WRITING CENTER
ATHENS STATE UNIVERSITY

Approach to Tutoring and Supporting Writing

The tutoring approaches emphasized by the Athens State Writing Center include employing nondirective and, according to specific contexts, directive tutoring methods; instructing consultants in discipline-specific writing conventions; raising empathy for students through diversity (broadly defined) training; and promoting consultants' overall growth and academic achievement. These methods situate writing as a socially constructed process and also locate the Writing Center as a collaborative space, metaphorically and literally, on our campus. Thus far, the Writing Center has conducted training on a weekly or biweekly meeting model. These meetings are used to share important business, discuss particular generic conventions for faculty-driven tutoring work at the center, improve tutoring practices, and touch base about various ongoing projects in the center. I meet with consultants at the semester mid-point to discuss their work and for them to inform me of any adjustments that may need to be considered for improving conditions at the Writing Center. We meet again at the end of the semester to reflect on areas of difficulty and to assess their progress overall. These meetings have afforded me a way to more clearly communicate expectations and to understand consultants' perspectives on their roles as consultants.

This fall, for the first time, I was able to create a three-hour orientation to foster community for the consultants before the semester began. The orientation offered an overview of best practices for promoting collaboration over the course of a tutoring session; gave an overview of disciplinary and style-guide conventions and resources; and allowed a former tutor to share her techniques for helping a student produce a working thesis. During this meeting, all of the librarians met the consultants. The Library Director discussed how to conduct exploratory research with students before introducing them to reference librarians for more in-depth searches.

The difficulty with the present meeting model is a lack of time, opportunity, and extrinsic rewards for deep application and reading by consultants. I would like to institute a directed reading course for consultants that would take the place of the one-hour research skills requirement, but know that the basic information literacy taught in that course would also need to be conveyed in this proposed class.

Athens State University does not offer any writing courses, except an advanced composition course that uses less current methods for instructing writing. I work with faculty to improve assignments and provide workshops for classes on a case-by-case basis. Although this non-structured approach is less than ideal, it is the tactic I have used to build relationships and create incremental change. I would like to institute a course to help students with basic writing skills and discipline-specific conventions. I am not attached to any department, however, so questions about how such a course might fit into a student's plan of study would need to be addressed. Any insight into particular models for navigating this challenge and creating a useful and versatile course are welcome.