidable, ongoing relationships with spaces and artifacts. We too seek to use and structure our spaces and artifacts to facilitate the interactions between ourselves and writers. Previous writing center scholarship has grappled with how we name our spaces and conceptualize our work. Much scholarship has also examined what we communicate through our vision of writing center space (Lunsford, Conolly, et al., and McKinney). Curation scholars, however, emphasize a slightly different perspective on space: one that considers space as a design-able canvas operating in an on-going association with artifacts and people. Curators, then, are designers of spaces, custodians of artifacts, and facilitators of people-artifact-space interactions designed to inspire thought and change. So, too, would we argue are writing center administrators. What then might we learn from curators? What would a pedagogy of curation look like for writing centers?

In *Curation as Graphic Design*, Leslie Tane articulates the role of the curator as an artist and designer, contending that the work of curation must go beyond care and basic exhibition construction to include visual, graphic design. Tane asserts that we must "acknowledg[e] the curator as the generator of design content and [view] the resultant exhibitions as neither traditional curatorial exhibit[s] nor art installation but something unique" (6). This conception of curation, which emphasizes the important role curators play in designing exhibits to communicate a vision, also offers a new way for those of us in writing centers to rethink

not only our roles concerning spaces and artifacts, but more importantly how we operate as designers of experiences that exist within spaces and utilize different artifacts. Curation, as Tane, Warrior, Lane, and Osborne make clear, begins with the need to care for objects and spaces in a way that facilitates a meaningful interaction with audiences. Similarly, writing centers seek to facilitate meaningful interactions with writers, interactions that are necessarily situated within physical or virtual spaces and entail the use of a variety of tools or artifacts.

This article will outline how we came to conceptualize a pedagogy of curation and then used it to create an analytical model we ultimately used to assess and redesign our writing retreat program. In our writing center, we have focused our pedagogy on the practices we enact in one-on-one conferences with writers. A pedagogy of curation, as we define it, invites us to expand our purview and explore how our practices are situated in space and place, how our physical environment shapes us as consultants and writers, and how the tools and objects around us interact with our teaching practices. In short, a curational pedagogy attends to the interactions between people, spaces, and objects as they engage in writing center work. Adopting a pedagogy of curation, then, means conceptualizing writing center work, whether conferences, programs, or workshops, as exhibits we curate through our construction and use of spaces and artifacts.

Writing Centers, Spaces, and Material Realities

Considerations of the material realities and locations of writing are not new to either writing center scholarship or writing studies. Writing center scholars have examined and troubled the extent to which our theoretical and physical conceptions of space have defined how we understand our work and communicated an identity to students and colleagues. In "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of the Writing Center," Andrea Lunsford outlines a number of the prominent spatial metaphors at work in writing centers, including "writing center as storehouse," "writing center as garrett," and finally "Burkean Parlor Centers" (4,7). For Lunsford, our spatial understanding of a writing center is intrinsically connected to our theoretical approaches to working with writers. Other scholars, such as Angela Clarke-Oates and Lisa Cahill, Kristina Reardon, et al., and Colleen Connolly, et al., have expanded Lunsford's work connecting space to writing center ideologies, practices, and even identities.

More particularly, in "Writing Centers are Cozy Homes," Jackie Grutsch McKinney contends that spaces tell stories, explaining that "through their arrangements and objects, spaces communicate to us; we could even say that spaces tell us a story about what they are and how we may use them" (21). McKinney troubles the comfortable, "cozy home" metaphors writing centers have used uncritically and attempts to create spaces that students will read as home-like, pointing to the complex cultural lens through which individuals see spaces in very different ways. For McKinney, Lunsford, and Connolly, et al., in particular, spaces, and the arrangement of people and artifacts within them, fundamentally shape the way that we think about our purposes and work, and correspondingly shape the complex ways students understand and interact with us as well.

Writing studies scholarship has also investigated the relationship between writing and space, focusing on the complex, cultural, and highly individualistic ways writers understand and interact with their work through physical spaces and with material objects. Here, writing spaces are understood to include not only a physical location, and the arrangement of objects, tools, and bodies within that place, but also the cultural associations. Jacob W. Craig, Stacey Pigg, Paul Prior and Jody Shipka, and Angela R. Dobele and Ekant Veer all observe and assess the possibilities different writing environments afford to different writers. In "Affective Materialities: Places, Technologies, and Developments of Writing Processes," Craig contemplates how writers' material and spatial habits grow from past interactions to certain spaces and objects. He argues for writing scholars to build a better understanding of how material realities shape writers in different ways, asserting that there is "a history and an affective reality that writers engage with each time they begin a writing task." For Craig, as well as Prior and Shipka, writing spaces and artifacts must be understood in correlation with one another, and with their collective and individual effect on the writer. Writers, then, navigate their practices and constructions of a writing identity through their selection, use, and understanding of writing environments and materials – in much the same way as writing centers must also enact practices through their conception of space.

Importantly, educational scholarship on learning spaces also investigates and theorizes the connection between learning environment design and teaching practices. While much of this work seeks to analyze how classroom arrangement and architecture influence student and teacher behavior (C. Brooks; Gierdowski; Head and Burnett; van Merrienboer, et al.), it also

explores the importance of educators' awareness of the limitations and possibilities afforded by physical space as they implement their pedagogies. In "Learning Spaces and Pedagogic Change: Envisioned, Enacted, Experienced," Dianne Mulcahy, et al. underscore the importance of distinguishing between a realist and a relationalist perspective on learning space design. Echoing the curators included at the beginning of this article, they explain:

> in a relationalist way of thinking, learning spaces and the uses made of these spaces are created and sustained together. . . Design can never provide a direct fit between space and occupation, and this space is never simply occupied by people. . . The character of the learning space changes with changes in its practice (579).

For Mulcahy, et al. the theorization of learning spaces cannot rely on a simple or direct connection between spaces, objects, and behaviors. Rather, educators must grapple with how sites of learning emerge from the interactions between people, practices, and space.

A Curatorial Approach to Writing Center Work

We argue that writing center practitioners, like those designing learning spaces, need to go beyond studying how we select environments or what our spaces say about us; we need to understand our practices and pedagogies as intrinsically enmeshed in spaces and artifacts. We must attend to what Jessica Enoch calls "space's rhetoricity," which recognizes the fact that "human actors create space not only through design and material composition but also through the rules and expectations for the space" (10). In *Domestic Occupations: Spatial Rhetorics and Women's Work*, Enoch explains, in addition to helping spaces "gain meaning," spatial rhetorics "suggest the purpose of the space; the actions, behaviors, and practices that should happen inside that space; and the people who should occupy it" (6). For Enoch, this critical interaction has "the power to divest spaces of their past identities and create new spatial meanings for the past and future" (6). People's responses to and interactions with and in a space, contribute to and reshape the rhetoric of that space. This definition of spatial rhetoric echoes both the definition of a relationalist perspective of learning space outlined by Mulcahy, et al., and the definition of the work of a curator outlined by Tane, Steve Bitgood and Don Peterson, and Lane. They all insist that a complex conceptualization of space demands that rhetors, curators, and educators go beyond considerations of objects and architecture as simple, static structures, and instead consider deeply how people's culturally-charged behaviors and practices construct and re-construct that space.

As writing center practitioners and administrators, we wanted to engage in this kind of deep consideration of how our practices emerged from our own interactions with spaces and objects. To help us imagine what a spatial-rhetorical or relationalist approach to writing center work looked like, we turned to scholarship on curation. Contemporary curatorial scholarship, as Lane, Tane, and others outline, has shifted the focus of curation from care for the object (artifact) to care more focused on a mediated and educational conversation between artifacts and people (including artists, subjects, visitors, and curators). Osborne describes the role of the curator as a facilitator, claiming that "what the curator facilitates is the access of the public to the object on display. Or, to look at it from the other end, the curator's job is to maximize the impact of the object. Curators remove barriers." Warrior likewise asserts that "curators have become the facilitators of stories, incorporating new narratives into objects' histories, and entangling objects with people's lives in new ways." Inspired by the perspectives articulated by Warrior, Tane, Bitgood, and Patterson, we outlined a pedagogy of curation for our own writing center work. In doing so, we sought not only to understand the rhetoric of the spaces we inhabited, including their material conditions and cultural meanings, but also how we were, or were not, acting as critical designers and facilitators of a dialogue between students, ourselves, spaces, and artifacts. A pedagogy of curation, as we define it, prompts writing centers to unpack how our goals and practices operate within our physical environment, and how we and our writers relate to that environment and one another. Enacting this pedagogy consequently requires us first to engage in analyzing our goals and strategies, evaluating how we use spaces and artifacts within our practice, and, most importantly, examining how consultants and writers interact with and respond to the physical structures around them. From this deeper understanding of how space, objects, writers, and consultants are interacting, we can then better design, curate, and adapt our work.

How, specifically, might writing center practitioners begin executing a curatorial pedagogy based on the deep analysis and design of sites of writing center work as exhibits? Helpfully, both Tane and Bitgood and Patterson articulate a method for curators to analyze and construct exhibits. For Tane, this process entails an assessment of design plans in relation to the curator's goals and understanding of audience. She delineates that "the curator must ask: How are these objects

connected? . . . Is a story being told with the objects? Who is the audience?" (12). Accounting for the spatial rhetoricity of museum exhibits, Bitgood and Patterson likewise "describe the principles of visitor behavior that relate to three other principles of exhibit design: (1) the characteristics of the exhibit object or animal; (2) the characteristics of exhibit architecture; and (3) the characteristics of the visitors" (4). They provide an empirical background for visitors' interactions with museum spaces, advising how physical elements such as size, motion, and positioning effects visitor behavior (4-5).

Building off these exhibit design principles, we created an analytical model to accomplish the first goal of our pedagogy of curation: analyzing the programs and practices of our writing center. We chose to think about writing center programs or activities (such as individual appointments, classroom workshops, or writing retreats) as exhibits. Conceptualizing a program or practice as an exhibit encouraged us to articulate and scrutinize that practice's goals and strategies as they were situated in a physical location, among artifacts and people. As with a museum or gallery, writing centers often construct multiple programs, events, and practices within a single space. We wanted to construct an analytical model, then, that would guide us in considering each program or event as an individual exhibit to help us more deeply probe the constructions and interactions of space, people, and artifacts within a limited frame.

Inspired by Bitgood and Patterson, we divided our model into three principles (goals and practices, relations among artifacts, spaces, and people, and curatorial design) and outlined a series of questions to help guide our analysis and subsequent design.

Analytical Model for a Curation Pedagogy

1. Goals and Practices
   - What do we want to communicate to writers?
   - How do we want writers to interact with us, one another, the space, and materials?
   - What do we want writers to experience within this program or practice?
   - What do we know about our writers?
2. Relations Among Artifacts, Spaces, and People
   - What artifacts are present?
   - What is the structure and basic functionality of the physical space?
   - What different meanings and possibilities might the physical space be communicating?
   - How are consultants and writers interpreting the space and artifacts?
   - How is the physical environment facilitating people's behavior?
   - How are we interacting with it?
   - How are we (re)defining the environment through our practice?
3. Curatorial Design
   - How can our practices intentionally engage the physical environment and artifacts?
   - How can we present and organize artifacts to communicate our goals, and enable the experience or interaction we want for students?
   - How can we best utilize our artifact(s)?
   - Are we constructing and interpreting artifacts and spaces in the best way for our audience?

In the discussion that follows, we outline how we first sought to enact a pedagogy of curation by using this model to re-examine and reconstruct one of our most popular writing center programs: weekend writing retreats. To facilitate this analysis and inform our subsequent revision of the retreat program, we received approval from our institution's human subjects research committee for a formal examination of our retreat site and writers' experiences in the retreat program. Specifically, we surveyed retreat participants about their reasons for attending the retreat and experience as writers in the retreat space. Full survey questions are listed in the appendix. During retreat time, we also documented writers' and consultants' locations within and movements around the physical environment. We connected this data with a detailed recording of the layout and structure of the retreat space.

Investigating this program from the perspective of a pedagogy of curation helped us realize that we were allowing our unconscious arrangement of space and artifacts to speak for us in ways that did not always align with the purposes we intended or the messages we wanted to send. In particular, when we observed and analyzed the interaction of space, artifacts, and people within the retreat, we discovered the extent to which our program exhibit inspired conflicting practices, interactions, and messages due to a lack of intentional design-thinking on our part. Re-approaching our retreat program with a curatorial pedagogy allowed us to see opportunities to craft a more meaningful constellation of spaces and practices.

Curating a Writing Retreat

Goals and Practices

For the past seven years, our writing center has hosted writing retreats for undergraduate students completing their senior thesis project. These short,

three- to four-hour, Saturday retreats have been incredibly popular and remain a hallmark program for our center. Our writing center is part of a small, liberal arts college in which every senior is expected to complete an independent thesis, an original research project that spans both semesters of the student's senior year and is structured as an individual tutorial with a professor-mentor from each students' major department. Recognizing the needs of a population of students who are a facing a long-term, research and writing project for the first time in their academic career, we originally sought to create a program, distinct from our "traditional" one-on-one appointments in the center, that would provide productive space for students to engage in the writing process.

Writing center-facilitated retreats (or bootcamps or write-ins) have become increasingly popular programs for undergraduate students, graduate students, and even faculty groups, and exist in a variety of forms. Sohui Lee and Chris Golde distinguish between two different styles of writing retreats, labelling them as either "Just Write" programs or "Writing Process" programs in their article "Completing the Dissertation and Beyond: Writing Centers and Dissertation Boot Camps" (2). While "Writing Process" models include more structured writing support and workshops or one-on-one tutorials, "Just Write" events are less structured; these retreats "presume that students will write productively, if they are given space, food, and monitored time" (Lee and Golde, 2). The writing retreats facilitated by our center clearly adhere to the "Just Write" model: though we offer students the opportunity to notify a consultant if they want feedback, our retreats are set up as quiet workspaces with little to no structure. Students arrive with all the items they need to write, including not only laptops and books, but also headphones and other items that help them focus. We provide breakfast and consultants for "quick consults."

The primary goal of our writing retreats has been to create a dedicated space for writers to work productively and with minimal distraction. From our appointments with seniors in the writing center and our discussions with faculty in different departments, we know that many students struggle to create and maintain a sustainable and productive writing schedule. As students are working independently, many seek a supportive social network, but struggle to create or sustain a productive community of fellow writers. Our purpose in hosting writing retreats has been to enable students to work individually, but within a community of colleagues. Our vision, then, for student interactions during retreats was not one of collaboration, but of camaraderie. Likewise, while we want students to know that writing help was available, we emphasize focused writing time, and productivity, as the primary goals of the event. We hope to convey to students the value of using small, consistent blocks of work time to make progress toward a larger goal. For us, the rationale for such a practice is obvious: we understand the importance of breaking a large project up into achievable tasks and understood as well that this strategy was a vital part of a successful writing process. When we initially created the retreat program, we also believed that the writing retreat practice would attract wider populations of students than those who already visited the writing center. We likewise assumed that by locating it outside the writing center itself, removing formal programming, and providing a meal, we would create a more comfortable environment. However, as we assessed the retreats through a lens of curation, we discovered that we were not, in fact, designing an exhibit for broader audiences, nor clearly communicating our beliefs and practices. We were, in fact, conveying other messages unintentionally.

Artifacts, Spaces, and People

We began our curatorial analysis of the retreat program by documenting and defining the artifacts at play in our "exhibit." From a curators' perspective, artifacts are the foundational element of exhibit design; the object of the "care" which Lane points out etymologically defines a curator's work, artifacts tell stories and convey meaning through their arrangement within the exhibit space (Craig, Warrior). It seemed fitting, then, to begin our assessment by first identifying the artifacts of writing retreats. We quickly realized that, for better or worse, we provide writers with no resources and few communications, and so do not curate many artifacts at all. We began, then, with the artifact which serves to introduce students to the writing retreat: the email invitation. In "Graduate School–Facilitated Peer Mentoring for Degree Completion: Dissertation-Writing Boot Camps," Jan Allen notes the importance of the email as the first interaction for students with the facilitator of the event, asserting that:

> a skilled facilitator contributes to the development of the peer community . . . These messages set expectations, explain some of the logistics, and, for our events, prompt students to begin a productivity and reflection log (37).

Our email message clearly invites writers to a comfortable, social space. It is framed as an event invitation: "the Writing Center would like to invite you to join us." And, as Allen notes, conveys the type of community and environment we intend: "writing retreats are a great way to make progress on your project

in company with your fellow senior classmates." However, while we do outline logistics and, in a short reminder email, describe a few expectations for what students should bring, we do not work toward "contribut[ing] to the development of the peer community" as Allen suggests (37). Given that one of our listed goals for the retreat program was to help students learn how to set achievable goals and how to build productive writing time, we realized, through this analysis, that we had not, perhaps, crafted the most effective artifact. Nor had we given much thought to other artifacts, practices, or spatial arrangements that would help us build the camaraderie or goal-setting skills we wanted to make a part of the retreat practice.

We turned, then, to assessing our retreat space, both in terms of what meanings it might be communicating to writers and how writers were interacting within that space. To aid this analysis, we took extensive pictures of the room we use for the retreats, as well as the hallways and building. We also spent time moving about the empty room: seating ourselves in the spaces usually occupied by students and taking note of different features of the room, some of which we had not noticed before. We documented all the objects in the room and their placement. Then, during one of our retreat times, we used a hand-drawn map of the room to record where students situated themselves, and where they moved during the retreat. We also manually documented how frequently, and when, students got up and moved about the room.

The first thing that we noticed, both in surveying the room and reviewing the pictures, was how our perspective of a space changed. Simply revisiting the space with an eye toward exhibit design had us reevaluating elements we thought of as conducive to writing. In the classroom, three of the walls are bare, and feature whiteboards that are generally left blank. The fourth wall is composed of glass and has two doors, one at either end. We establish the students in the traditional rowed seating and place ourselves at the front of the room. While this is convenient, it became clear that the positioning unintentionally reinforces the authority of the writing center staff who act as proctors for the event. Here we noticed, for the first time, we had created a space that was truly academic: a traditional classroom arrangement with writing center staff overseeing a large classroom of students. We were also struck by the size of the space and number of tables. We had originally chosen the room for just that reason: we wanted to accommodate as many students as possible – there are usually between thirty and fifty – and thought it would be easier to have everyone in one room. In surveying the room and images, however, we realized that the space, and number of participants, might also be intimidating to students. Because of the space we had chosen and how we structured the event, this was not a cozy, intimate environment suited to relaxed writing. Without giving it any thought, we realized that we had selected and designed a formal space with expectations of quiet, productive work, even as we envisioned and advertised a more relaxed, communal event.

We further noticed what we dubbed the "panopticon effect," as consultants are situated facing both the tables of students and the glass wall that looks out on the hallway where the bathrooms, water fountains, breakfast buffet, and building exit are located. Thus, when students leave the space for a break, all their actions are in full view of the consultants. As the consultants do not spend much of their time answering questions (we now question if this is due to the lack of artifacts or tools for students to cue a need for assistance), they spend much of the time sitting and watching the students. Studying the images of the room and the placement of consultants and students, we realized that our consultants were not functioning as the facilitators of a writing community such as Allen describes, and as we had intended, but rather acting as classroom proctors.

Evaluating our documentation of how frequently and when writers moved away from their writing space, either to seek help or to take a break, reinforced our observations of the space. Students did not approach the consultants often, and we could not identify artifacts (emails, notices on the board, or other tools) that we had supplied to encourage them to do so. While we believed that inclusion of a breakfast softened the formality and added to the social nature of the event, and we realized that nothing else about the structure of the space or our practices within it contributed to any communal feelings. Our observations suggested that the placement of the food outside the room primarily served to provide students with an opportunity for a break. Our observations of writers' movements about the room revealed that they took breaks fairly often, suggesting to us that our writers might want or need the retreat time (three and a half hours) to be divided up into smaller portions with a communal break in the middle.

Ultimately, identifying and analyzing the interactions between the artifacts, space, and people in our retreat program led us to the conclusion that we have unintentionally, but not necessarily problematically, created an academic environment that provides a pressure to perform. Our choice of a classroom that has limited visual distractions and our consultants' positioning (and behavior) in the room contribute to the creation of this formal space for

writing. Additionally, while the classroom is designed to be used collaboratively (the tables and chairs are easily movable and there are collaboration boards available), we offer no encouragement to utilize the furniture in this way. Analyzing the room in this way prompted us to wonder, what might happen if we did encourage writers to make use of the vast window and whiteboard writing space?

To answer this and other questions that arose throughout our analysis, we created a survey that was distributed to students who attended any of the writing retreats throughout the academic year. We wanted to learn about our students' experience at the retreats and their perception of the space. Twenty-one students responded to our survey, of which half had attended at least two retreats. Most had visited the writing center for an appointment that academic year. Though two students reported not being very productive, the rest indicated that they had been extremely productive (52.4%) or moderately productive (38.1%) during retreat time and that they strongly or somewhat agreed that they felt more focused during retreat time than when working on their own. Respondents were evenly split on whether they were extremely or somewhat satisfied with the layout of the room, location on campus, food, and tables. Lack of access to power outlets was a consistent complaint, however. Ninety percent reported feeling comfortable in the space; the two who did not cited wanting more space or seating options. We also suggested possible changes to the retreat set-up to elicit survey-takers opinions on whether a smaller retreat would be preferable, a different length of time, or the inclusion of more structure. Students were undecided on whether they would prefer to work with fewer people in the room (eleven said "maybe" and the rest were split between "yes" and "no"). However, they were quite clear in not wanting changes to the timing or structure of the retreats.

While our initial analysis offered considerable insight into what we thought we were conveying in our use of space and structuring of the retreat, learning the perceptions attendees added nuance to our understanding. We had believed that we were creating "alternate" writing center programming for a broader base of students than those who regularly visited the center. Through analyzing our curation of the program, however, we realized that we had set-up and inhabited the retreat space in a much more formal way than we originally believed. The survey and attendance records likewise revealed that, the same students who already felt comfortable visiting the writing center were signing up for the retreats. We were not reaching new audiences after all. Unsurprisingly, then, this population of students reported, in the survey, that they were generally satisfied and comfortable with the program and space. None of this was bad news – but it was disconcerting to discover that our vision for the program and curatorial execution did not match.

Exhibit Design

Though it was gratifying that the survey confirmed that we have generally succeeded in creating a productive, if formal, space for students to write, it is perhaps more important to note that we were not wholly aware of how the space we used was functioning, nor how our positioning and artifact practices were shaping the retreats. We realized, in short, that because we had not consciously and critically adopted a curation pedagogy (had not attended to the interaction between space, artifact, and people), we had persisted in envisioning and messaging a relaxed, consultant-supported writing "retreat," and yet had delivered a proctored study-hall. While the popularity of the writing retreats and the responses to the survey made clear the formality and even authority we had reinforced in our program construction was useful and productive for some students, we still wanted to design a program that would appeal to students who prefer more relaxed spaces, would like more community-building or structure.

Armed with what we learned in our analysis, then, our writing center staff redesigned our writing retreats using a pedagogy of curation. Our discussion of the goals we had for retreats, and what we wanted to convey to writers through them, now also incorporated a consideration of how the room we choose, our staging of that space, and the materials we might bring with us would reinforce those goals. Tane asserts that "curatorial design is communicating through object and artifact, telling a story, and engaging the viewer" (25). What, we asked ourselves, could we communicate and achieve through our arrangement of objects and artifacts within our retreat space? How could we "engage the viewer" in this exhibit?

Ultimately, we chose to take advantage of empty academic buildings on weekend mornings and constructed a retreat that used multiple rooms on the same floor. We placed our consultants in an open, communal reception area that includes food and writing resources. We divided students among small "break-out" classrooms where they could either work in silence or have conversations with partners, depending on the room they selected ("quiet work room" or "collaborative room"). Writers have the option to stop in the reception area at any time for help. Our decision to utilize multiple rooms was informed by the differing

opinions expressed in the survey and by our observation of students' movement in the previous retreats: some students were quite focused and moved only once for a break, while others frequently checked in with the person next to them or made multiple visits to the buffet where they might share a word or two with another participant. Our intention in designing a multi-room retreat was not only to allow participants to select the space that would best suit their needs, but also encourage writers themselves to participate in "creating and sustaining" the nature of that learning space through their practices in and use of it (Mulcahy, et al.). To that end, we too have changed our practices in hosting the retreats in that we begin by discussing with writers how we organized space for them, and how they might make use of (or re-appropriate) the spaces and resources at their disposal. We articulate our own goals as consultants and describe how we will behave in the space. We then prompt them to consider their needs and goals for the retreat; both their needs and goals for writing, and as writers in this place. Do they want to sit near friends, or away? Do they want a whiteboard nearby? Do they want a timer?

In short, our more careful consideration of our physical environment not only reshaped the way we design the retreat program, it has also prompted us to articulate for writers how our practices are enmeshed within the space we inhabit and the tools available to us and encourage them to do the same. Our work as curators of this program, however, is ongoing, as we seek to continue noticing how we and our writers are interacting within the retreat space, and to continue acting as facilitators of new artifacts and spatial constructions.

A Pedagogy of Curation for Writing Centers

Writing centers need to keep analyzing and problematizing the relationship between space, perspective, and our student populations. More particularly, we need to develop an understanding for how writers navigate not only our spaces, but also the resources or artifacts we make available in those spaces. We need to step beyond thinking about the writing center space – or the spaces where we host events and workshops – as merely symbolic or metaphorical. We do need to be aware about what our spaces are saying, but we must also interrogate how we and our writers interact with one another and with artifacts in those spaces. We need, in short, a pedagogy of curation to help us analyze the complex interlocution among all the (living and material) constituents present in a writing center event, and design (or redesign) our constellations of artifacts, spaces, and people to suit our purposes and the needs of clients. In doing so, writing centers might build on the work visible in learning space design and writing studies that seeks to understand the material realities of teachers and students, and writing and writers. And we might go further. We might develop an understanding of the material, spatial, and interactive components that make up productive collaborations between writers and consultants, and among writers in writing center spaces.

This is not to suggest, however, that a primary goal for a pedagogy of curation is to simply assess the physical spaces writing centers occupy and facilitate their redesign. Some of us are able to contribute to the design of our spaces, and some of us fight hard to keep a dimly lit corner with a predetermined aesthetic. No matter the physical space or our control over it, we believe it is still beneficial to measure and analyze our practices within those spaces using a pedagogy of curation. In their respective accounts of constructing innovative new writing center spaces, Karen J. Head and Rebecca E. Burnett, Justin A. Young, and Ben Lauren outline how their design decisions emerged from the intersection of institutional goals and limitations, writing center pedagogies, and examinations of student use of and response to learning spaces. In these accounts, writing center administrators had the opportunity to think deeply about the connection between space and pedagogy, and to subsequently reshape their physical environment with that pedagogy and their student audience in mind. These models for designing writing center space are valuable, especially for moments when writing center administrators can shape or re-shape their physical environments. A pedagogy of curation, however, as we hope we have shown, is not solely or even primarily concerned with the re-construction of a physical space, but rather a sustained attention to how our collective and individual practices work within that space. What a pedagogy of curation might offer us, then, are ways to re-think our practices, design, and use of space – even when we have limited or no control over changing that environment.

In defining and first using a pedagogy of curation, we did not seek to reconstruct an ideal physical space, nor to simply account for how our environment was influencing us and our students. Instead, we sought to better understand how our own program was operating within our chosen space, and to more critically redesign a retreat that communicated through its physical spaces and artifacts more consciously. Assessing and redesigning our retreat program through a curation pedagogy, we began by developing a new understanding of how materials and spaces functioned, and how our

responses and our writers' responses to them unconsciously shaped our practice. These observations prompted us, to examine how our goals aligned with and were communicated through our use of space, and to learn from students how they perceived the spaces how the structure of those spaces and our programming affected them. For our writing center, the result was both a change in where we located our retreats, but more particularly, we shifted the way we prompt students to use that space and began, to communicate with students about how our goals and suggested practices related to the physical surroundings.

However, adopting a pedagogy of curation need not entail a large-scale project; indeed, writing centers could begin adopting this approach through simple acts, such as observing and taking notes on the physical positioning of objects in center, role playing students in an appointment to understand their physical situation in the center, and noting or recording the movements and interactions of both consultants and writers. These methods of assessment are fundamental to a pedagogy of curation, and yet easy and free to implement. Additionally, many centers now have a form of exit survey that could include questions to help consultants and administrators begin to understand the kind of experience they are curating Approaching one-on-one appointments with a curation pedagogy could begin with an analysis of how consultants and writers are interacting in their environment. What objects do the consultants and clients use, ignore, or visibly work around? How are the participants and objects or furniture positioned, and does that positioning support or influence the consultant's and writer's desired practices? Surveys might further tease out writers' responses to writing center spaces. For instance, if the consulting table is filled with center-supplied reference books, paper, and pens, and the consultant's own work materials, does the writer feel they are entering the domain of the consultant rather than joining a shared space? Understanding how we and our writers are adapting to and using the environment of the one-on-one appointments carves out the opportunity to reshape that exhibit and the way we practice in it. Consulting spaces would not need to be remodeled to enact significant change for writers. It is instead important to be intentional in using the space and conscious of how physical spaces and the objects around us are influencing our practices.

Despite its emphasis on the construction and design of space, much of the literature on learning space design finds that while certain classroom configurations can be more conducive to different types of teaching and learning, it is still the educators' behaviors that have the greatest impact on students' experiences (Mulcahy et al., C. Brooks, Gierdowski). Likewise, a pedagogy of curation considers not only how spaces, artifacts, and objects can be designed and organized to best facilitate our programs and one-on-one appointments, but also how these elements and our practices work together to shape how writers experience our centers. In this way, a pedagogy of curation builds on and combines work we have already done in examining how our conception of writing center space speaks for us and even how our physical positioning in relation to a writer and their text may convey ownership or authority (J. Brooks). What a curatorial pedagogy adds to this work is not a call to radically re-construct our physical spaces, but rather to commit to an ongoing investigation of how what we and our writers do is situated within and emerges from our sites of practice.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

1. How many writing retreats did you attend this year?

2. Did you visit the Writing Center for an appointment this year?

3. What motivated you to sign up for the retreat or retreats? (Survey participants were instructed to check all that apply from a list of options.)

4. Overall, how would you rate your productivity during retreat time?

5. How satisfied were you with the following elements of the retreat set-up? (The food; the building's location on campus; the layout of the room; the tables and chairs; the availability of electric outlets.)

6. Was there anything you would change or would like to see added for future retreats?

7. Did you find this space a comfortable place to work?

8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

    a. The structure of the retreat motivated me to get work done.

    b. Seeing peers around me working helped me stay focused.

    c. The presence of Writing Center staff helped me stay focused.

    d. I was more focused during retreat time than I am when working on my own.

9. If it was available, would you prefer to work in a space with fewer students?

10. If it were possible, what days and times would you most like to see retreats offered?

11. How do you feel about the length of time of the retreat?

12. Would you have found it useful if writing retreats included a brief goal-setting discussion at the beginning?

13. Would you have liked to have seen the Writing Center staff provide more structure to the retreat?