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Tutor Alums Doing Good: A Qualitative Study of the Character Strengths of Writing Tutor Alumni

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Abstract

This article draws on data from 12 interviews with peer writing tutor alumni to demonstrate how their writing center training and experiences prepared them to work toward good (i.e., social justice or peace or rhetorical civility) in their post-graduation contexts. Recent scholarship in both writing center studies and writing studies calls for a redoubling of social justice efforts in our field (see Duffy, 2019 and Greenfield, 2020). This article asks how the field will

recognize or know success in such efforts. Data from this small study suggests that there is untapped potential in the research tradition focused on tutor alumni experiences (including, most notably, the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project), which is commonly used to demonstrate the benefits of tutoring to tutor alumni. This article reverses this lens, asking, instead, how tutor alumni might benefit the world, and whether we might consider their post-graduation habits and actions, which they credit to their time as tutors, as a measure of the field's larger, positive influence. Researchers will discuss a heuristic they developed for analyzing tutor alumni reflections that surfaces and distinguishes a range of character strengths (a concept out of positive psychology and the philosophical tradition of virtue ethics), including "civic-mindedness" and "social intelligence," which, after practicing and developing in the center, alumni reported that they continue to enact in their communities and contexts beyond the center.

BACKGROUND

In two recent books, John Duffy's *Provocations of Virtue* and Laura Greenfield's *Radical Writing Center Praxis*, distinguished writing studies scholars agitate for our field to do more to advance justice, peace, and ethical ways-of-being and communicating in the world.

In *Provocations,* Duffy observes that US society has "arrived at a historical and cultural moment in which there is little place in our civic arguments for deliberative language that might explore ambiguities, express doubt, admit error, or accommodate ideas that contradict our own" (8). While the field of Writing Studies is by many measures stronger than ever, he says, "[W]e seem to have little influence on the conduct of US public argument" (Duffy 9). But, his book argues that

writing studies could take the lead in reshaping "toxic" rhetorical and cultural habits.

Laura Greenfield, in *Radical*, also recognizes the potential of those of us in writing studies—and particularly in writing centers—to effect change. She calls for a paradigm shift, a redefinition of the purpose of the Center ("nothing less than … [an] entire deconstruction and reinvention of the field"), identifying the Center's *raison d'etre* as a pursuit of justice and peace.

Greenfield's and Duffy's arguments are analogous—each recognizing a need for change and observing the discipline's fitful attempts to create change, even within our own field. Greenfield writes: "Despite the growing number of these revolutionary arguments—arguments that call on us to be critically conscious of our identities, to examine unjust systems, and to seek opportunities for transformative actions—the dominant discourse and practices of the field remain largely unchanged." She witnesses the field's stagnancy in scholarship that reinforces the status quo (including structures of dominance), in conference presentations delivered by undergraduate tutors that paint ESL students as "Other," and in the relegation of anti-oppression efforts to "special-interest" groups within our professional organizations (Greenfield 6).

Both scholars propose revisioning our systems—the purposes we claim, the paradigms we embrace—to achieve the radical, transformative potential of our field. And their texts begin that work. This article asks how writing centers might chart success if we take up calls like Greenfield's or Duffy's. They both point to evidence of our ineffectualness but how do we see—even measure—the progress we seek? This article offers both a possible method for assessing

"change" and a tentatively optimistic appraisal of how our work might be making change already via tutor alumni.

WRITING CENTER ALUMNI RESEARCH TRADITION

If writing centers are to follow calls like Duffy's and Greenfield's, we must turn outward, focusing attention on how our work influences the world outside the center. In writing centers, there's already a robust research tradition focused on what happens after the center, most significantly Bradley Hughes, Paula Gillespie, and Harvey Kail's *Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project* (PWTARP). In the essay detailing findings from their research, the team underscores the effect that tutoring has on tutor alums:

> Undergraduate peer tutors are creating one the most important experiences in their educational careers, a complex, multi-faceted experience whose influence persists not just years but decades after graduation [...] [W]hen they interact closely with other student writers and with other peer tutors[...], they develop in profound ways both intellectually and academically. This developmental experience [...] helps to shape and sometimes transform them personally, educationally, and professionally. (13)

Hughes et al. argue that tutoring profoundly affects the *tutor* (not just the writer or the writing) and follow Kenneth Bruffee and William Cronon in theorizing tutoring as "a form of liberal education for the tutors themselves" (14). The alumni research tradition, both proceeding and following the PWTARP, has identified a multitude of benefits that

tutoring offers the individual tutor, from career preparation to personal and intellectual development (see, among many, Dinitz and Keidaisch's "Tutoring Writing as Career Development"; Whalen's "Putting Your Writing Center Experience to Work"; Welsch's "Shaping Careers in the Writing Center"; Bell's "The Peer Tutor as Principle Benefactor in the Writing Center"; Harris' "What Would You Like to Work on Today?").

At first glance, scholarship focused on alumni experiences checks some boxes for outwardly-focused research of the kind Greenfield and Duffy champion–at the very least this kind of research considers how the center's influence exceeds its institutional boundaries. And, as we were designing an interview-based research project focused on the experience of our alums, we were eager to see if our alums' experiences would align with those of alums from other institutions. Such findings would serve us in articulating our value to our campus community by allowing us to show how alums' center experiences prepare them for engagement with the broader world.

We began to suspect, however, in the course of analyzing interview data from 12 former tutors, that the writing center alumni research tradition might have a bigger story to tell. We argue that when former tutors tell us stories of tutoring that they are (perhaps) not only talking about their personal and individual growth. Our alums are sharing a story of our field's larger impact on the families, institutions, and communities of which our former tutors are a part. To some extent, alumni research has been telling us this all along, if not explicitly: many of the skills, abilities, and values developed through tutoring are undeniably social in nature.

Here's how Aidan, a writing tutor and research fellow, explained how they continue to draw on their tutoring experience in their personal life three years after graduating:

> I am the editor for my friends. Lots of my friends are in grad school. A lot of them are also writers and they're like creative writers. Everything gets sent to me. [...] I know how to be polite about what they need to review, and still supportive and how to fix things for them. I mean I do it for my little brothers; my next in age brother is going back to college right now, I'm doing this application. I'm helping him with his application edits. You don't know how much you write, until you see that everyone needs to write and not a lot of people have had the training, or really the sort of a knack for it.

Read through the conventional alumni research lens, Aidan's reflection demonstrates that tutoring helped them to develop the ability to read and analyze other people's writing and to provide "supportive" criticism, in addition to growing their self-confidence as a writer and editor. But we believe that Aidan isn't only telling us about their personal abilities and skills; they're telling us *how* they *enact* these skills and abilities, with and *for whom*. Namely, the skills Aidan learned through tutoring are making a difference in the lives of their friends and brothers, and their skilled engagement with these folks is at the heart of his narrative. Perhaps Aidan's supportive critiques will help their brother secure a spot at his dream college; perhaps Aidan's friends will feel more confident and supported in their graduate work. We wouldn't be so bold as to claim that these tutoring-informed habits are world-changing (in big, flashy sense), but we do think it's important to acknowledge and celebrate the fact

that former tutors, including Aidan, are doing good in the world by doing what tutors do.

As Greenfield describes it, a radical writing center "would understand its work not merely as limited to improving the writing skills of its students but in fact extended to effecting positive social change far beyond its walls" (72). Greenfield might read our analysis of Aidan's reflection, with its focus on the development of writing and writers, even if outside of the center proper, as too limited to be truly radical, and she would be right. We believe our center can and should reach for a more ambitious impact, toward justice and peace. So, we offer our findings not as proof that the work is done, but rather as evidence that it may be started, and that we can continue to build toward that radical vision by expanding our view of the effects of tutoring beyond the artificial bounds of the individual, and by theorizing peer tutoring not *only* "as a form of liberal education for peer tutors themselves" (Hughes et al.) but also as a launchpoint for sustainable action and ethical engagement within the wider world.

STUDY DESIGN

When we launched our IRB-approved alumni research project in the Spring of 2019, it was inspired, in part, by the PWTARP, with the goal of understanding how the tutoring experience equips tutor alums for post-graduation endeavors. To this end, we designed an interview-based study that would allow us to gather narratives both about tutoring and about the post-graduation experiences of our tutor alums. We solicited participation (via Facebook, email, and text messaging) from as many former tutors as possible, eventually assembling a group of participants who were between one and six years beyond graduation. We hoped that the

interview format would allow participants, some at quite a distance from tutoring, the time and space to reflect on and to remember important aspects of their work in our center. The interviews were conducted by current tutors and tutors-in-training, giving them an opportunity to connect with alums and to learn about the ways tutoring experiences might inform their work and lives post-graduation.

The interviews were designed to last between 20-40 minutes, with most averaging 30 minutes, during which interviewers collected demographic information (major, minors, extracurriculars, current profession, etc.) and asked questions to prompt reflection on the longer-term import of tutoring experiences. Most of the questions in our script were variants on the same theme, prompting our alums to describe and reflect on “abilities, values, or skills” developed through tutoring and whether the tutoring experience informed their current work or endeavors.

Importantly, when this project began, our writing center was transitioning from a traditional writing-focused support center to one which offered peer-to-peer support for the integrated processes of research and writing. Prior to 2017, our library operated a separate program of peer-to-peer support, hiring “Research Fellows” to offer reference-type services at a library help desk. In 2017, the Director of the Center for Writing and the librarian tasked with training and supervising Research Fellows began the process of integrating our related services. Our research participants include those who worked as tutors before, during, and post integration (in 2019, we officially rebranded as the Center for Research & Writing). So, while our primary purpose was to understand how, if at all, the tutoring experience equipped our tutor alums for

post-graduation endeavors, we also wondered: Would tutors trained in library and information science (research) support recognize special value in this aspect of their tutoring? As we'll explore in upcoming sections, our data points, somewhat tantalizingly, to the possibility that information science training supported a different type of development than our traditional writing-focused model.

Of the 12 participants, three worked exclusively as Research Fellows (i.e., providing reference support at a library help desk); six worked exclusively as writing tutors; and three worked simultaneously as Research Fellows and writing tutors *or* received cross-training to become "Research & Writing Tutors" after our Center fully integrated our services. More recent graduates had the benefit of completing a credit-bearing course focused on the integrated processes of research and writing; participants who graduated before 2017 primarily learned to tutor on the job. Ultimately, we don't think their diversity of experiences or even their different tutoring foci undermines our findings – what unites all of our participants is the common experience of one-to-one tutoring. In fact, many of our participants downplayed the importance of their formal training experiences, emphasizing, instead, the interpersonal aspects of the work (collaboration and conversation, between and among colleagues and between tutor and tutee) as most formative.

When designing our study, we hadn't yet come around to the idea that our participants would be teaching us about their impact on their post-graduation contexts. It was in the process of analysis that we began to sense the possibility of an alternative narrative. Prior to analysis, we had each of our video-recorded interviews transcribed by a

transcription service. Then, we spent time reading each transcript independently with the goal of answering our basic question (what do tutors take with them into their post-graduation contexts) and developing lists of themes. Together, we compared, debated, and consolidated our themes, searching for a unifying theory or framework that would help us understand this particular set of data but also offer a lens for future analysis. We eventually landed on a framework, inspired by John Duffy's *Provocations of Virtue*, that helps us see both the individual achievements and development of a tutor while also recognizing that the skills, abilities, and values are enacted and relational. No one is a "good listener" in a room on their own. Good listening is relational and active and, by necessity, involves others.

Greenfield (following Judith Butler) reminds us that radical work isn't about a specific outcome, it's about action. We agree. When our tutor alums tell us what they do in the world and how they engage with others, we see it as possible evidence of the type of action/activism we, as a field, seem eager to encourage and, thus, as evidence that we are working *toward* ethical ends. But which ends, exactly? We eventually identified twelve ethical actions (or what we'll call "character strengths") that our tutor alums reported practicing beyond the center. Drawing on John Duffy's work, including *Provocations of Virtue,* we built a heuristic that might help writing center researchers, like us, understand the ways they engage the world for good.

A HEURISTIC FOR MEASURING CHARACTER STRENGTHS

Some might be skeptical of the heuristic we propose, in part because it emerges out of an Aristotelian philosophical tradition that has been justly criticized as racist and sexist (Hursthouse ref. in Duffy 70). Despite this legacy, Duffy's *Provocations of Virtue* proposes revisioning composition's aims through the lens of virtue ethics, which he describes as "a theory for attending to those traits of character that ought to guide our most consequential decisions" (70), including who we befriend, what career we choose, and, importantly, how we engage others and the world through rhetoric.

Virtue ethics proposes that people can act ethically and morally by cultivating character traits, or virtues, like kindness, wisdom, and courage. Duffy calls on writing teachers to explicitly acknowledge the ethical and political nature of their writing pedagogy, inviting them to name for students the rhetorical virtues that are necessary to good–read: ethical—writing and to actively seek to develop these traits through instruction. Such traits include, for example, the virtues of honesty and accountability which writers use to establish ethos in their work and to write in ways that are responsible to their interlocutors and audience. Duffy's work, of course, is focused on the writing classroom, and when he identifies virtues for consideration in that space, they are *rhetorical* virtues—basically virtues of writing and communication. He is hopeful, as is Greenfield, that writing teachers will explicitly teach their students how to write *for* good.

Though he's not the first, Duffy is convincing as he argues that the writing classroom is a suitable place to teach ethics. He says, "to teach writing is to teach the communicative practices, such as making claims, offering evidence, and considering counter-

arguments, among others, through which writers propose and navigate human relationships. And it is in the context of navigating these human relationships that we are necessarily engaged, students and teachers, with the values, attitudes, and actions that fall within the domain of the ethical" (Duffy 10-11). Building on this argument, we call attention to the various and rich ways that tutors 'propose and navigate human relationships' in the center. As we see it, the writing center lifts the ethical interaction of writer and reader off the page, placing it in the immediate discursive moment of the one-to-one interaction. The tutor, as reader and collaborator and peer, must endeavor to be "good" in the crucible of conversation.

So, while Duffy takes a look at texts and textbooks, endeavoring to locate rhetorical (read: written) virtues, our project seeks to locate virtues within the reported experiences and reflections of tutor alums. In order to be systematic in this work, we turned to Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman's *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification.* This text, out of the field of positive psychology, sets out to identify and define positive character traits with the goal of measuring these traits in human subjects.

Peterson and Seligman's classification system has roots in the same moral and religious philosophy Duffy draws on in his book (he cites them, too), identifying virtues as "the core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence" which "emerge consistently from historical surveys" (6). The pair argue that these virtues are potentially universal and can be enacted or displayed through what they call "character strengths."

“Character strengths” can be understood as the “distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the virtues” (Peterson and Seligman). As an example, Peterson and Seligman explain that “the virtue of wisdom can be achieved through such strengths as creativity, curiosity, love of learning, open-mindedness, and what we call perspective—having a ‘big picture’ on life” (13). They identify 24 character strengths in all but are careful to say that they don’t view their list as exhaustive.

In our analysis, we coded for character strengths (as defined by Peterson and Seligman) and ultimately recognized twelve distinct strengths within our interviewees’ reflections, including social intelligence, civic mindedness, intellectual courage, open mindedness, and perseverance. Most of our trait definitions are based on Peterson and Seligman’s definitions, but we pulled, occasionally, from Duffy and a handful of other scholars. For this piece, we’ll focus on defining and exploring our findings around two character strengths: one which appeared regularly in our dataset and one that was most pronounced in the reflections of three of our participants. The presence of both strengths in our data seems to offer evidence of the influence our field may already be having (via tutor alumni) on our world. They are strengths that are specifically related to how we do right by others: social intelligence and civic mindedness.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

The first strength, social intelligence, falls under the virtue Humanity, which is defined by Peterson and Seligman as a category of “interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others.” Social intelligence, in particular, involves “being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and

oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick" (Peterson and Seligman 30). Our research suggests that tutoring, which almost by definition involves caring for and supporting others, is an activity that establishes or deepens this virtue. We coded "social intelligence" in all twelve of our interviews, and for many of our interviewees, it was the first or most significant "skill, practice, or knowledge" (our phrasing in the interview script) that they claimed to develop through tutoring.

Our data aligns neatly with Peterson and Seligman's definition of social intelligence: Participants told us that tutoring helped them understand others and to be aware of people's "motives and feelings": "how they're going about their writing and how they're perceiving things and how they're thinking about things," and how to "listen critically" in order to understand other people's wants and needs and "connect whatever is available and relevant [...] to the needs of that particular person." They also learned how to adapt ("fit into," as per Peterson and Seligman) "to different people [and] different personalities and kind of be a chameleon" and to connect to different people ("I've gotten pretty good at connecting with people"; "utilizing that kind of connection basis").

Here we would note that there wasn't a particular training activity that spurred the development of this trait: Rather, participants told us that they grew their social intelligence by working one-to-one with students and in a quasi-professional environment with their peers. They told us that both the variety of people they worked with and the volume of interaction were crucial to their development. One said, "You're exposed to a variety of personalities, and you're exposed to a variety of different ways of

thinking and different ways of doing your work and being productive." Another said, "the amount of people you're exposed to, it's just so extraordinary." Our analysis leaves us confident that our tutor alums are developing social intelligence through their work at the Center, and it suggests that the more appointments and--crucially—the greater the diversity ("variety") of the people who work in and use the Center, the more significant the tutors' learning and development.

While Peterson and Seligman's conception of social intelligence maps well onto our data, we also wondered whether, given the specific context in which tutors are developing social intelligence, that their social intelligence might have a particular writing center flavor. Consider one participant's reflection about the significance of context in developing their strength: "Especially *in the environment* where every 15 minutes I'm talking to a new person, figuring out how to create a *good connection* in a shorter period of time so that they trust you in what you're saying, that you feel comfortable in *having conversations and asking questions about things that they don't know*" (our *emphasis*). Here, one participant hit on themes that were common across our data, emphasizing the importance of establishing comfort, connection, and trust, and then describing how they assess ("asking questions"), and, finally, address the needs of their interlocutor ("having conversations"). Many of our participants emphasized themes of connection and need in their reflections, suggesting that these are foundational components of a tutor alum's social intelligence.

Having established that our participants developed social intelligence in the center, we turn to the larger question of this piece: Can the types of narratives

generated by our research help us understand a tutor alum's capacity to enact change in their post-graduation context? What do tutor alums tell us about how the work they do in our center is carried out into the world? One tutor, Olivia, said that she draws on social intelligence "every day, even with my coworkers, I'm like, *Okay, so I understand that you don't see it the way I see it, so let's look at it from a different lens*." Olivia credits her time tutoring with enabling her to communicate across difference in a professional context and to be flexible and responsive to those around her. We speculate that Olivia's actions may contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and productive workplace, and, in that small way, she may be making good change within that context.

Another alumna, Cyndi, told us how she facilitates better communication in her workplace, using skills and abilities that "transitioned" directly from her time as a tutor:

> [T]he department I work in is molecular, cellular and biomedical sciences. And within that, we have currently like 35 faculty who have a vast array of backgrounds. They're mostly training students who are looking to be pre-professional health, research science, along those lines. So, keeping in mind, they're all from so different of backgrounds, but they have that one goal that they're sharing, but they don't necessarily know, I think, how to effectively communicate to each other, that it is actually the same thing they're trying to do. So I think I often find myself almost being a champion, or a cheerleader, for people to acknowledge that yeah, you are doing the same thing and you're agreeing with each other. And what you're doing, I think, is good. I'd

> say the cheerleader role is one that I continue to wear the most.

Cyndi works with people from many different backgrounds and is able to facilitate their communication, to serve as a sort of communication bridge-builder, because she is especially adept at both recognizing common ground ("you're doing the same thing and you're agreeing with each other") and also helping others to recognize it (through "cheerleading" and "championing"). We think the work that Cyndi describes may be an important kind of peace-making–one that likely contributes to the wellbeing, cohesion, and productivity of her colleagues.

We could go on, here, sharing evidence of the ways that tutoring-informed social intelligence have allowed our tutor alums to shape and, likely, change their post-graduation contexts. The tutor alums in our research have gone on to work in libraries, in food service, in schools, in government, in non-profits, in academia–and all have found ways to put their social intelligence to use because social intelligence, as our alums experience it, is not place- or situation-bound. According to one participant, time in the Center equipped her "to confront *any type of challenge* you have in your way, especially because you never know who you're going to confront on a given day or what their personality is like. And you just have to be able to go with the flow and react in *any given situation*" (*our emphasis*). Taken together, this data helps us recognize something important about tutoring-informed social intelligence: it is the strength of being able to move productively and ethically between contexts. If a tutor alum develops social intelligence, it's something they'll potentially carry everywhere and into every interaction.

CIVIC MINDEDNESS

The next strength we will highlight in this piece is one we call "civic mindedness." This is the strength of recognizing and acting on obligations to our fellow humans, and would fall, we think, under Peterson and Seligman's value category of Justice, which they define as "a motivation to seek justice, equality for others and for self." Peterson and Seligman's strength *citizenship* shares something with what we are calling civic mindedness but doesn't capture what might be called the radical quality (as per Greenfield) of the strength exhibited in our data.

Peterson and Seligman's definition of citizenship foregrounds a sense of duty to a group (whether a family group, work group, church group, or ethnic group). As they point out, this strength can manifest in ways that promote the wellbeing of one group at the expense of another group. We think of Justice, as a virtue, differently, seeing its foundation not in our responsibilities to those like us but rather in our responsibilities to those who are not. Following Lisa Tessman, who theorizes a critical virtue ethics, we believe that the virtues we identify and potentially seek to develop in tutors should be those that promote the flourishing and liberation of all. Thus, the strength we name–civic mindedness–emerges from an awareness of the ways social and political systems inhibit the flourishing of others and the felt responsibility to work toward change.

Unlike social intelligence, which we identified in the reflections of all our participants, civic mindedness was most notably present in the interviews of three tutor alums, Matt, Olivia, and Aidan. At the time of their interviews, Matt was working in a public library, Olivia was working in a Parks and Recreation

department as a part of an AmeriCorps VISTA service opportunity, and Aidan was working as a librarian while taking classes to earn his master's in library science. Matt and Olivia worked exclusively as Research Fellows during their undergraduate careers; Aidan worked simultaneously as a Research Fellow and as a writing tutor.

Matt's civic mindedness is perceptible in his dedication to providing people with the information they need to make informed decisions–a natural focus for a librarian. Matt remembered his tutoring experience as a Research Fellow as one in which he helped "provide … information or means of access to other resources" to the students he supported. By providing access to information, Matt believed he empowered students to "make more informed decisions," and by doing so, we would argue, he promoted the wellbeing of those around him. After college, Matt sought work at a public library because he wanted to "broaden the population" he served, knowing he "feel[s] most satisfied" in that context. He told his interviewer that the library "is where I feel that I give the most. I want to provide [access to information] for more people." Here, we see Matt's determination to serve more than those with whom he might easily identify; he wasn't satisfied, as a college student, to support other undergraduates. His civic mindedness compelled him to seek opportunities to support "more people."

Matt also talked about the importance of access to information as well as "information literacy" as critical to democratic participation. He observed that people are "affected by what government and leadership figures are doing, there has to be a … sense of information literacy" to inform both the decisions of the leadership as well as those of the governed. We see civic mindedness, here, in Matt's

awareness of the social and political apparatuses that shape people's lives and in his desire to equip those around him to engage or resist those systems.

Like all our participants, Olivia observed that tutoring helped her grow her capacity to connect with people different from herself, and she credits her experience as a Research Fellow for "guiding" her towards applying for an AmeriCorps VISTA position where she might have the chance, again, to engage with people of many different backgrounds. She said, "In my current position … I work with a lot of youth, particularly impoverished youth. And so being able to connect with them … that builds more trust." She told her interviewer that her role at the Parks and Recreation department was something she was "really proud of and happy to be a part of"-- a reflection of Olivia's sense that she is engaged in a collective mission to do good in the world. While it's unclear in Olivia's reflection if her role as a tutor inspired her sense of responsibility to others, she tells us that her tutoring experiences helped her to develop the skills she needs to do the kind of work she values.

Aidan, on the other hand, makes crystalline the fact that tutoring taught them to recognize the value and joy of helping others. At the time of their interview, Aidan was transitioning from a career in a private corporation into one as a librarian where they would have a chance to help "someone live a better life." They told their interviewer:

> What I realized that about a year and a half [ago] in having sort of a quarter life crisis was that what I really valued doing was helping people. I really enjoy those one on one interactions that I had in the tutoring [...] in

> which my job was not focused so much on making a bottom line for the private corporation, my job was helping someone live a better life or accomplish a better, you know, results in their work or art or whatever. And that made me realize that the best work that I ever did was in the library.

Aidan also shared an example of *how* they have helped library patrons in their current work, and unlike Matt and Olivia, who worked only as Research Fellows, Aidan's reflections hint at how civic mindedness might manifest for a writing tutor in the post-graduation wilds. They told the story of working with a family of immigrants who were not native speakers (or writers) of English, remembering:

> [T]hey were extremely kind, but they were trying to advocate for housing rights for themselves, and they just, they came up to a co-worker of mine [...] and asked if someone could look at [an application document] for them. You know it's not necessarily a service a library does [...], but you know, sort of the main ethos is 'we're here to help however we can.' And I was able to step up and say, 'I've actually been a writing tutor,' and everyone's like, 'Oh God, we don't know what the hell we're doing. So, go for it Aidan.' And I was able to refine the letter for them [...] but that core was there, what they meant to say was really important. And, you know, they left feeling much more confident in their application they were about to send in. And I've done that a couple more times [...] but that first instance was like it was exactly what the sort of thing that I felt good about doing, and it was exactly the skills I learned from the Writing Center.

Aidan credits the ethos of libraries ("we're here to help however we can") for emboldening them to do the type of work they did as a writing tutor in a library setting. And, if their impressions are correct, they made a difference to a family who truly needed their help. Aidan felt they were doing something "good" in the world in this interaction, and we think so, too.

As we pointed out, civic mindedness was not widely evident in our data, emerging most prominently in the interviews of just three tutor alums. It's worth noting, again, that all three of these tutors worked as Research Fellows, meaning that they received training in information literacy and worked at a library reference desk during their tutoring tenure. While we don't have enough data to prove it, we wonder if these tutors, trained in information literacy, might be more confident than traditionally-trained writing center tutors in taking activist stances. Libraries, after all, have a robust history of activism and advocacy–and in doing, in fact, what Greenfield and Duffy both hope that writing centers will do more: confidently defining and asserting the values of the field. What would it mean to our tutors if, in the writing center, we made clear both our potential and our responsibility to work for justice and peace (per Greenfield) and/or to remake our culture of toxic rhetoric (per Duffy)? Would more of our tutor alums be confident in telling us how their writing center work helped them recognize their responsibility to the world?

CONCLUSION

We are confident that our tutors (present and future) will continue to develop social intelligence through their experiences in our center. Additionally, we believe that social intelligence, as a practice, has the

potential to help create peace in our world, and we think that a differently designed research project might allow us to show, even more precisely, how this happens. Our findings also compel us to consider how we might better cultivate a sense of responsibility to our community beyond the center (or civic mindedness) in our tutors. Limited evidence of this character strength within our interviewees' reflections suggest that we've got room to grow in this area, whether through the introduction of service learning projects, on-campus activism work, or careful reframing of our Center's purpose and potential in our training activities or mission statement. We want our tutors to view themselves as agentive, capable, and dedicated change-makers both on our campus and within their post-graduation contexts.

As of the moment of writing this article, we haven't brought these findings around character strengths to our tutors–though we very much intend to. Greenfield is right when she says that it is scary to name our values. What might it mean to expand our understanding of the value of tutoring (for the tutor) to encompass its capacity to shape tutors as moral and ethical actors working for change, for peace, for justice? Would administrators buy such a framing? Would potential tutors? Where are our blind spots in identifying traits or virtues? How do we choose well what strengths to embrace and which to resist?

Molly finds courage, here, in Emma's confidence about this project. When Molly asked Emma what she, a senior tutor at the time, would make of an ethical reframing of tutoring, she dismissed Molly's worry. Emma said that explicitly naming her tutoring practices, habits, and mindsets—like kindness, patience, and responsibility—clarified the principles and philosophy underlying her practice. She said it

helped her see why we do what we do and gave her confidence that what we do is good and right.

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