PRAXIS

11.2: CONNECTED WRITING

A SPECIAL ISSUE ON CONNECTION AND CONNECTIVITY

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FROM THE EDITORS

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For this issue of *Praxis*, we asked authors to meditate on the theme of connections and connectivity. In writing centers across the country, students and tutors connect across languages, technological mediums, and identity backgrounds. Moreover, we hoped to foster a dialogue about the ways in which different writing centers connect with each other.

To commemorate the 10th anniversary of *Praxis*, Sue Mendelson and Eliana Schonberg contribute a column to connect the current issue of Praxis back to its origins. We also feature a column by Mary Hedengren in which she explores how writing centers can increase connections between undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty in an ideal vision of a writing center future.

Three authors explore the cultural and identitarian connections they identify in everyday writing center practice. Elisabeth Ursell advocates for establishing conversation partner programs in writing centers, explaining that such programs could establish "intentional cultural exchange" between writing center practitioners and international students. Centering her discussion of diversity in the topic of faith, Courtney Bailey Parker explores how writing centers can enable students to speak more clearly to those outside their faith tradition. William Burns' discussion of the impact of a postmodern writing center investigates how writing tutor evaluations enable fruitful discussions of intersecting identity positions to take place within groups of students and writing center staff.

Two authors tackle the idea of connectivity as it manifests in debates over whether writing center staff ought to be "generalists" or "specialists" in a particular field. Bonnie Devet mobilizes the theory of ecocomposition to suggest how writing centers can help students see themselves situated in a web of institutional, cultural, and ideological locations, as well as reveal connections between seemingly disparate academic fields. Layne Gordon, urging for incorporating genre theory into writing center practice, envisions a type of writing center pedagogy that looks beyond the generalist/specialist dichotomy.

This issue also marks the first occasion *Praxis* has had the capacity to send submitted articles to two reviewers. We would like to extend special thanks to our National Review Board for the time and expertise they devote to *Praxis*.

Looking forward, Sarah Orem is entering her second term as Managing Editor at *Praxis*. As Jacob Pietsch completes his term, he would like to share his thanks and extend a fond farewell to the authors, reviewers, editorial team, and readers. We welcome Thomas Spitzer-Hanks as Managing Editor in the coming year, and we are excited to guide *Praxis* through its first guest-edited edition this Fall in collaboration with Dr. Russell Carpenter at the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity of Eastern Kentucky University, Dr. Scott Whiddon at Transylvania University, and Dr. Kevin Dvorak at Nova Southeastern University.

PRAXIS ORIGINS

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In celebration of its tenth year, the founding editors of *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, Sue Mendelsohn and Eliana Schonberg, reflect on its early days.

Praxis: A Writing Center Journal has Joan Mullin and a bike crash to thank for its origins. In the spring of 2002, Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC) director Lester Faigley invited Mullin to serve as an outside evaluator. In her report to the center's administrative team, she posed the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The UWC was one of the largest writing centers in the country, with an energetic and well-supported staff, but, as Mullin pointed out, it needed a vision of its future. Her challenge echoed the questions graduate student administrators of the period were asking themselves: what did they want to be when they grew up as professionals?

Sue Mendelsohn: During its adolescent period, the UWC had evolved in isolation from other centers, and as I worked with the other graduate student assistant directors and the staff to develop a vision for the UWC, I wanted the center to become a leader in the larger writing center community, a community that I was eager to claim membership in. I was beginning to question how I would enter into that national conversation after graduate school. The traditional advice to build a professional network by meeting people at conferences wasn't working for me. I couldn't shake the feeling that I was bothering the scholars I admired with small talk. But *Praxis* became a way that I could meet great writing center researchers on even ground: me as editor and them as writers.

With these goals in mind, I drafted a proposal to raise the UWC's national profile. Among four initiatives included in the proposal was a two-line description of "a newsletter for consultants," and *Praxis* evolved from this humble beginning. We wanted an e-journal that could serve as a listening post for emerging issues. The immediacy of web publication would let us speak to hot topics like technologies, economic downturns, and the new wave of community writing centers in a way that the established print publications weren't designed to do. I

obtained support from UWC faculty and staff to pilot an online newsletter and assembled a team of five or six stalwart consultants to work on it.

Eliana Schonberg: Sue's enthusiasm initially drew me to this project. I wasn't sure if this newsletter/journal she dreamed up would amount to anything, but it seemed interesting and a way to learn about the inner workings of the writing center. Over the course of a few editorial meetings, we chose a theme and announced the call for articles. Sue and I began to line up authors by reaching out to people whose work we admired.

Sue: The correspondence with those first authors proved formative. I remember conversations with Eliana about how we could sound like journal editors rather than graduate students and what the *Praxis* editorial voice should be. We combed through those early emails word-by-word, cheering when we finally got it right.

Eliana: True to writing center-form, but surprisingly to me as a newcomer to the field, those scholars we admired – Elizabeth Boquet, Pam Childers, Frankie Condon, Michele Eodice, Michael Erard, Dawn Fels, Beth Hewitt, Jeanette Jordan, Jon Olsen, Tiffany Rouscoulp, Vicki Russell, David Sheridan, and many others – responded generously, sharing their views on the state of the field or contributing articles, reviews, and interviews to our fledgling publication.

Sue: Two weeks before the first issue was to launch, however, a terribly-timed (and downright terrible) bike crash changed the course of *Praxis'* development. Riding my bicycle home from an afternoon of editing articles, I crashed and was knocked unconscious. I found myself laid up with a broken collarbone and a concussion just when the real editing work needed to be done. The first issue was derailed.

Eliana: Lynn Makau and I, along with other members of the editorial collective, stepped in with

the initial intention of saving Sue's project--ensuring that her recovery wouldn't be hindered by anxiety about the health of the journal. As it turned out, the accident forced the journal to evolve from one individual's vision to a truly collaborative effort. For me, the process of working with these texts and corresponding with this group of authors sparked an interest beyond the short-term crisis. I was at a graduate school crossroads. Having recently changed dissertation topics to focus on translation theory in addition to poetics, I was re-energized by my scholarship but anxious about my professional prospects. Now the point-person for *Praxis'* correspondence with authors, I was struck by the openness of writing center professionals all over the country. I began to realize that these were the sorts of people I wanted to call permanent colleagues. While *Praxis* provided Sue a vehicle to try on her professional persona, it helped me redefine my professional identity, expanding beyond translation theory and literary criticism to include writing center theory and practice.

Sue: I returned to the UWC after a week in bed, expecting to see that first issue as I left it: a mish mash of partially edited pieces and messy webpages. Instead, I found Eliana and Lynn Makau hunched over an iMac, putting the finishing touches on the issue. And from this period, *Praxis* found its collaborative ethos. The journal came into its own as not merely a project to serve the needs of the UWC or its editorial board, but as a forum for emerging conversations in the field. We were able to move from start-up conversations to the writing center work that we were excited to talk about.

Eliana and Sue: Now, ten years later, our experience with *Praxis* remains with us. We each direct our own writing centers and love the profession. In addition to launching each of us in this field, the journal granted us full membership in the scholarly world of writing centers. More than that, *Praxis* cemented a burgeoning friendship. We are still one another's first call when a thorny issue comes up in our respective writing centers. Our work taught both of us how to co-write successfully and how rare it can be to find a truly well-matched coauthor. Even when we're not coauthoring, we continue to be each other's first reader and editor.

In *Praxis'* decade of life, we played a small role. We were thrilled when Zachary Dobbins and then Eileen Abrahams stepped into our editorial shoes and

further thrilled to see the series of smart, dedicated writing center consultants who followed them. We're happy to say now that *Praxis* is no longer ours. What it has become – an established, respected peer-reviewed publication – is a credit to the writing consultants who found their own purposes in it. We continue to be delighted by what these writers, editors, graduate students, and undergraduates, have made *Praxis,* and we are grateful that *Praxis* still thriving through their efforts.

A Utopian Vision of the Writing Center: Multigenerational, Generative, and Multidisciplinary

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While recently reading W. Ross Winterowd's *The English Department: A Personal and Institutional History*, I was pleasantly surprised to see the following paragraph in the Epilogue, where Winterowd describes the ideal reunification of the creative and pragmatic writing arts:

> The Utopian writing program would be a hub-and-spoke operation, a *writing center* being the hub—a site where writers could congregate, talk about their craft, get help with problems, help others solve problems. The center would be a hub for all writers, from "basic" freshmen to upper-division students to faculty members. Genres would include every conceivable kind of writing: research papers, fictional stories, limericks, scientific reports, theses and dissertations, meditations—the sublime and the outrageous. (228-9)

It's a lovely description and I find it worth quoting at length because not only does Winterowd write with clear-eyed prophetic passion, but he also paints a rich description: what would the writing center look like if it were so broadly construed across the seniority of writers, the writing process, and the genres of writing?

In some ways, at my writing center, the University of Texas at Austin's Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC), we have tried to define a broad mission. "Any piece of writing at any stage in the writing process," is one of our catchphrases when introducing the writing center. We tell with pride about those consultations we've held with students working on poems or proposals, and about people who come in just wanting to brainstorm a project. But these are the exceptions, and although our ideals are high, we are far from Winterowd's utopia.

One of the biggest differences between that utopia and our reality is that, in being the *Undergraduate* Writing Center, we do have some institutional stricture on our mission. We serve only undergraduates, primarily because of the immense size of our institution and the presence of a smaller graduate-student writing center elsewhere on campus, both of which are more exception than rule for most writing centers.

But I'm concerned with what these institutional divisions mean in terms of the position of writing in the university; is writing seen as something that only undergraduates do, or else something that only undergraduates would want support doing? Either proposition is unsettling to me. Of course we know that there is a lot of writing going on at the universities at the graduate and professorial level, but much of that writing takes place behind closed office doors. Sometimes there are efforts, maybe within a department, or maybe on an ad hoc basis, to develop a faculty writing groups in all sorts of disciplines (e.g Houfek et al, 2010; Hampton-Farmer et al, 2012; Pasternak, et al 2009) or workshops (Dankowski et al 2012) but these efforts are seldom supported by dedicated staff or faculty members and often proceeded without training in the best practices of peer response.

This doesn't have to be the case. Violet Dutcher conducts a summer faculty writing retreat at Eastern Mennonite University. At the most recent IWCA conference in San Diego, Dutcher, along with Jennifer Faillet, Lunee Lewis Gaillet, Angela Clark-Oates, and Ellen Schendel all presented ideas of how writing centers could support faculty writers. The forthcoming book *Working with Faculty Writers* (2013) includes chapters as revolutionary as "Idea of the Faculty Writing Center" and invokes the "third space" for faculty, not just students. But while I admire the work of these scholars and what it could mean to normalize a social, flexible, process-based faculty writing culture, I can't shake the thought that a *faculty* writing retreat or even a faculty writing center stops short of Winterowd's ideal. Couldn't a writing center be a place where university rank doesn't create a limit for writers and their consultants, but provides additional perspectives? What would it do for writing in all fields if specialists learned to describe their research so clearly that an undergraduate could understand it? What would it mean for graduate or undergraduate consultants to be privy to the writing conventions and practices of expert writers while they are still in process? The prospect of such a center seems almost hyperthermic in its degree of exposure, but a communal writing center hub could be beneficial to all parties. If non-directive, non-evaluative writing feedback is useful for undergrads, why should it stop

being useful once they become graduate students or, for that matter, professors?

The gap between the ideal and reality isn't just about who is at the writing center, but also what is done there. In addition to our reality's insistence that the writing center is a place for undergraduates, we often feel as though the writing center is the place for undergraduates to find out what is *wrong* with their writing. This leads to Winterowd's other visionary description—that the writing center could be a place where getting "help with problems" was just one of many purposes for the center.

Notwithstanding our mantra of "any stage in the writing process," very few writers seem to take us at our word. Almost all of the pieces we see are in a completed, although not perfected, state; despite our best efforts as a discipline, the writing center is still seen as a fix-it shop or an emergency clinic, a place where sick or broken writing is "worked on." Some of the terms used in writing centers still highlight this fact—although there are fewer "labs," many writing centers talk about "student clients," or giving "diagnostic readings" and we at the UWC talk about our "consultants" and "consultees." This language highlights the fact that in practice, writing centers are seen as a step in revision, not a space where writers just, in Winterowd's words, congregate. Stephen North, in the canonical "Idea of a Writing Center," says to an imagined audience of teachers, "You cannot parcel out some portion of a given student for us to deal with ("You take care of editing, I'll deal with invention")" (440). North's example is interesting, not just because it describes how fragmented a part of the writing process "going to the writing center" has become, but also because in his example, the writing center becomes the space for editing, not invention.

Our mission might not be to "fix writing," but when someone walks in our doors, we assume that they have a problem—maybe with brainstorming, maybe with punctuation—and we are going to give them, if not the solutions, then at least the strategies to discover them on their own.

Julie Reid (2008) suggests encouraging more free invention through creating a "playshop" for writers. Her playshop involves such generative work as creating pseudonyms for the day and playing surrealist language games inspired by the Oulipo movement of the sixties as a way to break students into invention. I have to admit, I find the whole thing rather silly and I can't imagine students coming to the writing center to get a day's writing done feeling much fulfilled by activities like "Carnival Ticket Haikus" or "Wheel of Fortune Cookie," but I think that writing centers can bring invention more into their core; I admire Reid's effort to "not critique work, but show students how to generate it. Lots of it" (194). Rather than free-play whimsy, though, I imagine that many working university writers should appreciate the benefits of other alternative resources. Consider the idea of consultants as accountability counselors who could check in with an undergrad working on a term paper just the same as with a professor moving forward on a book. Such special consultants could receive training in the same emotionally responsive and non-directive methods of our regular writing consultants, but instead of trying to intervene in a project, these counselors would encourage the creation of it through setting internal deadlines or daily writing goals with writers and then calling them or meeting with them at the center to discuss the writing process, its difficulties, and ways to continue to generate lots of writing. Our writing center holds a twice-yearly workshop on writers block, which is always well attended, showing that, for many on our campus, the work of writing often begins before writing.

Other ways that writing centers could reposition themselves as places to generate, and not just critique, writing would be to provide spaces and organization for informal workshopping groups. Online forums could unite students, faculty, and community members who all want to write about similar topics, or for similar purposes. Our own Peg Syverson here at UT Austin has suggested that these online writing clearinghouses could bring together writers around topics like environmental design and technology. Such collaborations might bear fruitful cross-disciplinary research as well as provide mentorship opportunities for graduates and undergraduates participating in a common project.

Reimagining the space of writing centers, too, could give them more of a "hub" identity on campus. Instead of the open-air or cubicle design that's made for short consultations to diagnose and prescribe when encountering writing, imagine a writing center with small, reservable cubicles for quiet, focused writing time as well as classrooms or lecture spaces for well-known writers to come and speak "about their craft" to audiences within and beyond the university community.

In Winterowd's ideal, those famous authors wouldn't just be creative writers and those cubicles wouldn't just be filled with the clicks of a computer's keys completing a master's thesis; all types of writing could be encouraged and represented. In our writing center, we're extremely fortunate to have a lot of buy-in from writing intensive classes within the disciplines. We do get biology reports and executive summaries and very, very rarely we see pieces of creative writing,

but, mostly, we get research papers. And almost everything we see is required work. In more than 400 consultations, I have helped with over 80 personal statements and two dozen lab reports, and over a hundred school assignments vaguely described as "essays." But I have a hard time coming up with more than I can count on one hand when remembering the number of consultations I've had a with an undergrad who was writing something without a deadline and without an evaluation.

In Winterowd's ideal, we'd see more work like the comic book one upper-classman was writing to encourage his cousin to stay in school. This student knew his audience and he knew that what he was writing was important, but he didn't need to have a teacher to be there to evaluate his work. It was such an honor to work with a student—no, a writer—who knew that writing could help him accomplish his goals. These self-motivated writers don't have to be entirely altruistic. One spring, a group of young entrepreneurs all entered the writing center together with a proposal in hand that they wanted to pitch at a tech conference here in Austin. The stakes were high and it was personal, but it was not "for credit." Another visitor, an international student from China, brought in an email he was writing to his boss because he wanted to perfect his business English. These types of visitors may not be exactly "sublime and outrageous," but they understand that writing, important writing, takes place all the time, even outside of the formal structure of the university.

These ideals are, of course, only ideals, but they exist to give us something to ponder over and strive for. If the writing center is, after all, only an institution within the university with administrative direction and a budget reflecting priorities, how might we reimagine directions and reformulate priorities to develop a wider view of writing? Because Winterowd's vision isn't just a different type of writing center; it suggests a different philosophy of writing. In this philosophy, all writers and all writing is seen in process, as part of a rich writing world that extends throughout and beyond the university, from within each writer out to each writing community, and permeates the various roles that each person inhabits— friend, activist, student, professional, devotee— and unites them in one critical identity: writer.

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SUPPORTING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION:
CONVERSATION PARTNERS IN THE WRITING CENTER

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Introduction

Su is an international student who has been in the U.S. for less than three weeks, and she's visiting the writing center for the first time. She's enrolled in a seminar on Race and Theater and feels overwhelmed by the first assignment, which requires her to see a play and then write a paper in which she identifies its themes. Over the course of the session, it becomes clear to the tutor that Su's struggles in the class go well beyond the writing assignment. When she attended a performance of the play, she misheard much of the dialogue, and she was confused by its many pop culture references. When the play was discussed in class, the conversations about these references went quickly, and neither the instructor nor the other students seemed to recognize that Su wasn't following the discussion. Su also did not ask questions in class. She was afraid that her accent would make her hard to understand, and she was reluctant to reveal all that she did not know, especially her inability to anticipate what kinds of knowledge were expected from students in the class.

The services in the writing center are designed to help Su tackle *one piece* of what she needs to succeed in the class—namely, the writing assignment. But what Su really needs is support that more broadly addresses intercultural communication. That is, she needs support that blends oral language learning with written language development. Speaking, listening, reading and writing all play a role in the class that Su is taking, and she will need support on all of them to help her participate in that milieu. More importantly, she needs support that foregrounds one of the most difficult challenges of intercultural communication: namely, developing cultural awareness, which can be defined as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to both understand and interact across various cultures (Baker 65). In this case, cultural awareness includes the allegory, metaphors, and stereotypes often referenced in American literature and media, which would allow Su to move fluidly among academic, professional, and social discourses. Such cultural knowledge emphasizes language development beyond grammar to include non-standard English, colloquialisms, idiomatic expressions, and jargon that is often overlooked or not taught in EFL classes in the student's home country (Gan et. al. 234-235).

Can writing centers provide the kind of support that students like Su really need? In the absence of other language support services, Su may view the writing center as her only recourse for both writing *and* language development. If Su gets this kind of support at the writing center, she will be able to weave her language and writing development into a symbiotic process, rather than isolating her writing needs from her gaps in language and cultural knowledge. Although the incorporation of language support into a writing center may seem daunting, the larger question is not just *if* there is a need for such a service, but *how* it will be implemented in terms of adjusting staff and tutor roles, the writing center's identity and mission, and the overlap of teaching, conversing, and guiding students.

In this paper, I offer a description of a program that, when added to the services that writing centers already offer, can significantly enhance their ability to support English language learners. The program I describe is called "Conversation Partners" at my institution, and it is a service that provides direct support for listening and speaking, as well as a platform for developing cultural knowledge. Conversation Partners programs housed in university writing centers could provide outlets for second-language writers to receive explicit English instruction, but more importantly, they could provide cultural awareness that will enable students to fully participate in American academic discourse communities. A robust Conversation Partners program could change a writing center from the ground up. By addressing intercultural communication directly, a Conversation Partners program explicitly expands the emphasis of the writing center—it's not just about writing anymore.

Theoretical Frameworks

The rationale for starting a Conversation Partners program is supported by several ideas that have emerged from research and scholarship in TESOL, intercultural communication, and applied linguistics.

First, it draws on the idea of discourse communities as hybrid and enculturating. When international students come to study in U.S. universities, they are not simply faced with the task of learning the vocabulary and grammar of a new language, but also of entering new academic discourse communities. These discourse communities may be based in a specific time or place or related to a specific group of people (Canagarajah 31). In order for non-native English speakers (NNES) to access these communities, they must learn the lexicon, cultural conventions, and expectations necessary to be viewed as members. NNES students come to American universities as members in other discourse communities from their home country, and they do not simply abandon those connections. Rather, they must find ways to maintain those memberships while simultaneously enculturating into American academic discourse. This process is commonly described as "negotiating" among discourse communities (Canagarajah; Hyland; Morita; Norton)—that is, seeking commonalities between and among multiple communities and building bridges and understandings between discourse communities to accommodate areas where they conflict (or seem to conflict).

One common example that illustrates how difficult this negotiation can become is the conceptualization of intellectual property. In the academic discourse community of a student's native country, freely borrowing the work of others might be the sign of a skillful writer; this seamless interweaving of borrowed and original ideas often clashes with U.S. academic discourse, in which acknowledging the work of others is paramount to ethical research. In this instance, students must decide if plagiarism is a viable or unethical practice (Drank & Krolls qtd. in Sutherland-Smith), and if their academic citations represent honesty or dishonesty. Students must negotiate their perceptions of themselves as honest *people* with their identities as honest *students* who cite correctly (Valentine 90).

The negotiation of identity is at the heart of the process of enculturating into a discourse community. NNES students bring with them ideas from their home discourse communities about what it means to be a learner, a writer, and a communicator, and these ideas have shaped how they understand their own identity. When they encounter the different understandings of writers, learners, and communicators that infuse the American academic discourse community, they cannot acquire those understandings without also changing their own identities. Returning to the example of intellectual property, students adhering to the notion of intellectual property as publicly shared might need to distance themselves from writing as a collective exercise and instead redefine themselves as individual writers with protected ideas.

Research in TESOL suggests that negotiating individual identity in relation to social identity (such as that found in a discourse community) works best when students have multiple opportunities to bridge oral and written contexts, or as Peirce states, "develop their oral and literacy skills by collapsing the boundaries between their classrooms and their communities" (26). Conversation Partners programs are effective for international students because they act as intermediary learning spaces between the rehearsed language practice of classroom learning and the impromptu nature of everyday conversation. Although students are in a learning space, they are also practicing one-on-one dialogue on topics of their choosing. The more modes in which language is practiced, the more discourse communities that a student can access and build upon.

But the other key component in supporting language learners—and the area where Conversation Partners programs have the most to offer—is access to cultural informants. Cultural informants are members of a discourse community who are willing and able to provide explicit information about that community to those who are non-members. International students who enter native English-speaking communities for the first time commonly have questions about using forms of salutation, appropriate physical gestures, how to gain the floor in classroom discussions, and how to politely address misunderstandings. In those cases, and many more, they are best able to learn and enculturate into the expectations of American universities when they can ask questions and get explicit answers from informants (Belhiah; Kurhila; Koshik; Seo & Koshik). Cultural informants serve as liaisons between students' established identities and their developing ones by engaging in discussion with students not only about what American expectations are, but how they differ from the students' home cultures. In addition to negotiating new identities, cultural informants can also serve to negotiate meaning in NNES's language learning and storytelling. Research shows that the negotiation of meaning through collective scaffolding can help English language learners to develop more precise details, arguments, and cultural contexts in their retelling of stories (Ko et. al.). Although the majority of scaffolding and negotiation of meaning research has focused on English language classrooms, these strategies are also present in one-on-one interaction.

What is a Conversation Partners Program?

At their most basic level, Conversation Partners programs aim to provide listening and speaking practice to international students. They are offered at many universities, and they are usually designed as peer-learning programs: American students serve as conversation partners for international students who are NNES. However, many Conversation Partners programs are *not* specifically designed for matriculated university students. Rather, they are more commonly connected with auxiliary intensive English language programs intended for language learners who have not yet developed enough language proficiency to enroll in regular university courses. Although matriculated international students often receive specialized writing instruction in first year writing programs, they usually lack a space for listening and speaking development and feedback that specifically addresses second language learning. Prior to the development of our Conversation Partners program, matriculated international students at our institution could not access one-on-one second language support through the university.

Conversation Partners sessions at our institution provide a space for this type of support and typically include a blend of informal conversation and one-on-one language instruction. For example, a session might move from discussing a problem with a roommate into politeness strategies to use when confronting the roommate. From there, the conversation could progress into an explicit lesson on phrasal verbs related to the roommate problem, such as "keep it down" or "work it out." It is not uncommon for conversations to move back and forth between social and academic contexts, such as from the roommate problem to discussing an issue with a professor or classmate. Conversation Partners can also help students interpret assignments, summarize and understand vocabulary from course readings, and discuss, brainstorm, and synthesize content that might be incorporated into a writing assignment or a project.

A hallmark of the Conversation Partners program at our writing center is that it is student-centered, and it provides opportunities for explicit learning about intercultural communication. The sessions are generally driven by questions that the NNES students bring, which often address intercultural communication issues such as politeness strategies used with professors and classmates or saving face in unfamiliar social situations. Students at our center often come to Conversation Partners to learn more slang and better understand ungrammatical forms of English that they hear in colloquial contexts. The reasons that NNES students use Conversation Partners are widely varied, but can all be traced back to the students' desire to use conversation sessions as a testing ground for membership in new discourse communities, whether those communities are specific classrooms, friendships, research cohorts, or the general public. Many international students exercise agency in their own language learning and participation in new discourse communities by incorporating their favored learning strategies into these new communities (see Morita), and in many cases, students who participate in Conversation Partners are also aiming to increase their participation in classroom discourse.

Integrating Conversation Partner Programs in a Writing Center

At one level, a Conversation Partners program is easy to integrate into a writing center. Conversation Partners programs are similar to writing tutoring programs in structure and format, and they are inherently peer-based, with the primary focus being the issues that students bring to the session. Conversation Partners programs also conform well to the space and administrative structure of many writing centers' appointment and record-keeping systems. At our center, Conversation Partners and tutoring staff share the same writing center space, social media accounts, signage, and appointment scheduling protocol—namely, drop-in or appointment sessions. They also participate in the same Conversation Partner staff development programs, which focus on student-centered practice and scaffolded language activities. At our institution, Conversation Partners are current students who are hired based on previous study abroad, teaching, and language learning experience; in some cases, our staff are international students themselves, or tutors who have overlapping qualifications.

Joint tutoring and Conversation Partner staff might make sense for many writing centers, since some research suggests that writing centers already provide a "conversation partners-like" service, even if they are not doing so intentionally (Powers; Thonus; Valentine). Such service often appears in the form of scaffolding techniques such as repeating or rephrasing questions, summarizing, or reaffirming students' speech (Weissberg 259), or through peer coaching that combines spoken and written skills into one session (see Valentine). As was the case with Su, the student I described at the beginning of this article, students come to the writing center for support on a writing

assignment, and they morph their session toward other concerns related to culture and discourse community expectations. The feedback they need cannot be categorized neatly into "grammar" or "content," but it instead encompasses a wide range of lexical needs (Nakamura). Research on tutoring sessions with ESL writers shows that NNES students often depend on tutors to inform their understanding of academic expectations, how to interact with professors, and how to write for an American audience (Blau, Hall, & Sparks; Powers). Powers notes that "our faculty found themselves increasingly in the role of informant rather than collaborator" (41), which indicates that this role cannot fall just on tutors, but must be shared by all writing center staff, and may call for new positions (such as Conversation Partners) to be created.

Despite research that shows the preexistence of conversation-like support developing at the writing center, some writing centers may not welcome it when students engage tutors on issues that are outside the scope of their writing assignments. Supporting students on their oral language development and on their development of cultural knowledge can seem quite distant from supporting them on "writing." In fact, in some cases, the time spent answering international students' questions about American academic or popular culture was perceived as problematic, especially if the questions caused the focus of the tutoring sessions to shift away from the student's assignment, or if they put the tutor in a role that was more directive than some centers prefer. Powers notes a tendency "…to define conferences where ESL readers got what they needed from us (i.e. direct help) as failures rather than successes" (42).

These concerns make sense, but if we want to help students develop as writers, we will be more effective if we place more substantial emphasis on intercultural communication. For NNES, learning isn't neatly bordered by writing assignments. It's an ongoing process involving multiple language modes, and it involves reevaluating their understanding of themselves as learners, as well as rethinking the role of writing center staff as not only collaborators, but language educators.

Embracing a focus on intercultural communication can have great benefits for writing center tutors and administrators, even beyond what it provides for NNES. Conversation Partners provides a perfect learning space for writing center staff and students alike to grapple with the full complexity of what it means to be an international student and to enculturate into a new discourse community. Serving as a cultural informant helps staff to recognize and

think critically about the ways that discourse communities and identities develop, and it can help them study and conceptualize language in broader ways than they might have otherwise. Rafoth notes that "figuring out how English works is something you cannot just squeeze in between tutoring sessions," but rather it is an endeavor that tutors must constantly be exploring independently (Bruce & Rafoth 214), and a Conversation Partners program can serve as the designated space for such exploration.

Finally, serving as cultural informants for international students can also lead to greater reciprocal exchange in which international students expand writing center tutors' and administrators' cultural knowledge in return. Due to the Conversation Partner program's emphasis on conversations about cross-culturalism, students and Conversation Partners have more opportunities to collaborate on something that they each have in-depth knowledge about—their own cultural expertise and expectations. The reciprocity of knowledge among staff and students creates a more equal distribution of power and dominance in the conversation, such as allowing both participants ample chances to gain the floor when speaking. Such conversational equity may also lead both speakers to feel more comfortable in conducting conversational repair, since cultural misunderstanding must be negotiated with each person acting as both an expert and novice across communities. At our center, this was especially true for international graduate students, who often knew the terminology necessary for their areas of specialization, but lacked the foundation in academic discourse to translate and structure these complex ideas in a way that American readers would understand. In one reported Conversation Partner session, a dance student was able to describe the artistry of her movements in metaphorical terms, but found it difficult to translate her understanding of dance into metaphors that were relatable for native English speakers. In other words, the student was an expert in the description of dance as metaphor, but a novice in wielding comprehensible *English* metaphors, whereas the inverse was true for the Conversation Partner.

Providing Integrated Support for Language Learners

Imagine if Su had entered a writing center with a Conversation Partners program in place. In that case, she might have started by working with a Conversation Partner with whom she could discuss and practice the many oral language components that accompanied her writing assignment. From there, she

could move fluidly between Conversation Partners and writing tutoring sessions and between learning the language and cultural knowledge necessary to join the particular discourse community of her theater class, as well as the discourse community used by writing center staff. Su may also better understand the conversation strategies used in tutor-tutee interactions by practicing conversational models typically used at the center. She could work with a Conversation Partner prior to a writing tutor session to discuss her interpretation of certain cultural topics, and how such topics might be received by her target audience. This would give her more opportunities to discuss all aspects of the assignment—from vocabulary comprehension and reading summarization to brainstorming and oral analysis. It would also give her more experience and practice with conversation models in academic settings. She might also come to Conversation Partners to unwind after a stressful revision process, or to seek encouragement on how to balance her workload with her continuing language development.

Su might also become a regular visitor to the center if she establishes a rapport with a Conversation Partner. She could feel a sense of importance by sharing her own knowledge of her home country's politics and pop culture while simultaneously receiving new information. In Conversation Partners, instead of her writing skills being under scrutiny, a mutual establishment of cultural understanding would take center stage. Bruce noted in interviews with ESL writers that many of them felt embarrassed when using writing center services and did not wish to publicly expose any weaknesses in their English writing skills (Bruce & Rafoth). International students such as Su may feel more comfortable consulting writing tutors after they've met with Conversation Partners, especially if the partner is also on the tutoring staff. Su would leave the center knowing that she was not only gaining access to new communities, but also establishing a social identity within the writing center as someone who both gives and receives valuable information.

Implications for Future Research

Conversation Partners programs are still a relatively new phenomenon with long-term implications for writing center pedagogy. Future research will need to address program assessment and the role that Conversation Partners plays in changing staff dynamics. The coexistence of these two programs poses the risk of tutoring and teaching becoming synonymous for the same service; a close analysis of

how tutors and Conversation Partners define their roles will help writing center staff better understand how to structure each program's identity in relation to the center as a whole. The hiring and training process for tutors and Conversation Partners also deserves more attention. A combination of both crossover and specialized student staff has been effective at our center, but more crossover training will be needed in order for the staff to seamlessly act as tutors, language teachers, and cultural informants. However, much of what the Conversation Partners do in a typical session is not structured, so a greater understanding of links between free chatting and teaching will need to be established.

A look at the NNES students who use both services is also a crucial component of future research into Conversation Partners programs. Certainly, tutors and tutees will develop new notions about what a writing center can and cannot do, and NNES students in particular have expressed that they feel more at home in the writing center with the knowledge that the center values and creates a space for explicit language practice. Conversation Partners can redefine a writing center as much more than an academic support service, but also as a place for language socialization.

Conversation Partners should not be viewed as an accessory to a writing center, but as a valuable player in uniting TESOL and writing center pedagogy. By creating a special space for NNES students within the writing center, we can begin to publicly demonstrate that we value students coming from other discourse communities and hope to inform them, as well as ourselves, about the differences present in students' oral and written discourse communities.

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THE SPIRITUAL CONNECTION: HONORING FAITH TRADITIONS AND POLISHING "SPIRITUAL LITERACIES" IN THE WRITING CONFERENCE AT CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS

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"I distrust pious phrases, particularly when they issue from my mouth."
    -Flannery O'Connor[1]

Including Faith-based Institutions in Writing Center Theory and Practice

Much has been said about the future of writing centers and the need for consultants to respect the multifaceted literacies and diverse backgrounds of their clientele.[2] In light of this issue's theme of "connected writing," writing center scholarship's interest in bridging gaps between race, socio-economic status, and multimodal literacies proves that genuine connection is truly a priority in writing center theory and practice. But scholars have said surprisingly little about the effect of "spiritual literacies" and faith traditions on student writing: for instance, how might a writer's faith inform her writing patterns and, relatedly, how does her writing represent her religious convictions?[3] What role does the consultant/tutor play in helping a writer negotiate the presentation of her spirituality within a larger community's written discourse? Perhaps most importantly, how can we help students write about their faith in a way that helps them connect with others outside of their faith tradition?

Consideration of the writing center at a faith-based college or university—indeed, the faith-based institution at-large—can help us probe the question of how spirituality impacts literacy, especially within the context of a writing conference. We are quick to study writing centers' relationship to non-native English speakers, non-traditional students, and clients with diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, but few writing center practitioners have yet investigated how we can respect and negotiate faith traditions in a writing conference.[4] I argue in this essay that a closer look at how we help clients write about their faith within the context of a Christian institution offers writing center scholarship the opportunity to connect "faith traditions" to our ongoing discussions about diversity.

I should qualify at the outset that I write from a Christian perspective and that my employer is a large, private Christian university in the Southwest.[5] While the most comprehensive form of scholarship on this topic might be a general consideration of faith traditions in writing center practice, I believe that the particularity of my context has much to reveal about the surprising challenges we encounter when students attempt to write about their experience of spirituality. My hope is that the observations I offer about my rhetorical context in the world of Christian higher education would be informative and enlightening to rhetorical contexts outside my own.

The article is divided into three sections: (1) I identify "spiritualized language" as a chief obstacle tutors encounter when working with Christian clients, especially at a college or university that openly identifies as Christian; (2) I stress the importance of allowing Christian students the opportunity to interrogate the rhetorical context of the faith-based institution; and (3) I suggest a few practical strategies to help tutors encourage writers to polish their spiritualized language in a way that does not denigrate the writer's use of religious rhetoric or sentiments. Although specific to Christian higher education, ideally these insights will reveal the complicated relationship between spirituality and personal literacy. Furthermore, the claims I pose in this essay are meant to encourage other scholar-practitioners to consider how writing center scholarship might expand to include the faith-based college or university, and, more generally, the ways writing centers must confront spirituality as a sometimes significant component of clients' identities.

The Reality of Spiritualized Language in Christian Contexts

To demonstrate what I mean by "spiritualized language," let me offer a vignette of my first day teaching freshman composition as a graduate student at a faith-based institution: in order to break the ice, I asked my students to share what brought them to our

institution in particular. The responses involved statements like,

> "I feel that God has called me to be here."
> "When I prayed about it, it just seemed like this was part of God's will for my life."
> "I want my time at college to bring glory to God."
> "God laid on my heart that this university would best prepare me for service to the Kingdom."
> "Coming here is a way I can strengthen my walk with the King."

Sometimes they were remarkably specific:

> "God has anointed me to be a senior pastor at a Baptist church, which is why I'm going to be a religion major."

During my time as a writing center tutor at the same institution, I also encountered this spiritualized language in student writing, but its prevalence was solidified for me when I heard it used aloud in the classroom setting. The widespread nature of what is commonly called "Christianese" also appeared to an overwhelming degree in individual writing conferences I held with my students as a composition instructor.

When my students use spiritualized language to describe vocational goals as well as everyday activities, I am both surprised and frustrated. While I am excited that they feel comfortable explaining their experiences through the lens of faith, I worry that these expressions will not translate to effective communication outside of the Christian college setting. Like many, I feel that a mark of mature faith—in any religious tradition—is the ability to communicate the nuances of that faith in such a way that outsiders need not acquire a spiritual dictionary to understand the heart of our meaning.

Instructors and writing center practitioners who work in Christian higher education often find themselves addressing this spiritual rhetoric in the written work of their students or clients—expressions and terminology that are belittlingly referred to as "Sunday school speak." Indeed, much of this rhetoric is exclusive and compromises the viability of writers' words in contexts outside of their institutions. More dishearteningly, though, it demonstrates writers' own limitations in speaking of spiritual matters. Popular evangelical Christian expressions such as "God laid this on my heart," "live life in the Word," or "doing Kingdom work" (as well as terms like "biblical womanhood" or even "evangelical" itself) often prove unstable when subjected to deconstruction, not because the writers' words are disingenuous, but because they have rarely been asked to articulate the implications of such statements to readers who are either unfamiliar with or not complicit in the use of

these expressions. As popular Christian writer Kathleen Norris explains,

> richly textured religious language…can lead us astray…[L]anguage such as this, lovely and resonant as it is, can cushion the radical nature of our intimacy with God and make Christian discipleship sound far too easy. (Norris 52-3)

The challenge for tutors is to gracefully identify "richly textured religious language" in client writing and encourage those writers to refine their language—all without denigrating the spiritual and emotional value of these oft-employed expressions. The danger of passing over these phrases without question, as Norris suggests above, is that the writer may fall prey to oversimplifying the often extremely complicated connotations of theological statements, which are artfully disguised by the veil of religious language.

Representatives of the Faith: Spiritualized Language and Rhetorical Context

I feel that the first step to helping student writers at religious institutions refine their own "Sunday school speak" is to introduce them to their rhetorical context—namely, a context (the Christian college or university) that carries with it a great deal of history. In doing so, we teach them that because Christianity was culturally taken for granted at the advent of the American university, the growth of higher level academic discourse about faith and Christian spirituality was stifled. Eventually, it was nearly silenced. By communicating to these writers that we are in a rebuilding (perhaps initial building) stage of a distinctly "Christian scholarship," we give them permission to help participate in its development. Furthermore, when writing center clients at a Christian college or university are entrusted with part of that responsibility, they may take the process much more seriously.[6]

Outside of the writing center, students' general expectations upon arriving at a Christian college or university are difficult to pinpoint. They may, of course, have practical questions: Will my professors pray at the start of each class? Will I be required to attend chapel? How late can I stay out? And what exactly does "dry campus" mean? But their conception of the oft-repeated phrase "integration of faith and learning" is less explicit. What do students imagine when they hear "faith and learning" throughout their university careers? Are the terms related in students' minds, or are they neatly tucked away in their own respective spheres?

David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith point to this division right at the outset of their important

collection *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (2011):

> [F]or a long time the constellation of Christian colleges and universities that continue to exist (and grow) in the United States often operated with a dualistic conception of the relationship between faith and learning…[W]hat made a college "Christian" was the presence of a chapel, the prescription of certain mores in the dorms, and a blanket of prayer over the whole project...[T]he classroom, laboratory, and scholarship were still considered neutral. (Smith and Smith 1)

Even at a major Christian research university, my first-year students in English composition can articulate this split. University Chapel and church are for faith, they say, while the classroom (even the religion classroom) is for learning. What students do not realize is how the history of Christianity in the American university perhaps encouraged this division. In fact, students' knowledge of the history of "Christian colleges," let alone "Christian thinking," is decidedly limited.

The writing tutor at a faith-based institution can play a substantial role in helping tutees understand the depth and breadth of their rhetorical context. While it is possible to prompt writers to talk about their general perception of Christianity in the academy, this may not be enough to help them fully realize how the Christian college or university occupies a particular rhetorical space. The tutor, in fact, maintains a unique position in the tutoring relationship since he or she can act as a translator for the rhetorical context, a context that even Christian students at a Christian-affiliated institution might not understand.

The history of Christianity in the American university is of course lengthy and complicated. In general, Christian students have never heard of significant historical studies such as George Marsden's *The Soul of the American University* (1996) or Mark Noll's groundbreaking *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1995). Introducing these students to larger conversations about faith and learning does not necessarily require that students read these texts, though. Simply giving students a bit of background on Christian colleges and universities provides perspective on their rhetorical context.

For example, writers at a Christian institution benefit from understanding the baggage that accompanies their context and the degree to which the larger scholarly community views that context with wariness. As George Marsden explains, "current suspicions of Christian perspectives in the academy are reactions—often understandable—to the long establishment of Christianity in higher education" (14). Tutors might briefly highlight how in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Protestant Christianity was the norm at most American universities, and "not much effort was made to relate Christianity specifically to what was being studied" (Marsden 15). Marsden continues, "[Christianity] had built few intellectual defenses, since its monopoly had never been seriously challenged" (15-16). This trend progressed, and the bifurcation of scholarship and faith persisted into the present, resulting in grounds for Noll's now well-known claim: "American evangelicals are not exemplary for their thinking, and they have not been so for several generations" (Noll 1). In other words, Christian writers must face the reality that, historically, their thinking has not always been welcome in the American academy.

A tutor might help a writer come to grips with this complicated history by posing questions that help situate the writer within their rhetorical context: "Your use of the phrase 'God laid this on my heart' tells your reader that you are a person of faith; in what ways do you believe your reader's perception of you changes after reading this line? How do you believe Christians are perceived in academic contexts today? Do Christians have a responsibility to 'explain themselves' when they employ religious language in their writing?" By opening up a dialogue about the relationship between faith and the academy, the tutor encourages the writer to see how faith—often one of the most significant aspects of an individual's identity—might influence the rhetorical context and vice versa.

Strategies for Revising Religious Jargon

Christian writers frequently do not realize they are using religious jargon, especially if most of their peers identify with Christianity and are engaged with Christian sub-culture. As Grace Veach explains, this language "can bewilder someone from outside their faith tradition," and "[b]ecause they have heard these words so frequently, [Christian students] don't even think when they use them" (447). I am by no means suggesting that tutors attempt to change the way their clients talk about faith in their peer groups, but I would argue that this jargon and rhetoric deserves special attention if we want to develop these Christian tutees into thoughtful writers who can continue to engage issues of faith in contexts outside of the Christian college milieu.

A short brainstorming session of the various connotations of a single word or phrase that appears repeatedly in client writing can reveal its rhetorical instability and allow the writer to "re-see" the term.

Even at a Christian college or university, the spiritual backgrounds of students are varied (often not "Christian" at all), and this, in turn, contributes to the diversity of connotations attached to a word or phrase. For example, when I pose "biblical womanhood" to my students in the composition classroom and ask what associations it provokes, I get the following responses (which I like to list on the blackboard):

> feminine; dainty; mother; fertility; submission; Michelle Duggar; oppression; Proverbs 31 woman; pretty; kind; follows Bible's "rules" for women; stay-at- home mom; sweet; family-focused; the girl who wrote *Kisses from Katie* [author Katie Davis]; helpmeet; Virgin Mary[7]

The spectrum of these associations is fascinating. It is also of note that most of my students (particularly female students) are in pre-professional programs such as pre-business or pre-medicine. The women who come to mind for "biblical womanhood" are Michelle Duggar, mother to 19 and star of the TLC reality show *19 Kids and Counting*; Katie Davis, the now famous 22 year-old missionary who moved to Uganda and is in the process of adopting 13 little girls; and the Virgin Mary herself. These extremes are a far cry from the vocational paths many of my female students will pursue (the mention of the word "oppression" in the brainstorming session highlights this paradox). Sheryl Sandberg, successful COO of Facebook and author of the bestseller *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013), apparently does not make the "biblical womanhood" cut even though she is a more natural mentor for my pre-professional female students.

The point of airing these verbal associations in a public forum is to reveal the inconsistencies of this religious jargon, which is a task students of faith are rarely asked to do in religious contexts. Indeed, the thesis of Rachel Held Evan's recent book, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* (2012), is to expose the inconsistencies in the very term I posed to my students. As Evans explains, "In an attempt to simplify, we try to force the Bible's cacophony of voices into a single tone, to turn a complicated and at times troubling holy text into a list of bullet points we can put in a manifesto or creed" (295). The same might be said of spiritual language in student and client writing. In an effort to create a common spiritual lexicon—that includes expressions like "house of God," "biblical attitude," or "Spirit of God"—Christians often err on the side of oversimplification.

In the writing center conference, brainstorming the different connotations of religious language can happen on a smaller scale. Even asking the client to briefly poll off-duty tutors during the writing conference can give her an opportunity to step outside of her own perspective. In writing conferences with my own composition students, I will ask them to create a word cloud around the jargon in question, a visual reminder that some words are subject to a high level of instability. When a writer realizes that a word or expression might not hold up to scrutiny, especially outside the context of a Christian institution, they are more likely to reconsider their diction and opt for more inclusive language. Nancy Welch supports this posture toward "re-vision" when she writes that serious revision "begins with a sense of *dissonance*, of something that hasn't or won't adapt" (Welch 30, original emphasis). The dissonance for writers that arises when they see that an oft-repeated religious phrase cannot always adapt to other contexts is invaluable in polishing their habitual use of spiritualized language.

Contextualizing and revising spiritually rich expressions in isolation are helpful practices, but longer passages of writing that rely on religious jargon to communicate meaning reveal how spiritual language is often a central component of writers' understanding of their faith. As Jennifer Gray suggests, when we examine student language we are able to perceive "not only what the student is communicating, but also what the student is doing, what position the student is taking, what relationship the student is advancing with her subject, and *how the student values what she is discussing*" (Gray 1, my emphasis). If, for instance, a writer's spiritual literacy includes the phrase "filled with the Spirit" to explain heightened moments of spiritual ecstasy, then it could perhaps feel patronizing to have an instructor probe by saying, "Sure, but what do you *really mean* by that?" Above all, we must respect the faith traditions of our students while still pushing them to re-see the implications of their words. A more neutral question in this instance might be, "What do you value about this spiritual expression—'filled with the Spirit'?" By stressing that the enactment of one's personal literacy is often tied to an articulation of values, tutors can push tutees toward a deeper understanding of why they write the way they do.

On a practical level, I believe that the best way to encourage writers to be sensitive to the religious language they use in their own writing is to first distance them from it by introducing a piece of writing from an anonymous student they have never met. Then, encourage them to empathize with the anonymous student by imagining that student's own spiritual baggage via the language they use. By employing a kind of embodied revision (or, in other words, seeing the topic from the imagined perspective of the other writer), these writers are pushed to re-see

a prototype of another who relies on spiritualized language—and who may not be so different from the writer him or herself.

To demonstrate, I have included a selection of writing that I feel best represents the "richly textured religious language" to which Christian students so often revert. The topic, "required chapel attendance," is familiar to my students since they are required by the university to attend a class-wide chapel service twice a week. In this example, language classified as "Sunday school speak" is italicized:

> When students walk into a University Chapel service, they should be *overwhelmed by the Spirit of God*. Chapel is very class-like, and there are a lot of rules about using cell phones and laptops. It just doesn't feel like *a house of God*. People have a different attitude when they walk into a sanctuary on Sunday mornings, but this *biblical attitude* doesn't appear when they walk into chapel services during the week. The problem I see is that chapel isn't making the room into *holy space charged with God's presence*, and the students required to go aren't meeting the chaplains halfway with their own attitude. To fix this, chapel should feel more like Sunday morning so students would have reason to treat it seriously.

After reading this passage, it is clear that the writer has a genuine interest in altering her chapel experience. But the ambiguity begins in the first sentence: "[students] should be overwhelmed by the Spirit of God." To a certain degree, readers can intuit the general meaning of this phrase, but what the student does not realize is how the experience of "being overwhelmed by the Spirit of God" inevitably varies from person to person. And what exactly does the student mean by "Spirit of God?" Is this feeling akin to Eastern medicine's vision of Chi? Is it a ghostly, supernatural figure that participants actually see? The implications of "spirit" alone are complicated. And what of "house of God?" How do we distinguish between places that are God's house and others that are not?

When I encounter a student who frequently relies on religious jargon in his writing, I use roughly 5-7 minutes of the writing conference to ask him to read and revise this short passage I've included above. After listening to the student read the passage aloud, I pose a series of questions that are meant to help him practice "re-seeing" the religious jargon he himself uses through the eyes of an anonymous student: What is this student's religious background? Has she been a part of a religious community for most of her life, or is she relatively new to Christianity? Who taught her to use this language when she speaks of matters of faith?

What is her overall assessment of chapel? Is she disappointed in chapel itself, or disappointed in her fellow participants?

A student's answers to these questions are imagined realities, of course, but this practice encourages students to picture the writer behind the writing. When they practice empathizing with something they would normally look down on, the tone of their revisions is generally more careful and thoughtful. The goal, I explain during the conference, is for them to help this imagined student get her meaning across in a way that is not rhetorically exclusive or ambiguous, but that still maintains the integrity of her perspective. Furthermore, I push students to practice revising the student's thought-process, not just substitute jargon for more inclusive phrases. (When students are finished revising the passage, I tell them that I myself wrote the passage after pulling together an amalgamation of terms I have encountered in the classroom and in conferences with students.)

While most of the revisions these student writers produced are thoughtful and empathetic, they could be grouped into two categories with varying levels of effectiveness: (1) revisions in which students attempt to revise religious jargon with more religious jargon and (2) revisions that remain very attached to the original excerpt while not only clarifying the anonymous student's apparent meaning, but also deepening it.[8] The following selections demonstrate both kinds of revisions. Original spelling, syntax, and phraseology are maintained in all selections.

The first category of revisions revealed just how ingrained this spiritual language might be in the minds of students:

> When students walk into University Chapel, they should have an open mind and be ready to learn about the Word of God. It just doesn't feel like a good environment to learn about God. The problem I see is that chapel isn't making the room a church filled with joy and longing to learn about God.

One revision in this first category even challenged the anonymous student's complaint, implying that compulsory chapel attendance might be equivalent to a kind of holy obedience:

> When students walk into a University Chapel service, they should be happy to rejoice in the name of God. Chapel is very charged with God's presence due to the fact that students are required to go. The "requirement" of chapel seems to rub some students the wrong way.

The second category of revisions, though, displays embodied revision at its best. These students were

careful to maintain the overall structure of the anonymous student's excerpt, but carefully nuanced the student's logic as well and language:

> Chapel is described as a space to drop what is causing you stress, feel connected to God, and leave feeling refreshed and rejuvenated—in the syllabus, that is. The chapel employees believe that rigid rules on cell phone and laptop use, forced attendance, and strict policies allow for such a place. However, these components look identical to what is expected in an academic class, which in no sense is a place to be stress-free and connected to a higher being.
>
> When students walk into a University Chapel service, they should feel a sense of invitation. However, Chapel is very class-like, and there are a lot of rules about using cell phones and laptops…The problem I see is that chapel is not making the room inviting, and the students required to go should not feel as if they are constantly being observed by the chaplains based on behavior.

What these student revisions reveal is the value of *nuance* in writing about spiritual matters. In particular, the second example's suggestion that students "should feel a sense of invitation" when they attend Chapel effectively communicates the conventional implications of a religious service without overwhelming the reader with specialized religious language. This exercise not only asks students to empathize with an unknown writer (who is actually their instructor in disguise), but also helps them justify the value of carefully choosing language that is nuanced, inclusive, and respectful of the sentiments of spirituality. Practicing this kind of revision also lets the writer and the tutor/instructor broach a bigger conversation about how we talk about faith and how it affects our public discourse.

Many of these revisions simply require students to more thoughtfully define their terms, but these particular phrases and expressions occupy an emotional position in students' spiritual histories.[9] If a student has only ever used the phrase "moved by the Spirit of God" in relation to a personal conversion experience, then they may feel their experience is diminished when probed to "define their terms." The hope, however, is that further interrogation actually adds value to the spiritual experience in the long run since it allows them to legitimize their experience without relying on exclusive or even overly pious language. Flannery O'Connor's words in the headnote of this essay—"I distrust pious phrases, particularly when they issue from my mouth"—remind us that activities like the ones I suggest here push writers to question the words that "issue from [their] mouth[s]," a kind of self-study that privileges introspection, reflection, and recognition of one's particular rhetorical and spiritual contexts. In the rhetorical context of the Christian faith specifically, these practices encourage writers not only to consider the persuasive impact of their writing, but also to assume a more charitable posture when they address matters of faith—a posture non-Christians would affirm as well.

Conclusion

As I hope I have demonstrated in this article, the writing center housed in a faith-based institution is full of research potential for how religious students write about faith within a religious context. The notion that Christian students, in particular, may have their own rhetorical patterns in relation to their spirituality perhaps indicates that students of other cultural demographics may have comparable patterns yet to be explored. It is time for writing center scholarship to more openly consider the unique perspective of writing centers housed in religious institutions and to investigate what they can add to the conversation on diversity. In pursuit of connection across cultural, ethnic, economic, and social borders in the writing center, we must not diminish the reality that faith tradition often stretches across these boundaries, simultaneously transcending and complicating the neat categories we would like to assign to our research.

Notes

1. O'Connor, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 53
2. Indeed, Volume 10.1 of *Praxis* featured articles that addressed the theme, "Diversity in the Writing Center."
3. My use of the term "spiritual literacy" is a re-imagination of Wendy Bishop's concept of "personal literacy." Bishop defines "personal literacy" in this way: "the story of coming into language, of learning how to read and write, of learning what reading and writing mean in one's life" (Bishop 52).
4. One short article of interest on this point is Laura Rich's "When Theologies Conflict: Reflections on role issues in a Christian writing center." Rich highlights the unique way in which tutors have access to conversations about faith, especially at a Christian institution, since the conference setting lends itself to a detail-oriented interrogation of claims and ideas.
5. My university is affiliated with a Protestant denomination, but my use of the term "Christian" is certainly inclusive of all North American institutions that claim a Christian heritage, be their affiliation Catholic, LDS, Protestant, etc.
6. The concept of "Christian scholarship" in higher education is fairly recent. For more on the nature of Christian scholarship as well as its position within the academy, I suggest George Marsden's *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

7. I collected these responses on the blackboard during a discussion of "loaded words" in my Fall 2013 composition class.

8. These revision selections were collected over the course of the Spring 2013 semester. Students were informed that their revisions were a part of a larger study on religious language in college writing and that selections of their work might be anonymously cited in a written report.

9. Although Sharon Crowley's *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism* strongly criticizes the Christian Right's use of emotional language for persuasive ends (to the extent that she risks alienating readers who identify as Christian but not fundamentalist), she is correct in noting that this kind of language is often fueled by the speaker's emotional connection to the words.

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CRITIQUING THE CENTER: THE ROLE OF TUTOR EVALUATIONS IN AN OPEN ADMISSIONS WRITING CENTER

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Though created to give its inhabitants the feeling of comfort, structure, and control, suburbia has been co-opted by postmodernists seeking to crack its modernist façade to reveal the hybridity, fragmentation, and hegemony at its commodified heart (Silverstone). The in-between-ness of suburbia, that liminal zone between the country and the city, has its academic counterpart in the writing center, a complex site of social, material, and discursive relations that construct experiences on all levels of academic life. Like the suburb, a writing center can be seen as an example of Edward Soja's "third space," a part of institutional geography, yet located at a crossroads of many different, overlapping, and conflicting rhetorical and ideological ecosystems. Long Island, New York is the birthplace of the suburb and so its promises of luxury, centrality, and ease inform the lives of Long Islanders, young and old. The Suffolk County Community College Writing Center services the biggest community college on Long Island, with 25,000 students enrolled; the Writing Center sees about 2,000 of these students every semester.

My purpose for this article is twofold: to discuss the SCCC tutor evaluation process and to question what happens when the results of an evaluation fly in the face of present scholarship and negate current conceptions and perceptions of postmodern writing centers. As an open admissions commuter school bursting with diversity, SCCC seems like the poster child for postmodern existence amongst the suburban sprawl of Long Island, New York, and yet students using and dwelling in the writing center seem to be seeking shelter from the demands of a postmodern world. At our community college, the Writing Center is often utilized as a way-station between classes, jobs, and other obligations for our suburban students, thus increasing the traffic through our door. Attending a commuter school, the writing center is a place, a kind of educational and social suburb, where students could find some stable bearing in the midst of the frenzied activities that make up twenty-first century living on Long Island.

Though the SCCC Writing Center has been open since the early 1990's, the high volume of students and the demands placed on the tutors had left little time for reflection on theory or practice. On becoming coordinator in August of 2008, and at the risk of being hated from the moment I walked in the door, I decided to implement a brief evaluation form to better gauge (outside of anecdotal information) how the tutors were performing and if we were actually meeting the needs of our clients. Previous to the evaluation system, tutors (I included) assumed that we were satisfying the composing demands of our constituency; what we did not realize was that our students had many other needs, most outside of writing and assignments, that had more to do with spatial and social presence, location, and "centering" within the institutional and physical geography of the college.

In the fall of 2008, the SCCC Writing Center instituted an evaluation form to assess how effective tutors were in meeting student needs and to reflect on tutor practices. The tutor evaluations shed light on not only what students needed from our writing center but what they were not getting from their college experience. The respondents' need for a safe, comfortable, and secure "place," a material, centralized area where they could find some stability in their displaced lives, calls into question the notion that writing centers are spaces of multiplicity, fluidity, and transitional subjectivities (Grimm, Owens, Bouquet and Learner). As the cultural and economic dreams of suburbia seem to be fading away for these community college students, the yearning for a stable, unambiguous space is often projected onto our writing center.

Several spatial compositionists, such as Johnathon Mauk, perceive "traditional academic space" as becoming fragmented, disrupted, and "place-less" by the movement away from campus of different kinds of students with different academic needs and off-campus commitments who cannot locate themselves physically, socially, or discursively in traditional composition classrooms. Writing centers themselves have been discussed and imagined as "in-between places," occupying "a liminal zone operating somewhere between the 'native' language practices of their clientele and the discursive demands of the

academy" (Owens 73). Much has been written on how writing centers can help or hinder this negotiation of instructor expectations and student voice and yet our evaluations displayed anxiety over a different, though related, negotiation involving space and place. Students, whether residential or commuter, still have to interact significantly with some aspect of college geography, places and spaces that, far from being "discursive vacuums" (Mauk 371), have a profound effect on the spatial, social, and rhetorical strategies utilized by students not only composing for a writing class but also in constructing identities that encompass many different spatial-socio-discursive experiences (not only the academic ones).

The Evaluations

Beginning in August 2008, the SCCC Writing Center instituted a post-session evaluation. This evaluation was created and implemented in order to encourage reflection on tutor practice, assess how effective tutors were in addressing student needs, and to try to understand how tutors are perceived by students in terms of specific practices, areas of focus, and behaviors deemed "helpful." The central research questions addressed by the evaluations were what do students want out of sessions and are they getting it from tutors. The evaluation also sought to gauge the probability of students returning to the writing center and at what frequency.

For the Fall 2008 semester, 304 evaluations were collected by the entire writing center staff: 8 Professional Assistants (adjunct faculty that work part time at the writing center), 5 student tutors, and a coordinator. The evaluation sheet was given to students at the end of a tutoring session. Students were asked to fill out the sheet in the writing center. A box was used to collect the evaluations, and the coordinator would collect the evaluations three times a week, read them, and put them in the corresponding tutor's mailbox. The tutor would read the evaluation and return them to the coordinator.

The evaluation sheet consisted of four questions, a combination of open-ended and Likert scale questions based on a previous evaluation form I had used in previous work at the University of Rhode Island's writing center.

The questions were as follows:
1. What was the most useful part of the session for you today?
2. How helpful was the tutor/consultant you worked with?
   Not Helpful
   Somewhat Helpful

Very Helpful
Why?
3. How likely are you to return to the Writing Center to work on this or other writing projects?
   Not Likely
   Somewhat Likely
   Very Likely
   Why?
4. Any suggestions for improvement or final comments about your experience?

Responses to Questions

The most common written comments focused on the following topics:
- Editing and Proofreading
- Citations/Bibliography (MLA and APA formats)
- Thesis statement
- Essay structure and organization
- Understanding assignments
- Meeting professor expectations

In particular, students found the following methods helpful in addressing these needs:
- Using examples/models
- Finding errors
- Explaining the "how and why" of drafting and revising
- Encouraging students to ask "why" and receive clarification from professors
- Encouraging students to take ownership of their writing

These content and composing related areas were often combined with discussions of how tutors helped to alleviate writing and academic anxieties as well as personal doubts about their abilities. Students expressed that tutors encouraged them, gave them support and confidence, and were "patient," "caring," and "kind." Students felt "connected" to tutors during sessions, and this connection was displayed through tutors' willingness to listen, assuring students of their abilities, and suggesting additional resources to support students.

Those students who did respond to the final question focused almost exclusively on how the writing center helped to alleviate anxieties about writing, assignments, and academia in general. Written responses almost exclusively reflected two basic subject groups: first year students and returning students who had not been in school for a significant amount of time. Both of these subject groups expressed considerable concerns about their ability to

perform, succeed, and acclimate themselves into the academic community of SCCC. Both subject groups expressed gratitude to the writing center for encouraging them and giving them confidence to believe in themselves and their ability to succeed. Specifically, several participants of both groups remarked that the writing center made them feel "important," took their work "seriously," and helped to address "embarrassment" that hindered their experiences in and out of class at SCCC. Several participants in the returning student subject group remarked that had they known about the writing center sooner they would have not dropped out of SCCC or would have come back sooner.

Though the evaluation was geared towards specific areas of the composing process, student responses focused almost exclusively on how the writing center helped to alleviate anxieties about acclimation, adaption, support, and placement in the college community and academia in general by offering them a "place": somewhere that was "quiet," "spacious," "inviting," and "open." Several respondents mentioned the use of the writing center's tables and chairs to study, to sit and read between classes or while waiting for a bus or their ride, and to just "spread out" their "stuff." The material, technological resources were also cited in terms of the ability to plug in laptops and use the printer from their laptops.

Based on my own observations and experiences with students at SCCC, this need to claim or dwell in a space, a space that could also help them with academic and professional tasks, reflects the fragmented life that most of these students live. Many of the students who utilize the SCCC writing center are "students of difference … included but not invited to invent a new university that might suit them" (Grimm 10). These students have many demands and obligations that pull them away from locating themselves in the college's physical and institutional geographies, and yet the writing center acts like a literal "center" for their busy, fragmented lives.

Questioning the Evaluations

I was happy with the results of the evaluations, but I started to question whether we were doing more harm than good in terms of postmodern critical writing center literature. As evidenced by recent discussions of the role of writing centers in a multi-modal digital society (Balester, Grimm, Grutsch McKinney, Lee, Sheridan, Silver, [2012], and Boquet and Learner [2012]), the problematizing and contesting of dominate literary practices and mediums

in order to critique and resist the writing center's institutional role of managing and containing difference has become an important part of the ethos of the postmodern writing center. Sue Mendelsohn's dazzling "Visualizing Writing Consulting" video presentation suggests that new media and the ability to intervene in the complex relationships between reader, writer, and discourse have significantly altered how tutoring and writing centers can be conceived and experienced. As postmodern/human geographers such as Paul Knox and Sallie Marston might imply and writing center practioners know, a writing center is not a neutral oasis removed from everyday life, but exists at the intersection of local, institutional, global, and discipline influences and conditions. A writing center has a unique perspective on institutional power relations and politics that influence the work done in college because of its "alongside" position. Therefore, writing centers can engage in institutional critique identifying and questioning the relationships and discourses that students and faculty carry with them and interact with on campus.

As James Porter, et. al. have noted, institutional hierarchy is directly related to geography— where one is placed on the campus map has significant connections to where one is placed in campus hierarchy—and so the physical location of a writing center (Centralized? On the margins of the campus? A part of a Skills Center? Its own entity? Old building? New building? Basement? Top floor?) can tell us much about how a writing center is perceived by the academic institution it is connected to. Many writing centers exist outside but alongside and can take advantage of tensions and gaps between institution, classroom, and everyday life

Because of our particular physical location and placement in institutional hierarchy, the SCCC Writing Center could analyze how institutional power relations and positioning influences student/faculty/staff subjectivities and our writerly selves. Many students who come to our writing center complain about their frustrations with the bureaucracy of SCCC (registrar, financial aid, campus policies) and struggle to connect their complex lives with the demands of their classes and professors. Though they are coming for help with specific projects and writing assignments, several of the tutors encourage students to write public documents, petitions, letters, and e-mails to administrators and professors addressing their dissatisfaction with how they are treated by and placed in the institutional hierarchy.

This notion of making institutional and disciplinary rhetoric personal and specific rather than disembodied and distant is an attempt to encourage

serious material, social, and discursive engagement with the complex dynamics of campus life at SCCC, a "third space" of the personal, public and institutional funneled through the writing center. The crucial awareness of how hierarchies and power are spatialized, mapped, and rhetoricized—silenced, marginalized, ignored, or privileged through space and discourse—has slowly been making its way into the SCCC writing center ethos of some, though certainly not all, of the tutors. As an in-between place, not quite classroom not quite student space (just as a suburb is not quite city and not quite country), a writing center can call attention to this positioning and location and offer students a place (materially and rhetorically) from which to identify and challenge that positioning and location.

And yet because writing centers are a part of an institution, dependent on the institution for budgets and funding and often need to justify themselves to the institution by proving their worth to the institution, is the writing center the place for true institutional change? Can a writing center resist the very positioning that sustains and nurtures it? Do all the tutors share an institutionally aware tutoring pedagogy? Outside of those students who do seek "justice" from the institution, do we have a duty to provide unconditional support and acclimation into the institution through facilitating writing as a college resource? What kind of "place" would best serve our student population and our tutors? A suburb (an "oasis" of rest and rejuvenation) or a contact zone (a site of conflict and self-awareness) or the borderlands (a space of ambiguity and transition)?

These questions suggest that evaluations can be instrumental in a form of mapping that goes beyond mere geographical positioning. Borrowing from the University of Rhode Island's writing center, the concept and practice of Tutorial Interaction Maps, the visual and discursive diagraming of tutoring sessions, could aid in identifying and tracking the ways tutors, students, instructors, and administrators all are complicit in how a writing center is conceived, perceived, and lived through language, materiality, and social relationships and positioning. Noting how directive or facilitating a tutor is in a session and the reasons for the strategies utilized in the session can raise awareness of the tutor's role in supporting or critiquing dominant discourses, locations, and identities in the institution. And yet, we also have to remember that the acts of mapping and spatial planning can be a way to control and colonize as well.

As we have continued to collect evaluations, I still question the consequences of constructing a writing center as an objective, secure, stable place: can being too familiar with spaces, genres, and topics work to the detriment of critical and postmodern writing center pedagogies? What happens when students become too close to these experiences and take then to be "normal" and "natural," overlooking, ignoring, or forgetting the constructed material, ideological, and discursive production of structures of feeling, academia, and the institution? Can consistent use, presence in, and travel through spaces and places actually help institutional and ideological hegemony become ordinary, common, and accepted? Our evaluations have revealed that familiarity hasn't bred contempt but just the opposite: returning students feel more secure, empowered, and willing to take risks with their writing, positioning, and identities at the college. More and more students are seeking help with challenging institutional rules and regulations they feel are unfair or unjust through the composing of letters and petitions. Though the staff often agrees with these rules (such as the regulation that smokers must stand at least 50 feet away from the building), it is encouraging to see students actively using writing to question institutional policies, no matter how selfish the motive may be.

I have started in an informal way to ask my staff these questions in order to engage with what Julie Drew calls the "politics of place": "ways in which place plays a role in producing texts and how such relationships affect the discursive work that writers attempt from within the university" (57), seeing SCCC as producing multiple, conflicting spaces reflecting power relationships that include or exclude depending on imposed, shifting, and negotiated material conditions, institutional statuses and identities, as well as accepted and permitted discourse conventions of the various academic and social environments of the campus. Could the writing center problematize familiarity, transform these spatial-social-discursive feelings and practices into strategies and tactics for critique, resistance, and contribution, and still help students construct a notion of academic spaces as secure places? A place to start may be in looking at the language and metaphors we use to define a writing center and what we do there. The work of Mandy Suhr-Systma and Shan-Estelle Brown have identified oppression and resistance as being embedded in the very words we use to describe and label ourselves, our constituents, and the work we do in a writing center. Bringing a more critical awareness to how language influences both theory and practice through evaluations and heuristics can show us the very tangible consequences of the words we choose to talk about writing and tutoring.

These issues of identity, place, and discourse were not critiqued by the staff as most of the tutors asked whether it was their place to do this. Many of the new students I talked to at the SCCC writing center spoke about their need to feel comfortable, welcomed, and connected to their academic places, that the transition from home spaces to college spaces was made easier for them by locating and grounding themselves unambiguously in the spatial-socio-rhetorical geographies of the college in ways that allowed them to quickly identify and internalize the practices, conventions, and expectations for being a "productive" member of the SCCC community. So was the rejection of ideology and institutional hierarchical positioning a necessary strategy for surviving and integrating into their first semester at SCCC?

For many of the incoming students, a heightened awareness of institutional power relations and mapping made them feel "wrong," "confused," "nervous," and alienated. The vast majority of students I spoke with want stability, security, an unambiguous place of comfort and support for their writing but can a writing center ever give them that?

In addition to the help they receive with their writing, students conceive, perceive, and live the writing center as an environment that is not decentralized or fluid or multiple, but rather a constant, coherent, lucid place to find some clarity in their increasingly fragmented lives. The writing center is a reliable presence for these students who find themselves between communities, projects, discourses, and identities. Yet do writing center practioners have an ethical responsibility to problematize and deconstruct notions of transparent, absolute space, identities, and discourses? This tension between student, tutor, and institutional desires can be either liberatory or paralyzing depending on the context (Ortoleva). Whose needs are to be honored and respected?

Conclusions

Part of a postmodern writing center's mission should be to help students position themselves in the college geography and critique that positioning as well. The negotiation between being supportive and raising consciousness is a difficult line to walk when dealing with students' lives and their investments in education. Tutor evaluations are a valuable way to aid in constructing a social, academic, and material guide to help those not favorable positioned in institutional hierarchies. Using the ongoing evaluation process and the conversations they have generated between myself,

the tutors, and students who use the writing center, I have been attempting to re-evaluate and reposition writing center "good intentions" as an inclusive environment that encompasses public and private, recreational and professional, and "real life" and the academic as interconnecting relationships, experiences, and practices that depend on each other to structure how writing center work is conceived, perceived, and lived by tutors and students.

In order to gauge and explore these environmental relationships, multiple levels of evaluation, feedback, and reflection must be integrated into training, practice, and policy.

The writing center is informed by multiple competing forces: disciplinary, institutional, pedagogical, material, and the needs of the students the center is serving. As the history of writing centers has shown us, finding a place in the discipline was not easy, nor has finding a place in the institutional and physical geographies in which writing centers are located. Postmodern theory has given writing centers more credibility and validity in English Studies, and yet writing center practioners need to be aware of the distance between how we see ourselves as a discipline and how our writing centers actually function in everyday life. Writing centers need to be aware of their "good intentions," be they material, discursive, or social, and not neglect the very students we are trying to help. Though we can't restore the "glory" days of suburbia (nor should we be striving to do so), writing centers can help students to critique how material environment, discourses, and identities are all interconnected, and can be used to center or decenter their experiences and ours in a writing center. Evaluations give students a voice, a presence, and an identity in the philosophy and daily practices of a writing center.

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USING METAGENRE AND ECOCOMPOSITION TO TRAIN WRITING CENTER TUTORS FOR WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

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Half a decade ago, in a now famous keynote address to the 2008 International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference, Susan H. McLeod pronounced that "Writing Across the Curriculum has survived and is thriving thirty-five years after it began." In fact, Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing in the Disciplines (WAC/WID) programs have become mainstays in many American institutions of education. Based on their "State of WAC/WID in 2010 Methods and Results of the US Survey of the International WAC/WID Mapping Project," Chris Thaiss and Tara Porter report that, since 1987, such programs have "grown by roughly one-third" (534). WAC/WID programs are, indeed, flourishing.

There to support these programs have been writing centers. While centers cannot claim, of course, to be responsible for WAC/WID's phenomenal rise, centers are key places where students talk about writing with other students (Harris), and given that the writing centers' tutors usually have varied majors (not all are seeking an English degree), centers have become a *de facto* "hub" for talking about writing in all disciplines (Golden). As Paulette Golden has described in her *Praxis* article, a center is "the place that teaches students *how* to navigate the constraints of different writing contexts" (emphasis in the original). As a long-time director of a center (twenty years and counting), I agree that centers are "hubs," playing an important role in assisting clients with writing in all disciplines. To fulfill this role, tutors must help students, regardless of discipline; or as Golden explains, "The Writing Center tutors should be able to demystify the diverse writing practices students will encounter."

It is a daunting prospect. How can consultants be ready to assist with assignments from various disciplines? How can tutor training help student writers see the larger picture of what writing in the academy entails? How can tutors be trained to help student writers understand the vital role students themselves play in a discipline? This paper explores the current theories for training tutors to work with writing in the disciplines and, then, advocates changes to this training, changes that broaden the perspective for both tutors and their clients so that students understand what it means to know and to write at college, regardless of the discipline.

For over twenty years writing center scholars (Kiedaisch and Dinitz; Tinberg and Cupples; Shamoon and Burns; Powers and Nelson; Walker) have debated the best approach for handling WAC/WID students, with this debate focusing on whether tutors should be trained as specialists or generalists. The specialist camp has made good points. A tutor majoring in History helping another History student can make the session "revolve around the rhetoric of the discipline" (Walker 27) and "help clients from their fields learn discourse strategies in more productive ways than a generalist tutor" (Walker 27). The specialists helping in their area of expertise or major can even point out factual problems, as one tutor told me she did when she assisted a client who was analyzing a medieval poem. Using specialist tutors also makes good sense when tutors are assigned to a specific course.

But the specialist approach poses problems. Staffing a center with these types of tutors ignores practical concerns. No directors can hire tutors for every discipline at a college or university: the staff is just not there. Then, too, training tutors as specialists assumes disciplinary writing is monolithic; "writing in History" or "writing in Philosophy," however, is merely a convenient label, ignoring how each discipline has its own contexts and sub-specialties, especially when one considers cross-disciplinary majors, like Criminal Justice or Career Counseling (Thais 96). To add to the confusion, within one discipline, two professors may require different ways of writing. And some disciplines (like Gender Studies)—new and developing—are still "evolving" (Clark and Herandez) so that their techniques are ever changing. Even assuming that disciplines do exist and that directors could point out the features embodied in the fields, the sheer weight of detail would, most likely, crush tutors. Then, too, having specialist tutors feels very narrowed, like proverbial tunnel vision, so that the center might fail to provide clients a broader sense about the writing and knowing (Carter) that occurs across a university or college—that is, those features are pertinent to all disciplines.

Is the answer, then, to use generalist tutors? An advantage of these "uninformed" tutors is that the balance of power shifts to the clients so that they focus on their disciplines more effectively (Walker 28), discovering the conventions of their majors (Greiner; Hubbuch). For instance, generalist tutors can ask students writing a Sociology essay, "Can you use personal experience to support your case in this paper?" or for a History paper, "How recent should your sources be?" When generalists admit to clients their lack of expertise in a discipline, both students and tutors can turn to disciplinary models for assistance (Savani). Recently, my center experienced this emphasis on models. When a Hotel and Tourism professor required his two sections of seniors to bring their capstone business plans to the center, the professor provided a model that tutors and clients examined for its content, arrangement, diction, and layout. The result was that tutors and clients both learned from each other, or as one tutor explained to me, "Working with the wide variety of students that come through the Writing Lab can be an educational experience for the tutors as well as the clients."

But the generalist approach also has disadvantages. In shifting the "balance of power" (Walker 28), tutors sometimes feel they have not helped clients enough, stumbling through sessions, feeling so flummoxed they fall back on only the most general of rhetorical techniques, unable to ask questions that might help with a specific genre. At a prominent northeastern university center, a client sought help on his architectural designs. The tutor, who knew nothing about blueprints, relied on her default knowledge of tutoring strategies, asking about audience and purpose: "Who will use the designs?" and "Why did you put this room here?" Although the client felt he had received a great deal of help, the tutor believed she had done little, except to demonstrate what her director called "intellectual empathy" (Shaw). When tutors sense they lack expertise to ask questions of larger import, they can also yield to the temptation to fix only surface problems (comma splices and diction). Of course, clients like having "correct" papers; nevertheless, the tutors, having failed to assist with larger rhetorical issues, would be reinforcing the comma clinic image for centers.

Other problems arise from the generalist/specialist debate. The bipolar approach of specialist or generalist forces tutors into "boxes" (Walker 28), ignoring the fact that tutors often switch hats from generalists to specialists as they work with different clients. There is another problem. Neither specialists nor generalists are trained to handle a vital

concern for all college-level writing: helping students learn what it means to enter the environment of a discipline, what effects it has on writers, and how the student writer can, in turn, influence the discipline, whether it be History or Biology. In short, students need to feel less like victims trying to find ways to survive a discipline's demands and more like members of an ecological system where they contribute (Dorbrin and Weisser). Missing from both the generalist and specialist approach, then, are the clients' perceptions that they are contributing to their disciplines.

A partial answer—and only a partial answer—is to stress what Kristin Walker and Paulette Golden advocate: directors should train tutors in genre theory to analyze the discipline's discourse. Specifically, Walker argues tutors should show clients that the different genres are not arbitrary but arise out of the "communicative situations" of the disciplines (30): "In order for communicators to accomplish goals within a discipline . . .they must use the socially accepted forms of communication within their field" (Walker 30) so that when students know how specific genres (Biology's lab report or History's research paper) are inhabited, they become part of that community (Walker 31). Thus, when training tutors, directors should

> become familiar with the culture that produced [discourse] conventions, communicate with experienced communicators within the field, analyze the writing produced in that field, and provide models for tutors to use, along with knowledge gained about that discipline's culture. (Walker 35)

So, Walker—proposing that centers need to avoid the use of specialists vs. generalists—advocates that tutors learn what questions to ask about various genres. Golden also argues that tutors should learn about the "typical documents, formats, citation styles, organization, evidence, detail, style and language within the fields of humanities, social sciences, natural and health sciences, business, and beyond." In fact, as Bradley Hughes of the University of Wisconsin-Madison explains, generalist tutors are probably already using genre theory to work outside their majors, even if only tacitly. From interviewing tutors, Hughes has found that generalist tutors tap into their own genre experience, such as writing a personal statement or a lab report, in order to help clients (Hughes). Thus, generalist tutors are probably already more than "generalists."

Though this genre approach of Walker or Hughes is useful for stressing the social community into which clients are moving as they write a lab report or

research paper, it is still not quite enough. It needs to be enhanced. In addition to being aware of genre features, tutors should be able to help clients grasp a larger view of what it means to write in the academy— that is, what the disciplines share and what happens to writers when they enter and become part of a discipline, as it shapes them and they shape it. For tutors to provide clients with such a helpful perspective, this paper suggests adding to the genre concept two training approaches. First, directors should provide a *theoretical* perspective by introducing tutors to composition theories specifically describing WID: *metagenre* and *ecocomposition*. Next, directors should use a *practical* application where tutors explore the writings in their own majors. In this way, tutors are ready to help clients see what it means to know and to write at college, regardless of discipline. Centers will then become true multi-disciplinary hubs.

To enhance genre approaches in centers, directors should introduce tutors to a key composition theory that reveals how writings in the academy are not arbitrary and capricious: Michael Carter's now famous theory of *metagenre*. Metagenre, which extrapolates the common ways of thinking behind disciplines, seeks out the overarching genres. In other words, as Carter's article states, "[it] "directs our attention to broader patterns of language as social action [. . .] [where] similar *kinds* of typified responses [are] related to recurrent situations" (393). Metagenre can be illustrated by two weekend athletes: one chooses to go for a brisk run of five miles while the other swims twenty laps. Though the details of the exercises differ, there is a broader pattern or metagenre: both are building muscle mass and trying to lose weight by expending energy (Devet, "Linking" 177). In the academy, Carter reveals that four metagenres seem to underlie most writings: "problem solving" (Engineering and Food Science would be examples), "empirical inquiry" (Political Science, the natural sciences), "research from sources" (History, English, Religious Studies), and "performance" (Art and Design, Communication) (Carter 394).

In training, directors should point out these metagenres so that tutors can help clients classify the clients' writings. For instance, a literature paper for an English course is the metagenre of "research from sources" while Sociology and Biology writings are part of "empirical inquiry." Tutors should also be encouraged to show clients the similarities between disciplines. Here is what one consultant discovered about writing in History and in English:

> Even though sources are vital to a History paper, writing in History is like that in advanced English courses; both use interpretation, and both explore how interpretations can vary from one critic/historian to another. How one historian views a quotation from a famous person could be different from how another historian interprets it, just as two English critics can vary in their readings of *Hamlet*. (Devet, "Writing" 9)

When directors use training to point out overarching features inherent in writing for the academy, tutors and their clients both realize that disparate disciplines share ways of knowing; tutors can avoid panicking when students are writing a paper in a major that differs from their own field. Instead, tutors trained in metagenre can show clients that academic writing is not such a mystery.

Directors can also train tutors to see that while two disciplines may both be using "research from sources" as their metagenre, the outcome or use of that way of "doing" (Carter) is different. Research in the sciences, for instance, is often an end in itself, such as a scientific paper explaining the origins of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. In English and Religious Studies, though, the research paper leads to specialized knowledge of the field. The literature research paper, according to Carter, is a way to learn to read like a literature major, while the Religious Studies paper helps students to think of the discipline not as an expression of piety but "as a scholarly enterprise" (Carter 400). By knowing about metagenres, tutors can explain to clients the connections among disciplines, even as they determine the notable differences.

After being armed with knowledge of metagenres, tutors and students are ready to look at how writings differ in the details of style, role of readers, and perhaps format—all of which may affect the argument and arrangement of the writings, what Carter calls the "doing" (394) or the execution of the documents. Consider an English paper as opposed to a Sociology or Biology paper. As one tutor explains, "English might examine a suicide [by looking at] a poem like 'Richard Cory', while Social Scientists examine it through statistics and Biologists use anatomy and experiments" (Devet, "Writing" 9). Tutors should point out these differences so student writers gain insight into academic writings.

Besides knowing about metagenre, tutors should also be able to help clients overcome an all-too-common feeling about writing in disciplines: as they are being socialized into a discipline, student writers often feel like victims. As Christina Murphy has warned in "The Writing Center and Social Constructionist Theory," the social constructionist theory behind genre and metagenre can feel "restrictive" (28). Social constructionism and genre theory argue that the individual is formed or

constructed by her social experience and culture (Murphy 28). As a result, writers feel controlled, with no sense of their own ways of knowing and doing (Walker 31). Here is how a University of Hawaii student perceived her role as a victim when writing a History paper:

> I had to throw out so much stuff, and it was so overwhelming…because it was a lot of information. After class, [the instructor] told me to touch on education. But I told him I couldn't see the logic in it and that's why I struggled because I couldn't see what education and family systems had to do with my paper…. I told him that I'm writing about women, not so much the family and traditional stuff….What I noticed is that when instructors tell you to add more [information] which has nothing to do with what you want to do, you resist. So, four chapters out of the paper is me and the other two are what the professor wanted. (Hilgers et al. 272)

To dispel a client's view of the self as a victim, tutors need to show students what it means to be part of a discipline. A second composition theory can help: *ecocomposition*. First introduced at the 1998 College Composition and Communication Conference by Sidney Dobrin and Christian Weisser, ecocomposition offers a new perspective on what entering a discipline entails, what effects the discipline has on its writers, and how writers can, in turn, affect their discipline.

First, a little background on ecocomposition. As its name implies, this theory of composition is inspired by Marilyn Cooper's oft-cited article "The Ecology of Writing." Cooper describes how student writers experience a system of writing which has "textual forms" (conventions like term papers), "cultural norms" (how being in a social group affects one's writing, such as using student talks versus academic speech), "interpersonal interactions" (how student relate to their fellow students linguistically and socially), "purposes" (what they want to achieve as students), and "ideas" (how the academy arrives at new concepts) (369-70). These forces operate simultaneously, constituting an ecosystem. Often, because college writers are unaware of this system, their situations feel like that of the man in the well-known anecdote who tries to understand an escalator even while he is riding it (Fleckstein et al. 396).

Acknowledging Cooper's web-like structure, ecocomposition adds even more to the writing process: ecocomposition sees writers entering a "place" or "environment" where they experience "interrelationships." Borrowing from ecology, ecocomposition argues that what happens to student writers is much like what occurs in nature's ecosystems. A leaf lying on a forest floor contributes to the growth of the surrounding trees by decaying and nourishing the trees just as the trees themselves provide a shaded forest floor to encourage the moss. All are interconnected; all contribute to each other. A student writing a History paper evaluating the accuracy of Ridley Scott's film *Gladiator* is influenced by all the other term papers of that History course, by all the other writers in that course, and by all the term papers ever written for any History class. The student is experiencing these interconnections as the "relationships between discourses and environments, discourses and writers, and other discourses" (Dobin and Weisser, *Natural* 23). Unfortunately, students do not always realize they are entering an ecosystem when they are writing in a discipline. Ecocomposition, though, shows that the act of writing is relational (interactive), with the writer of the *Gladiator* paper having entered this environment of interconnections.

To encourage clients to see that they are, indeed, entering a "place" or environment, tutors should ask questions to locate clients contextually (How are most History papers written? How are these papers different from movie reviews, such as for *Gladiator*?); historically (What are the students' past experiences with writing in the field and with writing in general?); ideologically (What beliefs, especially facts, do historians hold? Under what beliefs or assumptions does a Hollywood movie operate?). Tutors' questions may also focus on other texts (What other History papers have students written already for the professor? How does writing for History differ from writing in their English classes?) and on other writers (How have other students written this assignment before? What are other students in the class doing?) (Dobrin, "Writing" 18). Such questions help students find ways to move into a discourse community by having their writing "fit with systems" (Dobrin and Weisser, *Natural* 73).

The interplay concept associated with ecocomposition offers tutors a way to answer Murphy's concern that students feel they have lost their individuality as they adjust to a discipline's requirements. Ecocomposition argues that writers are active forces, shaping a discipline's environment. Writers shape the discipline as the discipline shapes them. As the student crafts the *Gladiator* paper to fit the demands of the discipline, he is contributing to the writing of History. As Anis Bawarshi explains, "[T]he self and the social [are seen] as *recursively* at work on one another, engaged in an ecologically symbiotic relationship" ("Ecology" 70; emphasis added). When Boeing engineers write a memo, their writing is molded by all memos written at the company, and, in

turn, their memos affect all future memos. It is an ecosystem where organisms work together, exchanging energy in order to live and function inside a system. Tutors should point out this concept to students who all too often feel they are manipulated by a discipline.

So, when the University of Hawaii student complaints that her History professor is seeking power or control, tutors can tell the client that the professor is just helping the writer acquire the thought structures of the discipline (Hilgers et al. 272), showing her the roles of family and of education as they affect women in history. The tutor, in ecocomposition terms, is helping this student see that she is becoming an inhabitant of an ecosystem, flourishing in an ecology of writing; she contributes to the system as the system molds her. When tutors give clients this important perspective, student writers feel less intimidated, more welcomed into the world of college writing, regardless of the discipline.

While it may seem as if ecocomposition is just a modern or "greener" way to express the ancient concept of *kairos*, ecocomposition is not synonymous with this classical term. *Kairos* (loosely translated as "rhetorical situation") refers to the occasion or "opening" presented to rhetors for persuasion; it stresses how rhetors must grab the rhetorical opportunity, determining the "window" of the situation and the most advantageous arguments associated with the opportunity (Crowley and Hawhee 37). The *kairos* of a commencement address to graduating college students differs from a defense attorney's last-minute appeal for a criminal on death row (Clark, *Praxis* 13). Instead of portraying rhetors as trying to decipher arguments (Crowley and Hawhee 37), ecocomposition stresses that rhetors are immersed in the environment, interacting with it even as it interacts with them, creating a cooperative mutualism that is supportive and, yes, even web-like (Devet, "Redefining"). Rhetors become part of the thoughts and ideas of a discourse community (like that of the commencement speech or the attorney's appeal). As Sidney Dobrin and Christian Weisser argue, "Our current knowledge. . . responds to and reacts upon previous acts of knowledge-making. . . . Language, communication, knowledge, and writing are all ecological pursuits" (*Natural* 146).

While metagenre and ecocomposition theories are valuable to help tutors, theory demands application. Tutors need to practice passing from "knowing about" ("declarative" or theoretical knowledge) to being able to do or apply theories ("procedural" or practical knowledge) (Haskell). To prepare tutors to work with disciplinary writings, directors should ask them to examine details about writing for one particular

discipline (Walker 35). When directors have their tutors experience this cognitive development, tutors feel better prepared to assist a WID program.

This movement from abstract framework to daily practice helped one of my consultants to understand the web of writing in her own discipline of Political Science. To develop expertise in her field, she explored its environment (aka its ecosystem); she interviewed her professors so she could learn what concepts inform Political Science papers and what methods are used to document sources. After having experienced the "place" or environment of Political Science, she next wrote two handouts for the center: "How to Write in Political Science," where she described major genres, such as abstracts, court briefs, literature reviews, and research papers, and "Political Science Guide to Referencing," which explained how to use the discipline's citation system. In other words, her handouts generated an environment that students could enter in order to contribute to Political Science writing. But she had gained far more: she had also learned what questions to ask about her major, such as what sections make up a court brief (name and citation; key facts; the issue; the decision and vote; reasoning and majority opinion as well as separate opinions). She had explored the genre of her field, and as she said, "I became an active reader" who had acquired the specialist language of her discipline. As a result, she returned to the center better able to tell clients how they are also entering a discipline as she had done.

Of course, writing center training courses are already filled with process and post-process approaches to composition so that overly busy directors who already face Himalayan-high piles of obligations probably wonder how they can possibly pack more theory into their tutor training. However, including the theories of metagenre and ecocomposition is valid and necessary. Tutors learn best when they possess a conceptual framework as offered by these theories. In fact, according to studies in the transfer of learning, learners who possess a big picture—as fostered by studying theory—begin to recognize patterns (Bransford et al. 44) so that as they conduct their day-to-day work, they are ready to handle any situation because they enjoy this theoretical overview or "conceptual knowledge" (Haskell 31). With tutors dealing with writings from many disciplines, directors should embrace the teaching of composition theories.

With centers as hubs for writing in the disciplines, it is time to put to rest the dichotomous debate between having either specialist or generalist tutors. Instead, directors should prepare tutors for the varied

writings students bring through the centers' doors by enhancing the genre concept of training, especially since clients need to gain a wider perspective on what it means to write in the academy. This enhancement can be achieved by providing a theoretical perspective. Knowing about metagenre and ecocomposition lets tutors point out to clients the similarities among genres as disparate as History and Biology and to show clients how they are moving into the web of a field, adjusting and adapting to its requirements as well as adding to it. Then, with tutors practicing in one discipline—preferably their own major—tutors can see theory at work, making their centers into places for WID to flourish.

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BEYOND GENERALIST VS. SPECIALIST: MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GENRE THEORY AND WRITING CENTER PEDAGOGY

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Following the trend in composition scholarship of the 1980s and 90s toward theorizing about genre as a social and rhetorical construct, several colleges and universities across the nation have worked to implement genre-based curricula in their writing courses. From first-year writing classes to writing across the curriculum programs, instructors have steadily recognized the benefits of genre pedagogies and asked their student writers to compose in a variety of genres. However, while genre theory has found a home in several college classrooms, very little attention has been paid to the potential application of genre theory to writing center pedagogy.

I suggest that other scholars have shied away from discussing how writing tutoring can employ genre due to anxieties about such strategies devolving into "directive tutoring" methods. Talking about genre explicitly may be associated with prescribing rules for writing or lecturing students rather than conversing with them—two pitfalls that many writing centers work hard to avoid. While these concerns are certainly valid, I argue instead that genre is a powerful concept that has a place in the writing center because of the opportunities it affords regarding the teaching of writing as well as its social implications. The writing center is a place where students can meet with peer tutors and receive direct feedback on their writing. Students can also ask questions that they might not feel comfortable asking their professors. The writing center, furthermore, offers students more exposure to the academic community while giving writing tutors the chance to augment students' sense of agency in this academic community. These opportunities make writing centers unique services on college campuses and exemplify how genre theory can help us reach our pedagogical and social objectives in the writing center. This essay offers a theoretical framework for understanding genre theory, which can shape and enhance writing center pedagogy and help writing tutors better conduct their tutoring sessions.

Theorizing Genre for the Writing Center

In order to understand how we might apply genre theory to writing center pedagogy, it is first necessary to define genre and describe what it can do for writers. One of the foremost voices in contemporary genre theory is that of Carolyn Miller. In her seminal essay "Genre as Social Action," Miller explores how genre should be conceptualized, grounding it in a social and rhetorical understanding of language. She claims that genre is "a typified rhetorical action based in recurrent situations" (Miller 159), and argues that:

> …what we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have: we learn that we may eulogize, apologize, recommend one person to another …. We learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves and the potentials for failure and success in acting together. (Miller 165)

For Miller and the scholars who support her claims, genre is a way of making meaning out of our social situations. This definition implies that genre is also a locus of power. In other words, when we learn a genre, we learn what power we have as actors in a social setting. We learn not only what ends are in our grasp, but also the power that our communications may have. Therefore, within the context of the writing center, educating students about the power behind a given genre would also bolster their sense of agency as writers and their interest in the project of writing. By helping student writers learn specific genres, a writing tutor helps them understand the situation in which they are being asked to write as well as their power within that situation.

Miller's theory illustrates the potential that genre theory holds for increasing students' sense of ownership over their writing and improving their understanding of the conventions expected in academic discourse. Jeanne Marie Rose explains this point in reference to a first year composition course in her article "Teaching Students What They Already Know: Student Writers as Genre Theorists." Rose argues that "composition courses serve students best

by calling attention to the habitual language choices that students at all levels undertake as part of their daily lives and making active theorizing about these choices a feature of the writing process" (28). In this sense, the goal of genre pedagogy is to make students aware of their own agency when they select certain discourses and give them the tools to critique these choices. Rose also notes that "composition teachers can help students to recognize that they already possess the practical consciousness needed to respond to a number of language situations" (33). One could easily swap the term "composition teacher" here for "writing tutor." In the writing center, tutors can not only frame discussions of students' writing by talking about the affordances of a given genre, but also emphasize the power of choice that their students possess. Student writers often face anxieties about entering into an academic discourse and "getting it wrong." I have worked with several students who feel that there is a key to academic writing they simply can't access. Using genre can help ease students out of this fear by emphasizing that they already have the power to make such decisions.

While empowering student writers as individuals is one positive aspect of using genre theory in writing center pedagogy, there is also a communal aspect to genre that tutors can use to their benefit. One of the most interesting developments in contemporary genre theory is the recent turn towards considering genre as crucial to the formation of discourse communities, bringing the social and communal dimensions of genre into even greater focus. In his article "Genre in Discourse, Discourse in Genre: A New Approach to the Study of Literate Practice," Ross Collin builds on Miller's definition of genre as social action and makes use of James Gee's Discourse Theory to construct an understanding of genre as a means of identity formation, which is bound up in the creation of discourse communities. He observes that "genres may be understood as sites where individuals constitute themselves and are constituted as ideological subjects-in-worlds" (Collin 84). Collin's theory has several implications for the writing center. Not only can consultants have conversations about the ways in which students' positions as individuals change according to a given genre, but they can also have conversations with students about the ways in which certain genres view the world and what they prioritize as a result of that perspective. Participating in a genre means taking an active role in a given discourse community, and talking with students in the writing center about what that community values can help them see their own work in light of what it contributes to that group.

Although thinkers such as Miller, Rose, and Collin are not addressing the context of the writing center directly, their ideas provide the groundwork for understanding how genre theory can shape writing center pedagogy. Genre does not simply refer to a category or type of writing, but instead genre carries with it certain social and rhetorical possibilities that can help tutors foster a sense of agency and ownership in student writers as well as a sense of belonging within the academic community.

The Existing Debate about Genre in the Writing Center

Those scholars who have written about genre in the writing center have often focused on the question of whether writing tutors should be specialists in particular genres or disciplines or generally knowledgeable about writing. In "The Debate over Generalist Tutors: Genre Theory's Contribution," Kristin Walker explains that those arguing in favor of the specialist position think it is crucial for tutors to understand discipline-specific rhetorical expectations and strategies in order to talk with students about them effectively (27). On the other hand, those who advocate for tutors as generalists claim that students benefit most from an exchange in which they are the ones who must articulate the knowledge and conventions of their discipline rather than having it articulated for them by the tutor.

Walker, however, takes the middle ground, arguing that "genre theory, as it has evolved from social constructionism, provides 'generalists' and 'specialists' with a tool to analyze discipline-specific discourse" (28). She concludes that "each student must learn for him/herself the processes of becoming initiated into a particular discourse community; this is where a writing center tutor can be most helpful by serving as a guide in this process" (Walker 32). This statement echoes Collin's theory and the emphasis on the communal aspect of writing. In a writing center session, the tutor can simulate a variety of discourse communities for students in order to educate them about their own positions in those communities and the ways in which they can exercise agency within them. For example, students in the invention stage of writing a literacy narrative can benefit immensely from a discussion of genre in personal writing as well as genre in literacy narratives, helping guide them toward an understanding of what they can accomplish in that project. The strength in Walker's discussion therefore lies in being able to look outside the traditional generalist-specialist debate and make concrete the ways in which genre theory can have a real place in the

context of both writing center pedagogical theory and praxis.

Some Suggestions for Teaching/Using Genre in the Writing Center

The genre theorists discussed thus far offer some helpful considerations for writing center pedagogy, but it is important to think about some specific ways that genre can be applied to writing tutoring. Broadly speaking, there are two schools of thought regarding the teaching of genre: those who support its explicit teaching and those who are against it. One of the formative moments of this debate came with Aviva Freedman's 1993 essay "Show and Tell? The Role of Explicit Teaching in the Learning of New Genres." Freedman argues against explicitly teaching genre, a strategy that she defines as "explicit discussion, specifying the (formal) features of the genres and/or articulating underlying rules" (224). She offers two responses to the idea of explicit genre instruction: the Strong Hypothesis, in which explicit teaching is neither necessary nor useful, and the Restricted Hypothesis, in which Freedman "acknowledges... the potential for harm in such teaching," but admits that it can be useful in some situations and for some learners (Freedman 226).

Freedman ultimately privileges learning genres in context. She argues that "teaching in the workplace, or in a writing center, or during an internship provides an ideal locale for this immediate kind of intervention because students are involved in authentic tasks and authentic contexts when the teaching takes place" (244). In other words, writing should be a highly situated activity. Freedman's understanding of teaching writing is that it resembles the relationship between a master artist and an apprentice. In this arrangement, learning occurs through observation and practice. This quotation also reveals that the writing center, in Freedman's view, is a place where students can learn about genre while they are actually in the process of writing. Tutors can thus provide an "immediate intervention" that will improve students' understanding of genre and of writing in general. Freedman would likely envision this intervention taking the form of Socratic questioning, modeling, and other non-directive tutoring methods. For example, a tutor could ask such questions as: "I notice in this section of your rhetorical analysis you start to use the first person. I think that's sticking out to me for some reason. Why do you think that might be?" Although this question does not directly address the conventions of the genre of rhetorical analysis, the tutor still calls the writer's attention to something that seems

anomalous for the assignment, and hopefully guides the student to a more complete knowledge of the genre at hand.

The other school of thought, however, maintains that there are many benefits of pedagogical strategies that explicitly discuss genre. In "Genre and Rhetorical Craft," Jane Fahnestock responds to Freedman's article and argues for the productive potential of explicit instruction. Fahnestock also counters Freedman's claim that teaching writing is like teaching a craft, and argues that "there is no craft or 'art' without an explication of its principles so that they can be applied across situations" (269). For Fahnestock, genres must be taught directly in order for students to operate as writers within them; students need to be told their options so that they can employ them with success. Several of my own experiences as a writing tutor have illustrated this fact. For example, I have worked with several students in the beginning stages of writing a personal statement who are struggling significantly to understand the genre. It has been beneficial in my experience to begin the session with a discussion about the genre of the personal statement, along the following lines: "Based on what I know about personal statements, it's a genre that really prioritizes applying your unique experiences and goals to a certain position (*etc.*). So, knowing that, would you like to talk through an outline and then we can discuss some ways to address those conventions?" Although this language is more explicit, and perhaps more directive, it nevertheless maintains the writer's agency and empowers the student by fostering an understanding of the genre itself and providing a platform to discuss creative options. Such a strategy ideally would also scaffold the student's learning by first discussing what kinds of personal writing the student had done in the past and then working to build off those experiences to increase an understanding of the genre. Both explicit and non-explicit approaches, therefore, have valuable applications for writing center pedagogy and can achieve similar goals.

Taking this fact into consideration, then, one of the ways that writing tutors can make use of genre is by talking with students about what certain genres value and how genres understand the world in various ways. In *Genre*, John Frow illustrates the importance of this strategy by claiming that "far from being merely 'stylistic' devices, genres create effects of reality and truth which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writing of history or philosophy or science, or in painting, or in everyday talk" (19). A chosen genre is therefore indicative of how that specific discipline, subject, or person understands the

world. A writing tutor can therefore explain this kind of worlding to students and enable them to see their own work as something larger than a singular assignment—as something that is part of a tradition of looking at the world in a particular way. A tutor could explain that a personal narrative, for example, understands the world as one in which individuals have deeply meaningful experiences that can be remembered and recreated for a reader to then experience vicariously and learn from. Frow goes on to assert that "genre guides interpretation because it is a constraint on semiosis, the production of meaning; it specifies which types of meaning are relevant and appropriate in a particular context, and so makes certain senses of an utterance more probable" (Frow 101). Genre therefore gives clues about what is acceptable in a certain situation, which can allow writing tutors to have conversations about why a particular meaning is expected from a given genre. Discussing genres as situations in this way also opens the doors to helping students feel that they are members of discourse communities and can make meaningful contributions within those communities.

So far I have discussed some ideas for incorporating genre theory in writing center pedagogy in two ways: by scaffolding a writer's learning through discussing (whether explicitly or implicitly) the conventions of a given genre and by discussing genres as an opportunity for the writer to exercise agency and make meaning. I suggest a third and final way that writing tutors can use genre is by discussing how to break generic conventions. Such strategies expand on the idea of using genre to talk about a writer's options by discussing the rhetorical power of going against a reader's expectations and making anti-generic moves. For example, a student I worked with on a personal statement for an application to a business school had decided to frame his essay as if it was a letter to a future roommate. He had consciously decided to do something other than the traditional entrance essay and wanted to make sure that his voice as an individual was heard by the selection committee. Over the course of the session we were able to have a highly productive conversation about his choice to go against these generic conventions and what such a decision could achieve. Marc Hummel addresses a similar phenomenon in his article, "Community Writing Centers and Genre Literacy." In his discussion of youth community writing centers, Hummel claims that "an understanding of how genres function… enables [children] to become successful writers more quickly, as they both conform to the conventions of genres and invent new uses to suit their needs" (59). Although it is debatable what is meant here by "successful writers," it is evident that genre-intensive pedagogy is beneficial not only because it gives students the tools necessary to operate within a certain discourse, but also because it offers them options for exercising creativity and going against the conventional uses of these tools. Writing tutors can thus serve as crucial mediators in the student's process of understanding and adopting generic conventions as well as breaking them for their own creative and rhetorical purposes.

Moving Forward with Incorporating Genre in the Writing Center

Genre theory offers some important possibilities for writing center pedagogy that have not yet been widely considered. I suggest that more research should be done on how genre is currently used in writing centers so that both directors and tutors can gain a better understanding of how to further implement genre theory and genre-related pedagogical strategies. While training tutors in genre-specific conventions may require more time and resources, tutors will be able to guide a student writer's learning. What is important to keep in mind is that when we teach writers about genre in the writing center, we are teaching them "what ends [they] may have;" we are teaching them about the "situations in which [they] find [themselves] and the potentials for failure and success in acting together" (Miller 165). Using genre to guide our pedagogical strategies in the writing center can be an excellent way to achieve the goals of scaffolding students' learning, enhancing their sense of agency, and reaffirming their membership in the academic community.

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