SOUTHERN DISCOURSE *in the* CENTER
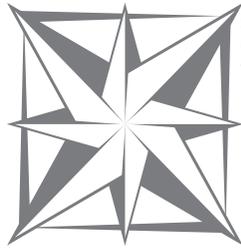## *A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation*

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Southern Discourse in the Center: A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation (*SDC*) is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal published by the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) biannually from the Georgia Institute of Technology. As a forum for practitioners in writing centers, speaking centers, digital centers, and multiliteracy centers, *SDC* publishes articles from administrators, consultants, and other scholars concerned with issues related to training, consulting, labor, administration, theory, and innovative practices.

Our editorial board welcomes scholarly essays on consulting, research, administration, training, technology, and theory relevant to writing centers, speaking centers, and digital/multiliteracy centers. Article submissions may be based in theoretical and critical approaches, applied practices, or empirical research (qualitative or quantitative). Submissions are evaluated by the editors, and promising articles are sent to our national editorial board for double-blind review. To honor *Southern Discourse's* historical context, future issues will include special sections that profile the work of regional associations, emerging undergraduate research, and centers across the country, providing a sustained look at regional and national concerns that centers face in the 21st century.
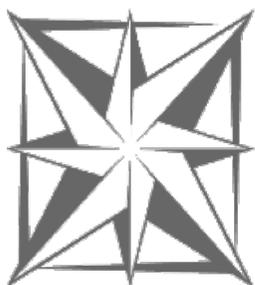
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Southeastern Writing Center Association

Our Mission

The Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) was founded in 1981 to advance literacy; to further the theoretical, practical, and political concerns of writing center professionals; and to serve as a forum for the writing concerns of students, faculty, staff, and writing professionals from both academic and nonacademic communities in the Southeastern region of the United States. A member of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), an NCTE Assembly, the SWCA includes in its designated region North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, and the American Virgin Islands. Membership in the SWCA is open to directors and staff of writing, speaking, and digital centers and others interested in center work from public and private secondary schools, community colleges, colleges and universities, and to individuals and institutions from beyond the Southeastern region.

The Journal

Southern Discourse in the Center: A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation is the journal of the Southeastern Writing Center Association. Published twice annually, this peer-reviewed journal promotes a community of writing center scholarship within the southeast and nationally while serving as a forum for innovative work across the field. Subscribe to *SDC* by becoming a member of SWCA at http://www.iwca-swca.org

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Southern Discourse in the Center: A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation invites articles that engage in scholarship about writing centers, speaking centers, digital centers, and multiliteracy centers. The journal welcomes a wide variety of topics, including but not limited to theoretical perspectives in the center, administration, center training, consulting and initiatives. An essay prepared for publication in *SDC* will address a noteworthy issue related to work in the center and will join an important dialogue that focuses on improving or celebrating center work. Please submit manuscipts to SDC@iwca-swca.org.

Genre, Format, Length, Citation

Most articles in *SDC* will be between 3,000 and 5,000 words. We ask that all articles be documented in accordance with the *MLA Style Manual, 3rd Edition*. Consistent with traditional writing center practice, *SDC* promotes a feedback model. Articles will be sent out to our national board for blind review and reviewed by our editorial team. *SDC* is excited to work with you. For longer articles, please send an email inquiry.

"Back to the Center" Guidelines for Writers

Alongside scholarly articles, each issue of *SDC* will include an article of roughly 1,500 words that focuses on a specific writing center, speaking center, digital center or multiliteracy center. "Back to the Center" will share a center's successes and hopes for improvement. By incorporating visual images, "Back to the Center" should give its readers an authentic sense of the ethos of the center and of the work done there. What is working in the center? What are the areas that need improving? What are the goals for the center?

"Back to the Center" will also include a section titled "Center Insight." In this section, we'd like to know the numbers: How many sessions are held in the center per semester? How many consultants are working in the center? How many hours a week is the center open? How does consultant recruitment occur? How long is the training process for consultants before they work in the center?

"Consultant Insight" Guidelines for Writers

Consistent with the consultant-writer model of the mutual exchange of ideas, we invite consultants to provide insight into center experiences. This article of roughly 2,000 words can be research driven or can take a more narrative and personal approach that illuminates consultant experiences. *SDC* is interested in both struggles and achievements. The article may focus specifically on one aspect of consulting or it may provide a broader sense of center work.

Contents

From the Editor

Karen Head

The Georgia Tech Communication Center remains in a flurry of activity as we continue to settle in as the editorial home for Southern Discourse from the Center. We are pleased to announced a number of changes to the journal that we hope you will appreciate.

In very happy news, our journal now has an official ISSN number—meaning we are part of the larger indexing system for libraries, including (drum roll, please) the Library of Congress! This is a first step toward offering our journal's content to various searchable databases—doing this will allow us to share your important research to a much wider audience.

We are also expanding content to include some new sections. In this issue you will see the first addition: book reviews. Given the growing number of ESL/ELL students in our colleges and universities, Melissa Aberle-Grasse's review of *Tutoring Second Language Writers* edited by Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth is both theoretically and practically useful for our community of practice.

Beginning later this year, SDC will have a new submission focus for each fall and spring. Atricles for our fall issues wil relate specifically to the SWCA annual coference theme, and our spring issues, while generally open-themed, will occasionally have a guest editor who will choose the focus. Therefore, specific calls for submissions will be circulated.

For this issue, we have two articles from five scholars—evidence of our position that multi-authored scholarship demonstrates a core principle of writing center praxis: collaboration. These articles ask readers to consider what we can learn from a broader sense of collaboration. First, Bromley, Northway, and Schonberg present their findings about the complex nature of cross-institutional research for peer tutors. Schweitzer and Shields explain how the notion of collaboration is often complicated by institutional expectations and the need to work with other faculty and staff to support students.

Cultivating new professional voices is also extremely important to our work. When our editorial team can include more Consultant Insight columns, we will—just as we have done this time. Clem and Bryant's reflect on the power of peer tutor-led research to reshape their work and how they can help revise all practices within a center. Snydor's reflection about how her blindness, and the associated dependence on listening, is an important lesson for all tutors about how we can better interact with the work of our clients.

Finally, in our ongoing feature, "Back to the Center," we are pleased to introduce you to the excellent work being done at Wallace Community College in Alabama.

Extra thanks to Jennifer Forsthoefel and Joshua King for their editorial assistance.
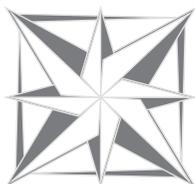
Evaluating the Complexities of Tutor Collaboration in Cross-Institutional Writing Center Research

PAM BROMLEY
KARA NORTHWAY
ELIANA SCHONBERG

In the last few years, research by Brian Fallon, Lauren Fitzgerald, Melissa Ianetta, Katrin Girgensohn, and Christopher Ervin has explored how writing center professionals can support scholarship conducted by undergraduate and graduate peer tutors. Such research helps inform the work of the home writing center, incorporate the varied experiences of tutors in writing center scholarship, and encourage tutors as scholars

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Pam Bromley is Assistant Professor of Politics and International Relations at Pomona College, where she also directs the Writing Center. In addition to her cross-institutional research, she is embarking on a research project documenting international writing centers.

Kara Northway is Associate Professor of English at Kansas State University. Aside from her interest in writing centers, her research includes the practices of writers in the early modern period.

Eliana Schonberg is Director of the Duke Writing Studio, where she is also Assistant Professor of the Practice in the Thompson Writing Program. She is currently researching knowledge transfer in various contexts and also consultants' use of writing center key terms, specifically collaboration. At the time of the data collection for this project, she was Director of the University Writing Center at the University of Denver.

in the field (Ervin; Fallon; Fitzgerald; Girgensohn). Calls for publication by undergraduate tutors have increased (see Kinkead), and in 2012, The Writing Center Journal published a special issue composed entirely by undergraduates (Fitzgerald and Ianetta, "Peer Tutors"; see also Fitzgerald and Ianetta, Oxford Guide 24-25).

While such scholarship encourages research with tutors, little published research investigates the complex nature of these collaborations, either at single or multiple institutions. Our ongoing multi-year study brought together tutors from three institutions, a large public university (LP), a medium private university (MP), and a small liberal arts college (SLAC). This ongoing project spurred a subsequent investigation probing a new area, which is the focus of this article: a study of the nature of such tutor-administrator research. Like previous scholars, we found that collaborative research was an important learning experience for our tutors. And naturally, there were also advantages to having tutors gather data. But we and our tutors faced unexpected challenges while collaborating across institutions, including tutors negotiating roles, navigating differing institutional cultures, and communicating over long distances. We therefore wanted to offer recommendations and share our experiences to acknowledge that, while rich in potential and often worth implementing, collaboration with tutors (in our case, with tutors across institutions) is not a seamless process. Yet this messiness can help writing center administrators see new sides of tutors as scholars in their own right—suggesting a richer mosaic of tutor potential and a need for administrators to be more attuned to tutors' varying research needs and desires.

Methodology: Studying Tutor Collaboration in a Large Research Project

This article, on the nature of research collaboration between tutors and principal investigators (PIs) – arose from our ongoing, IRB-approved, cross-institutional project examining student perceptions of writing center effectiveness. We were thus collecting data for these two studies simultaneously, as illustrated in Figure 1.

AY 2009-10	AY 2011-12	Late Spring 2012-Fall 2012
Summer 2009 PIs draft survey questions	*Fall 2011* PIs draft focus group questions	*Late Spring 2012* 17 focus group leaders reflect on experience at home school
Early Fall 2009 PIs share questions with tutors, solicit feedback. *PIs begin studying tutor collaboration.*	*Late Fall 2011* PIs share questions with tutors, revise questions	*Late Spring 2012* 10 tutors and PIs reflect via Skype about focus groups across schools
Early Fall 2009 PIs amend survey questions with tutor feedback	*Winter 2012* Tutors at each school conduct mock focus groups, gather student feedback	*Early Fall 2012* 8 students review survey and focus group data for IWCA presentation. Work mostly by institution, once collaboratively via Skype.
	Winter 2012 PIs revise focus group questions with tutor feedback	
Academic Year 2009-10 Student Exit Survey (58 tutors solicit responses; 2270 students take survey)	*Spring 2012* Student Focus Groups (17 tutors lead focus groups; 37 students participate)	*Fall 2012* Student IWCA Presentation (8 tutors from all schools present on collaborative project)
Study of tutor collaboration: PIs collect information on their home campus about how tutors reshape questions, solicit student responses	Study of tutor collaboration: PIs collect information on their home campus about how tutors reshape questions, conduct focus groups	Study of tutor collaboration: PIs collect information on their home campus about how tutors reflect on focus groups, collaborate across schools

Figure 1: Timeline of Overall Cross-Institutional Research Project

As parts of the larger study were taking place, the PIs collected data about the complexities of tutor collaboration, focusing on the experience of the data-collectors, i.e., the tutors. In total, 58 tutors (the entire tutoring staffs, both undergraduate and graduate students, at our institutions) collected survey data, and 17 tutors led focus groups. Compared to recruiting a student to complete a survey, creating and administering focus group questions require tutors to take amore active role in the research process. In fact, we decided to use focus groups in the larger study not only because they would allow us to solicit more student experiences with less effort than conducting

individual student interviews. It was in this move that some of the benefits of working with tutor-researchers came out. As one of our focus group leaders explained in a multi-institution conference call, "if it was an interview, I think the people can feel like they are on the hot seat. But as a group we can gain the comfortability and get there, and I think people . . . warm up and share their ideas" (LP). In that same call, another focus group leader noted, "I like the focus group because you can hear interesting responses and immediately try to delve a little bit deeper" (MP). Such comments suggest that student-tutors can bring rich insights into selecting appropriate research methods.

The PIs' email conversations and the evolving focus group protocol on Google Drive demonstrate that tutors revised the focus group questions and clarified the wording to engage a broad student population more effectively. We shared feedback from tutors on the focus group questions before the focus groups began later that semester and then adapted the questions accordingly. For example, tutors at the Medium Private changed and added to the series of questions about breakthroughs. Our original beginning of that series of questions was "One of the questions we asked on the survey was about having a breakthrough in your writing"; tutors suggested alternative wording, incorporated into the final protocol: "Some people on the survey acknowledged having a breakthrough in their writing," which directly addressed focus group participants and caught their attention at the start of this series of questions. Tutors also added new questions. For instance, in that same series of questions about breakthroughs, tutors from the Medium Private suggested a pointed concluding question, included in the final protocol: "Is a breakthrough important or not?"

Many of the tutors who helped revise the focus group questions led mock focus groups to confirm that the questions would actually address the issues we were aiming for. Tutors volunteered to lead substantive focus groups without directors present. Following the last focus group, ten out of the seventeen focus group leaders participated in a cross-institutional Skype call that asked them to reflect on their experiences participating in collaborative research. Once the data had been collected, eight tutors worked in groups by institution to analyze data related to particular interests. These tutors then collaborated using Skype calls and sharing information via Google Drive, as well as one face-to-face meeting, in order to present preliminary findings together at the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) Conference in October 2012.

Below, we use qualitative data gathered from our tutors in three different ways: from the three-institution transcribed Skype conversation (8 quotes), from the Medium Private and Large Public follow-up conversations and email exchanges after that Skype call (5 quotes), and from year-end reflections written at the Large Public and the SLAC (4 quotes). In each instance, we note the tutor's institution and the means of data collection. These seventeen quotes represent the views of twelve tutors, four from each school, almost all of whom were intensely involved in the project and representative of the seventeen focus group leaders. All of the empirical, qualitative data were collected using widely accepted means that recorded the information and are replicable and accessible to other researchers (Babcock and Thonus 32).

Background: The Larger Study

For context for the current study, we summarize some details of our larger research project here; for further information, please see Bromley, Northway, and Schonberg. Our ongoing project asks: What makes writing center sessions effective for students, and is this effectiveness connected to the transfer of knowledge or to the formation of a writer's identity? In order to match our research process to our writing center values, we needed—and wanted—to involve our tutors from the start (for an example of what made tutor involvement particularly appealing to us, see Wilson). We began our ongoing project with a post-session survey inviting student-writers to reflect on what they took away. We posted the same survey on computers in all three writing centers, and we asked tutors to request that every student-visitor complete it. Over the course of the 2009-10 academic year, we gathered 2,270 survey responses. Quantitative surveys are a useful methodology for getting at these kinds of what-questions, and surveys have the benefit of being easy to administer, a particular advantage when working with many data collectors; survey results can also be more easily generalizable than other types of research (Chambliss and Schutt 129; Driscoll and Perdue 28).

Information collected from the survey for the ongoing project demonstrated the following result: students found their sessions successful, for the same reasons, irrespective of demographic factors. However, the survey did not allow us to understand how students were learning and applying strategies or rethinking their identities as writers. To learn more, we needed to frame our questions differently. Complex how-questions about process necessitate qualitative methodologies, such as interviews or focus groups (Creswell 3-23). Our focus groups, which used the same protocol across campuses,

enabled us to pose these types of questions; we generally followed the guidelines of Tara Cushman, et al., for tutor-conducted focus groups in a university writing center setting. For example, Cushman, et al. suggest using two moderators per group and limiting the number of specific, goal-oriented questions, while providing refreshments. In the spring of 2012, we conducted focus groups at each school, soliciting participation from either a random sample of students who had already visited their campus writing center that academic year (MP) or all students who had visited that academic year (LP and SLAC). In total, we had 9 focus groups, with 2-4 groups per school and 1-8 participants per group, for a total of 37 participants, more or less equally distributed across our campuses. At all institutions, administrators trained focus group leaders on ethical practices for conducting focus groups, and at two institutions, focus group leaders were also required by IRB to pass online modules in ethical practices.

Benefits for Both Administrators and Tutors as Researchers

While this article focuses on the benefits and challenges of cross-institutional collaboration for student-tutors, we found advantages for us as professionals as well. We discovered that this research solidified tutors' learning, helping them to invest further in their tutorials and developing their professionalism. For instance, watching our tutors at IWCA, we were impressed at their investment in preparing their collaborative presentation. This presentation in a public forum demonstrated the tutors' development as professionals, allowed us to assess our pedagogical work in the center, and showcased the education provided by our centers and schools. Tutors can also access student perceptions that administrators and teachers, perhaps due

to their positions of power, cannot (Cushman et al. 4-5; see also Vyvial). Such multi-site, multi-method, replicable and aggregable data (RAD) collected with tutors provide us with higher quality evidence on which to base our research claims (see Driscoll and Perdue 21-23; Rowan 18; Chambliss and Schutt 188; Creswell 3-23).

Tutors also became confident conducting research. Across our institutions, a major change was that tutors gained awareness of both the broader writing center field and the value of research. One focus group leader emailed after the Skype call that the IRB process "helped [him] understand the procedures for obtaining permission for university research" (LP). In the same email conversation, another focus group leader recognized the potential of RAD research methodologies to which she had never been exposed: "For me, I gained insight into a new method of research from the focus group process" (LP). Furthermore, one focus group leader was delighted to realize that the focus group research method actually works; in the multi-institution conference call, she explained,

> "it seemed like it [the questions] would be difficult to answer, yet when we were in the focus group, people seemed very willing to talk. They didn't pause or question the questions in a way that we would. So I would say that the most surprising was actually the ease with which those focus groups went, and maybe perhaps I was over-thinking how they might be difficult" (MP).

During that same call, a tutor from another institution remarked on the surprising benefits for participants as well: "I was afraid it . . . might be an ordeal for people to come in and answer all

of these questions about their identities and their writing. But it seemed to be a positive experience, for them as well as us" (SLAC). One tutor commented in his year-end reflection, "I had never even been part of a focus group before I led this session, so I learned a lot about research procedure" (LP). More significantly, the cross-institutional design forced tutors to cultivate trust both in their colleagues at other institutions and in the research process. During the conference call, a leader commented on her concerns about focus group questions drafted by colleagues at another institution: "I think a lot of us [tutors] were confused and/or made uncomfortable by some of the questions, . . . but I think that it actually went better than I anticipated. Most [participants], after we had discussed it a little bit, said some really interesting things" (MP). This increasing trust produced fruitful results for this research project and, we hope, for later collaborations.

Growth for Tutors as Practitioners

Our research, drawing from student-writers and tutors, shows, like Ervin's findings from writing center practitioners, that tutors benefit from working with project data through reflecting on their practice and gaining confidence (A10-12). At all three centers, anonymous survey results informed administrators' staff meeting conversations about tutors' growth and best practices. Across all three campuses, tutors felt that the surveys and focus groups helped them recognize the effects of their tutoring practices and therefore gain confidence. As one tutor noted in a debriefing conversation with her administrator after the multi-institution Skype call, this information gave insight into "the black hole" of tutoring (MP), meaning that tutors are often not sure what writers take away from

their sessions. Another tutor, in her year-end reflection, discovered that, while she was worried about whether students were learning, "they found me useful. . . . The students were getting what I was trying to pass on" (SLAC). These statements demonstrate that tutors realized the positive impact of their work. One leader noted during the conference call that the research experience justified her habitual consulting strategies; she preferred specific feedback to general praise, paraphrasing a student's response, "not just saying, 'Oh, this helps me,' but saying, 'This helps me because . . . [I find that] helpful" (MP). Furthermore, leaders came to understand and appreciate how students used their writing center sessions. One tutor noted in the multi-institution Skype call, "hearing [from focus group participants] that it [the session] is not just come in, fix the paper, and leave, it's gathering tools to use in the future. I thought [that] was really valuable" (MP). Seeing that students were growing as writers, transferring knowledge acquired in their sessions, allowed tutors to reflect on how they could increase this type of learning.

Such reflection, in which we often encountered concepts or terminology from the survey or focus group questions, helped tutors grow as consultants and writers. A tutor who administered the survey but had not led focus groups used the vocabulary from the survey in her year-end reflection: "When reading over [student] responses on the survey, the areas that I realize I don't focus on as much are the 'changing the way they view themselves / writing' fields. . . . I'd like to try to remember this aspect a little more consistently" (SLAC). Another tutor, who administered the survey and led focus groups, explained in her annual reflection, "Through our focus groups, I started thinking about how my identity comes

through as a writer. . . . This manifests itself in my consultation reports . . . perhaps because in a small, only-readable-by-four-people way, I'm putting myself out there. That, in an exhilarating way, is frightening" (SLAC). These two comments directly refer to specific survey and focus group questions about identity. While we do not have empirical evidence that tutors indeed applied these concepts in actual sessions, using the terminology from both instruments helped tutors internalize desired outcomes for tutorials and develop a vocabulary for talking with students about these features, even for tutors not explicitly involved in focus groups. Reflection on tutoring sessions and experiences is an important way for tutors to develop and progress (Fitzgerald and Ianetta, Oxford 78). Furthermore, as tutors at all institutions wrangled over the focus group questions, tutors demonstrated that they were beginning to think about how researchers create effective questions. This is an important step for tutors in generating their own research agendas or projects.

Following this project, some of the tutors who led focus groups and/or presented at IWCA , and designed their own research projects or changed the focus of their job searches to include writing center positions. Many tutors found that leading focus groups and/or presenting at IWCA helped them expand their skill sets, giving them experience in their field of study. In essence, they, like the writers in the centers, were "gathering tools to use in the future." One of the undergraduate focus group leaders from the Large Public designed his own IRB-approved, multi-site, qualitative research project, conducting interviews with tutors, students, and administrators to assess benefits of literacy centers, which he presented at the 2012 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing. In addition, an undergraduate tutor and marketing major at the Medium Private wanted the experience of leading focus

groups on her resume. She had only conducted focus groups in her major once, so the writing center focus groups provided valuable job preparation. A SLAC student foregrounded her focus group experience and IWCA presentation to secure her post-graduation goal teaching English in Japan. Finally, a graduate tutor from the Medium Private, just beginning to explore job possibilities in her field of study and in writing centers, accepted a faculty position teaching and establishing a new writing center.

Unexpected Complexities of Collaboration

Much of the current scholarship focused on involving tutors in research only addresses these types of benefits (Ervin; Fallon; Fitzgerald; Girgensohn). And indeed most of our tutors were delighted with the experience of working together on the focus groups. As one leader noted in the conference call, "I thought that the collaboration across the institutions was great because I think everyone had enough input into the questions. . . . I think that we had a lot of input into the process" (LP). However, not everyone involved in our project was equally enthusiastic, and we want to draw attention to the challenges of involving tutors in research. Some of our tutors were more circumspect. As one leader noted in an email debriefing the Skype call, "I came to appreciate the complexities of collaborating across institutions" (LP, our emphasis). Therefore, while we saw real benefits for tutors and administrators from this collaborative research project, it is important to acknowledge that we also faced obstacles--some insurmountable and some that could be productively overcome.

Given the barriers of institutional culture and distance, it was difficult for tutors and administrators to negotiate roles, particularly

cross-institutionally. For example, on our multi-institution online conference call, tutors from the SLAC and the Medium Private found it easy to jump into a large, virtual conversation; the Large Public tutors found it difficult to speak up. After that call, tutors from the Large Public continued their conversation about the format and offered some possible reasoning for their reticence. As one tutor explained, as recording continued after the other schools hung up, "My non-participation is not an indicator of my non-interest—the format wasn't working for me" (LP). Another commented, "I can't think on my feet" (LP). There is more than just a predictable complaint about technology here—the technological challenges highlighted preexisting concerns. Tutors wanted to feel heard, and a lack of previous ties and early face-to-face meetings made the virtual format seem particularly frustrating for some.

Collaborating across institutions was a logistical challenge for our tutors. We discovered that institutional structure affected tutors' ability to engage with each other. For example, at the time of this research, the M.A. tutors at the Large Public often only worked for one semester at a time, limiting involvement in a long-term project. Distance was another impediment. Synchronous communication was difficult to arrange across three time zones. As a result, we only managed to connect our tutors in this way twice: once to debrief about focus groups and once to plan and divide roles for the IWCA presentation. Because of the coordination problem, in general, all changes suggested by one set of tutors were relayed by their administrator to the other administrators, who discussed with their tutors, proposed next steps, then came back to the other administrators, and so on, delaying the feedback loop and further distancing tutors from each other.

A final major hurdle was negotiating commitment and roles. Tutors were committed to their home institutions and writing centers but not necessarily to the field. In addition, for tutors, analyzing the data for a research presentation was new and demanding, in part because tutors did not understand how the information gathered and analyzed fit into the larger research project or into existing scholarship. We also discovered that some tutors wanted to be more or less involved than administrators initially envisioned. We had tutors who only wanted to participate in one portion of the project, such as leading focus groups, due to other commitments. Conversely, two graduate tutors wanted to be more involved in the writing and data analysis than we, as administrators, could manage. Because the three administrators had together created this research agenda, focus groups were only a portion of the ongoing research project, and given that three of us were already collaborating across institutions, we felt that introducing an even larger writing collaboration at such a late stage would become unwieldy. However, this put the director of these interested tutors in an awkward position in which she had to discourage her tutors from additional participation and hence from research.

Ramifications for Future Studies

Not all writing center practitioners will want such a large-scale approach for every project: tutors working across institutions with each other and tutors working on research projects with their own director will only be suited to certain types of research questions. But we learned a great deal from collaborating on research with our tutors, and we strongly encourage others to engage their tutors in cross-institutional projects. Nevertheless, there are important things that we wish we had known that may prove beneficial for others collaborating with tutors.

We, as PIs, could have done a much better job creating a sense of disciplinary community for the tutors in our project, perhaps by creating more real-time or asynchronous team-building activities. Tutors were engaged and excited to be involved in research, but their involvement simultaneously enriched and complicated the project in terms of design and implementation. We also discovered that timing was important. We could have been more intentional in articulating to tutors the long-term commitments and, for tutors coming in midway, the history and future of the project. While some mobility is unavoidable, administrators should anticipate graduation dates of tutors and prepare accordingly.

Supervisors have to recognize our influence and be cautious about tutors who get involved in a project out of a sense of obligation or good citizenship. We should have been more flexible and sensitive in matching specific roles to tutor interests. It is important for administrators planning research with tutors to think about what experienced and inexperienced tutors can gain or lose. Tutors who have been to a conference before or conducted individual research may have preconceived ideas about what they want to study. It may be harder for them to make a commitment to a collaborative research project when they have their own evolving research agenda.

In addition, we needed to think more deeply about differences between data-gathering and initial analysis with tutors versus fully co-authoring. As we reflect several years later on the missed opportunity to incorporate our two eager graduate students, we wonder, what does it really mean to collaborate, in all senses, with our tutors on a long-term research project? Given the complications of long-distance, cross-institutional mentoring, trying to manage it successfully with multiple administrators and tutors seemed, for

us at the time, to be too challenging. While one of the PIs was already co-authoring with a tutor, bringing in new co-authors to this project in the midst of data analysis was just too late in the game. However, we should have expected that collecting data would cause some tutors to want to analyze and write about that material. Therefore, in addition to including tutors in instrument design and data collection, we needed to anticipate tutors' deeper engagement and leave space in the project for tutor-administrator analysis, perhaps at single institutions to make the collaboration more workable. The challenges we, as PIs, faced in setting up and structuring a three-institution, three-time zone collaboration prevented us from thinking as optimistically and expansively about our tutors as we normally might have, and as others should as they embark on future research. Considering the push for more student research as well as emerging conversations about the complexity of junior professional roles, which all of the PIs occupied at the time, and their effect on different institutional relationships (Geller and Denny; Ervin), this issue is ripe for writing center studies to address.

Collaborating with our tutors on a multi-year/method/institution study was challenging. However, the substantial benefits for tutors and for administrators may well be worth the effort, not only because such collaborations lead to stronger research, but also because the collaborations themselves should merit investigation. Rather than championing student research for its own sake, it is time for the field to confront the real and significant complexities involved in tutor-administrator collaborations and to theorize new best practices for such valuable research.

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"A New Studio Approach: Collaborating to Support First Year Writing"

Leah Schweitzer
Kathy Shields

The Writing Center at our small private university underwent significant changes in 2013. In addition to hiring a director who was also a tenured faculty member, the Writing Center was tasked with expanding all of its services, including providing more targeted support to the first-year composition (FYC) program. To address this need, the Writing Center Director proposed creating a Writing Studio, a one-hour supplemental "lab" course that students could take in conjunction with the first-year writing class. This studio model is a hybrid of what others have done, but it also has unique features that have allowed it to succeed when many

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others have not. This article focuses on the practical considerations of this particular model, outlining what this model looks like and how it functions on a day-to-day basis while also considering how scholarship has informed some of its construction. Finally, we discuss what makes us consider this program a success while considering the difficulties of assessing a program like this in a quantitative way.

Background

Our school is a small, Methodist-affiliated, liberal arts university. While we do have a few graduate programs and one doctoral program (in education), our graduate student numbers are still small-- and there is no graduate program in English. There are about 5000 undergraduate students, the majority of whom are traditional college students in many ways: they generally enroll straight from high school; come from families in which the parents, siblings, and other assorted relatives also have university degrees and represent the upper-middle class. While these students are typically prepared for college in the sense that know how to perform as students, not all of them are prepared to write to the standards and expectations of the university curriculum. We have students who, without extra help, would struggle to successfully complete the first-year writing requirement. And, in this way, we are like many (probably most) colleges and universities across the nation.

In 2013, the English department at our university did away with its stretch FYC program, a program that allowed students who struggled with writing to take the FYC requirement across two semesters instead of one. This decision wasn't made for

pedagogical reasons, but rather purely financial ones: the stretch program required twice as much classroom space and tied up faculty teaching loads. However, while the decision wasn't a pedagogical one, there was a recognition that removing the stretch program as an option left some incoming students at a disadvantage. The (canceled) stretch program had been a short-lived solution to the question of how to help incoming students who were likely to struggle with the FYC requirement. When the department got rid of the stretch option, it turned to the Writing Center to augment its services in order to fill the gap the stretch program once filled. This augmentation included engaging an actual Writing Center Director (rather than an administrator who managed tutor scheduling and payroll), hiring more tutors, increasing the operating hours, and adding new on-campus locations for face-to-face tutoring sessions. But, one of the unique measures the Writing Center took, one that was intended to address the very specific void getting rid of the stretch program created, was to create the Writing Studio. While the model may need to be tweaked to accommodate the size and demographics of other schools, what the Writing Center Director started from was a place of thinking how already existing strong resources could be leveraged to serve a particular segment of students who struggle in the FYC classroom, resources which many institutions also already have.

Our Model: The Writing Studio

The Writing Studio was conceived of as a one-hour optional and supplemental course for the required first-year composition course. Composition students self-select into the Studio; while first-year advisors may suggest to certain students that they

would benefit from the studio (for example, those who don't do well in their first semester are often encouraged to take advantage of the studio in their second semester), it isn't mandatory for anyone. While the mandatory FYC courses are taught by full-time and adjunct members of faculty, the optional Studios are co-taught by a librarian and a student tutor from the Writing Center. There are ten Studio sections offered each semester, and each of the ten sections caps at five students. This means the course serves a total of 100 students per academic year, which roughly corresponds to the number of students who had previously placed into the cancelled stretch program.

While many colleges and universities are exploring tutor-in-classroom (TIC) options as a way to serve all students in FYC, placing a (usually) professional tutor in every section of first-year composition courses to help with the class (Song and Richter 1997; Spigelman and Grobman 2005; Parfitt 2007; Striker 2013), this isn't a practical option for our school or many others. The Writing Center staff is all undergraduate students; it's a purely peer-tutoring service. And, while there are more tutors working for the Writing Center now (between ten and twelve where there had previously been no more than four before 2013), there isn't enough money in the payroll budget to pay those students to cover 35 or more sections (at three hours a week each) of FYC as TICs, nor is there the time given that these tutors also need to attend their own classes. TIC is a great solution for those campuses with the resources and infrastructure to implement it; however, it's not one that can work at a university like ours. Key to creating a sustainable Writing Studio model was considering the resources we did have available, especially the human and monetary ones. For

us, that meant peer tutors and librarians used in a capacity that also made sense given budgetary and time restraints.

On a logistical level, that each section of the Studio is co-taught by a student tutor and a librarian addresses the labor and cost concerns the previous stretch program created: English department faculty are freed up to teach more general education and major requirement courses while tutors (who are paid an hourly wage for their time) and librarians (who are paid stipends equal to one-hour of adjunct pay per Studio section) provide a less costly staffing solution for the Studios. Because the Studios meet in small groups of five students and two instructors, there is no need for classroom space; Studios meet in one of the libraries on campus at communal tables in study spaces, thus also avoiding tying up limited classroom facilities.

This Studio program isn't intended to serve a large population of students, but rather to provide consistent, weekly, focused assistance to some students enrolled in first-year composition[1]. All sections of the Studio share a common syllabus with shared objectives:

1. Engage in the writing process from invention through final draft.

2. Understand and use strong research practices by identifying reliable sources utilizing databases, and placing sources into a larger conversation to support an argument.

3. Provide useful and intelligent critique of others' work.

The Studio model set out largely to address what the composition program identified as the most common reasons students fail

composition on our campus: procrastination on or incomplete work and inappropriate source use and integration. Our Studio model has lofty goals, but the shared syllabus, which includes a framework for how to proceed through the semester and what to cover in each class session, provides guidance to librarians and tutors about what they are primarily charged with accomplishing. There's a distillation down to a few primary and practical focuses that faculty who teach composition appreciate and that instructors can manage.

The Studio schedule of assignments (see appendix for sample schedule) corresponds to the FYC syllabi, asking students to turn in work assigned to their Studio well in advance of the final FYC due dates. Before a writing assignment is ever submitted to an FYC instructor, it has been through the writing process from invention to research to workshopping and editing in the Studio. One of the goals of the Studio course is to show students the benefits and rewards of starting a writing project well before the due date. Another is to demonstrate that writing doesn't have to be a solitary and painful endeavor, and part of what helps with that is the collaboration between the librarian and student tutor.

The librarian serves as the instructor of record for each Studio and is responsible for developing the skeleton syllabus provided by the Writing Center Director, inputting midterm and final grades, and all other administrative tasks related to teaching[2]. Although tutors are not listed as an official instructor for the courses, they still have a leadership role in the studio. Tutors are co-teachers in the day-to-day work of the studio, and the librarian may look to the tutor to work with students on particular skills related to writing. If the librarian has to miss a Studio class, the tutor takes responsibility

and teaches that class.

Although each Studio section starts with the same syllabus, each section is not uniform. All Studio students work through the process of invention, drafting, and revision for each assignment. However, as the instructor of record, the librarians set the tone and routine for their particular Studios. Class time can be used in a multitude of ways, such as dividing students up between the librarian and peer tutor to allow for working with students in even smaller groups and addressing students' personal needs (such as research and citation) individually as they arise. Class time can also be spent providing mini-lectures on database searching and citation or specific writing and grammar issues to the whole class at set times during the semester. The flexibility of the Studio model allows for this, and it also allows instructors to adapt their syllabus to account for student needs, assignment changes, and other issues as needed.

Even with only five students, there are logistical challenges to the Studio as well. Although FYC courses share a common set of assignments, they do not share common due dates, and each of the five students in a section may have a different FYC instructor. Students are required to share their syllabi with their Studio instructors during the first week of the semester so that the librarian can create a schedule to help students stay ahead and complete each segment of the assignment before it is due.

Students turn in all work for the Studio in a Google Drive folder that is shared with the librarian and the tutor, as well as with the other students in that section. Using Google Drive also means that students can access their work from any computer, but most

importantly it allows the librarians and tutors to easily provide and respond to comments. Students are typically asked to turn in invention work or a draft in Drive a couple days before the Studio meets so that the librarian and tutor both have time to look it over and provide feedback. Peer review is also used within the Studio, and students may also be asked to look over each other's work, especially if they are in the same FYC course. The librarians are also available to students outside of class, and students can make appointments with their Studio tutor or another tutor through the Writing Center for additional help as needed.

Librarians and Tutors as Studio Co-Instructors

In addition to addressing a logistical element by freeing up English faculty to teach to departmental needs, the decision to employ librarians with Writing Center tutors was also a strategic one. Librarians are natural partners for writing centers. Both want to help students develop as researchers and writers, to be able to analyze, synthesize, and produce information, and to be able to transfer those skills to other areas. They also both provide support for FYC programs and may do so independently or through offering joint workshops and services.

By creating a course with librarians and tutors in the role of co-instructors, our Writing Studio model differs from many of the case studies and examples present in the literature – none of which have employed this combination. Much of the research around writing centers and libraries (Elmborg and Hook 2005; Ferer 2012) focuses on the need for a physical space that is shared by both the library and the writing center (thus why many writing centers are located in libraries); the Studio model described in this

article not only puts these resources in the same physical space but asks librarians and tutors to bring together their collective knowledge and strengths in one class setting, something which no other studio model has done. In this way, our Studio provides a structure to the collaboration that isn't possible within library workshops or one-time Writing Center appointments. Through sustained dialogue over the course of a semester, rather than through one-shot instruction or appointments, our Studio strives to create, as Sheril Hook envisions, "a seamless information/writing experience, allowing librarians and writing tutors to be experts in part of the larger process, co-referring students back and forth between research and writing, creating spaces for creative, yet disciplined work and co-training each other […]in ways that each can support the other" (38-39).

Because inappropriate source use and integration was noted as a key concern of FYC faculty, it seemed essential to not only have librarian experts in the Studio classes but also to create a way to model the intellectual pursuit of research and writing as conversation. Having both a librarian and a tutor co-teaching the course accomplishes this goal. While worded differently when describing the Studio to students, one aim of our Studio, as other scholarship has encouraged, is to take the activity of writing into a social space where knowledge is collectively shared and created. Kenneth Bruffee suggests that this form of learning (the learning community) models the way in which professionals in all disciplines "construct knowledge in the language of their communities of knowledgeable peers" (53). In our Studio model, the classroom becomes a community, and the conversational, peer relationship modeled in the studio by the librarians and writing tutors allows for this kind of knowledge construction, one that

addresses part of what is implied by the second course objective: seeing research and writing as part of a conversation.

The community element of the studio is further enhanced by using undergraduate peer tutors as co-instructors. The peer tutors can relate to the students on multiple levels since they know many of the FYC faculty and the assignments and can share their own experiences and struggles with, as well as strategies for, writing and research.

Through the work and the conversations that take place around the table, librarians and tutors emphasize the interrelatedness and interdependence of research and writing. James Elmborg suggests that these conversations are incredibly valuable for student writers:

By working in collaboration, the library and writing center can treat the research process and the writing process as a seamless whole. Both writing tutors and librarians can become more adept at recognizing 'decision points', the point when information moves the research in new directions. Engaging student writers in discussion about these decisions [...] might be very productive, indeed. (11)

As librarians and tutors work with students for the entirety of an assignment, from invention to revision, they are able to engage students in discussions around these decisions. They can help students to consider new ideas and bring in new research as they converse about their topics around the table. Through discussing invention and inquiry in the studio, librarians and tutors are also able to reinforce the language that students hear in the composition classroom, which further connects the Writing Studio

to the FYC course.

Why Our Studios Work

In their 1996 CCC article, "Repositioning Remediation," Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson conclude that through their experiment with writing studios, they came to appreciate more fully the intellectual (and spiritual) nature of the interpersonal agency and engagement fostered by working with student writers in small groups where they are treated as writers, where writers are defined as those who navigate and negotiate the relationship between their languages and their worlds on a daily basis (through both written and spoken language forms) and, very importantly, where the mental processes that deal with the personal and interpersonal are understood as the socially and institutionally-constructed background for that negotiation. (82)

Much of the scholarship on studios stresses this social nature of writing and the role collaboration plays in helping young writers; hence, the third objective of our Studio syllabus: provide useful and intelligent critique of others' work. This collaboration and the ability to articulate critiques of writing are important, so participation in and fulfillment of this third objective also becomes part of what constitutes passing the Studio. Grego and Thompson's model differs from ours in that while students in their studios were told whether or not they passed or if they passed with distinction, students didn't actually receive the grade on their transcripts or course credit, which seems to make the distinction of passing nominal only.

The Studio model we have embraced is closer to that of John Paul Tassoni and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson's model as described in their 2005 article, "Not Just Anywhere, Anywhen" which is also a for-credit model.   Students in our Studio model do receive one hour of credit for the course. The pass/fail grade is determined by consistent attendance as well as completion of at least 80% of the work required. That work includes completing invention exercises, turning in drafts of work to the Studio in advance of the due date for the FYC course, and participating in conversation and critique of peers' works. The accountability of a pass/fail grade and the opportunity to earn credit are essential to making our Studio model work and is something that differentiates it from many unsuccessful models.

In their article, "Beyond the Budget: Sustainability and Writing Studios," Chris Warnick, Emily Cooney and Samuel Lackey write, "Because students did not earn letter grades for the course, attendance was a constant issue. In their dialogue sheets, graduate assistants frequently voiced their frustrations with students who were late or who missed a scheduled session, and these attendance problems suggested to us that students were not fully behind the small-group method on which the program was built" (80-81). Warnick, Cooney, and Lackey cite lack of student buy-in as one of the three primary reasons their studio model didn't work at College of Charleston. Buy-in to the small group is not one of the problems we've even had to face; students at our university love the idea of the kind of personalized attention they can receive in this environment. Our studio set-up plays into many of the reasons students choose our university in the first place and fulfills an oft-cited millennial need to feel special. However, tying the course to credit and a pass/fail grade helps; the modicum of

accountability does keep those who are otherwise inclined to sleep in or end their day early coming back. This for-credit, pass/fail structure allows us to put emphasis on participating in the writing process fully and in timely fashion as a key component of success in writing courses and college, in general.

Our model began with the question of how could we help first-year students, especially those underprepared to write at a college level, succeed in an FYC course. And, in doing so, the course began to matter to a variety of people across the university. The most important need and difficult to obtain buy-in is administrative. Grego and Thompson's article speaks indirectly to the problem of stakeholders who want composition programs to serve the university but don't value it with the resources or respect many other programs get. Most of the research either overtly or through implication suggests that there is a basic issue with sustaining a studio model over a long period of time. Key to the current success of our Studio was minimizing necessary resources and getting clear and resolute promise for those minimal resources.

We do benefit because, unlike many writing center directors, our Director is tenured and a senior member of the English department. Additionally, the Writing Center Director reports directly to the provost and maintains her own operating budget. While the Writing Center has always been an all-university service, prior to 2013, it relied on skimming from the English department budget for funding and paid student tutors out of a general pot of money allocated to Academic Services. In other words, the Writing Center was at the mercy of two different departments for funding and payroll—and was often limited by this. As part of the process of establishing the Studios, the Writing Center separated from

Academic Services and from its de facto housing in the English department. This gives the Director sole discretion for hiring and scheduling of hours and, in placing it outside of the confines of any one department, makes those at the highest echelons of the administration stakeholders in its success. The chain-of-command is clear but also changed because the Writing Center is no longer a sub-department but rather its own entity. This, perhaps, has placed a little bit of pressure on making the administration want to see the Writing Center and the Studios succeed.

How and where writing centers are housed and financed is unique to every school and is often quite difficult to change. But, that doesn't mean there aren't other paths to getting administrative support. The even more important and obvious way to get administrative buy-in is to argue for the Studio's role in retention. Retention has long been a primary concern for all universities (Noel, Levitz, and Saluri 1985; Tinto 2006-2007; and Braxton 2013)—it is increasingly one of the most important focuses at our university. Retention is the buzzword. Failing courses, feeling isolated, feeling under-prepared, or otherwise feeling disenfranchised are oft-cited reasons why students drop out or transfer. It is easy to make the case that the Writing Studio addresses many of these problems, not just the academic ones, but the emotional ones as well. A class with a cap of five, headed by two people invested in helping students with their writing, means that someone is paying attention and offering support. Just a few students in a section, all working on common struggles, encourages connections with peers as well. The cracks that students can fall through in their first year are given this tiny safety net—and anything that can be said to improve retention gives the administration a reason to maintain support.

While there is no data that makes a direct connection to the Studio playing its small role in retaining students, the evidence for the success of this model is based in qualitative surveys about the experiences of those who have taken the one-hour, supplemental studio course. While the librarians and tutors are not grade??focused within the Studio, its a concrete measure of assessment that those outside the workings of the Studio understand and can interpret as aiding in student success and track how students in the Studio perform in FYC (though it's hard to make the argument that individual grades are improved because of the Studio because it's impossible to get data on how an individual student would have done without it. There's nothing to compare to.). If students feel that their grades are improved because of the Studio, that adds to their overall satisfaction. The qualitative data on the experience suggests happy students—happy students who are less likely to dropout or transfer. A small logical leap, but the qualitative data is part of an argument that demonstrates success and justifies the resources we're using, resources that come from many places on campus.

By making the Writing Studio a joint service offered by the Writing Center and the Library, in cooperation with-- rather than as a mandated course taught by-- the English department, it becomes part of the larger fabric of the university. Involving more departments creates a larger pool of people invested in seeing the Studio succeed. In this case, more hands in the pot makes sure it's being constantly tended.

Conclusion

As James Elmborg writes, "[b]y collaborating together, librarians and writing instructors can create a powerful learning community with an overlapping zone of proximal development" (14). Writing centers and libraries are uniquely positioned within the institution to address students in that zone. Nathalie Singh-Corcoran and Thomas Miller state that: "[Writing centers and information literacy programs] occupy the spaces between, not just disciplines, but also the strategic spaces between the work done within disciplines" (210). Our collaborative work in the Writing Studio can, hopefully, have an impact on students, not just during the first year, but throughout their college careers. How much, however, is hard to measure. It is difficult not to make small leaps of logic and faith when discussing assessment in this context; making concrete, quantitative assessments are difficult because it's hard to say how any given student would have performed in FYC without the Studio supplement. The data we would like to provide, i.e. how much a grade can be improved with the Studio, how much better the writing meets expectations with the Studio, etc., is impossible to gauge because we can't make comparisons of individual students with and without the Studio. One area of research for the future is the impact of the Studio on a growth mindset (as defined by Carol Dweck), a focus of our university's new quality enhancement plan (QEP). This study will begin in Fall 2016, and while it still won't be able to measure how a grade or actual writing abilities are affected by Studio participation, what a study like this can tell us is if the Studio has a role in changing attitudes about learning and writing, if it can open students up to thinking about their struggles with writing as part

of a process rather than as simply a sign they are lacking.

What we do know from our experience, however, is that students in the Writing Studio develop relationships with the librarians and the writing tutors and that during and after the semester they continue to come back for help in other courses. We have witnessed students grow in their ability as researchers and writers, but more importantly, many of them have developed more positive attitudes about research and writing. And that, for us, is one of the greatest indicators of success.

Notes

1. It should be noted here that ELL students take a separate first-year composition sequence, so the Studio, as conceived, does not address those needs. However, it would take only some tweaking to modify the course to also be appropriate for ELL students.

2. This solves the problem of all the administrative logistics that needed to be considered when the Director proposed this as a credit bearing pass/fail course. Librarians, as employees of the university, can be registered in the system as adjunct faculty and so have access to all the administrative areas of the system that students (i.e. peer tutors) can't get into.

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Back to the Center

The Writing Center at Wallace Community College

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SARAH NEWMAN
RANDIE SESSLER

George C. Wallace Community College, also known as Wallace Community College, Wallace College, or simply Wallace in the area, is a two-year college with two campuses in the wiregrass area of southeastern Alabama. The College's main and largest campus, with an approximate enrollment of 3,461, is in Dothan, and our Sparks Campus, or simply Sparks, is almost an hour north in Eufaula, with an approximate enrollment of 435. Including our dual enrollment population, our spring 2016 overall enrollment is a little more than 4,300. The College bridges the divides between the differing demographics of students on each campus – whether traditional or nontraditional, single, single parents or family providers, or unemployed, full-time or part-time employees – to provide practical and supportive educational and training opportunities. We also work to meet the varied levels of academic readiness, goals, and needs of students who wish to transfer to a four-year institution as well as those who plan to complete their degree or credentials with us. The College offers both academic and technical degree and certification programs, and both campuses develop and enhance

Emily Cosgrove, Ph.D., is the Director for the Center for Writing and Writing Instruction and the Title III Project at Wallace Community College.

Sarah Newman and Randie Sessler, Ph.D., are the Coordinators of two locations of The Writing Center at Wallace Community College.

programs to meet the needs of changing marketplaces in our areas. These goals, and the desire to enhance student learning and engagement, inspired our eventual Title III grant funding award, which allowed us to officially open our doors in March of 2014.

For us, our two Writing Center locations (formally titled as The Writing Center by our institution) exist within an office called the Center for Writing and Writing Instruction (CWWI), which is essentially its own department. We house one Writing Center (a tutoring site) and Writing Lab (a larger computer lab used for classes and individual student writing) on each campus. Each Center employs a full-time coordinator who tutors and manages the day-to-day operation of a center, as well as supervises the great mix of both peer and professional tutors who work at one or both of our campuses. Our director is primarily based in Dothan.

The initial idea and framework for The Writing Center were developed through our Title III grant, which awarded us over $1.5 million in 2013 to increase student retention through:
> 1) the creation of The Writing Center
> 2) an Enhanced English 101 course that The Writing Center would support through required tutoring of students
> 3) a Lab space in which our developmental English students would receive extra support one hour a week
> 4) faculty support in writing, and developing a writing across the curriculum program on both campuses from 2013-2018.

Now, as we are over halfway through Year 3, we report an almost 25% increase in the success rates of at-risk students in English 101 courses and an almost 5% increase in the year-to-year retention of our at-risk developmental and English 101 students, as well as much success integrating our services and positive vibes into our campus cultures. Due to the success of these Writing Center initiatives, the College will continue to support these programs after the grant period ends in 2018.

Service

While the focus of our grant is to assist with at-risk student retention, and therefore provides a lot of support to our developmental writers, The Writing Center has an "all students, all writing" approach. Aside from professional tutors with backgrounds in teaching, tutoring, and English-related disciplines, we also hire qualified peer tutors from all disciplines who work with our coordinators to help all writers at any stage on any sort of writing, from brainstorming and drafting to working through patterns of error and foundational grammar rules. Since we're a community college that also provides technical education, our students range from those in criminal justice to biology, music to mathematics, and dual enrollment high-schoolers to cosmetologists.

We believe in creating a culture of writing on campus, and continue to create sustainable programs where students feel welcomed, encouraged, and empowered by their writing and opportunities to engage in writing with others, including faculty. Outside of tutoring, we provide assistance to instructors and to empower them to develop writing assignments that are both purposeful as they relate to course material and engaging as they teach students about writing in

CENTER *in*SIGHT

Wallace Community College currently enrolls a total of a little more than 4,300 students at both campuses, including our dual enrollment population.

- Director, Emily Cosgrove, Ph.D. (since 2014)
- Staff: 2 Coordinators, 1 Media Coordinator/Professional Tutor, 1-7 Professional Tutors, 2-7 Peer Tutors at each location
- Hours Open Per Week: 38 for each center
- Number of Consultants Working Per Shift: 2-5
- Number of Students Reached spring 2015 – current numbers for spring 2016: approximately 1,300 students had 3,196 appointment

their respective disciplines. We also use our Writing Center and campus spaces to make connections between writing and other activities students might be interested in—reading, board games, comic books, creative writing, open mic music performances and poetry readings, current events, etc. We believe that bringing options, opportunities, and support for bettering student writing on campus will enhance a culture where students feel that writing isn't a scary, boring, or awful thing that must be avoided, but rather is a chance to try something new and realize the potential that they have to communicate in different arenas through academic, professional, and social writing support.

Staff
The CWWI has four full-time staff members—a director, two coordinators, and a media coordinator/professional tutor. The three coordinators each tutor 20 hours per week and spend another 20 in either administrative or media-related capacities. We also employ between one to seven professional and two to seven peer tutors at each location who have varied backgrounds and interests with a shared commitment to writing and student support. Outside of our initial tutor training and practicum processes, we as a staff continually engage in professional development opportunities related to increasing our tutoring knowledge and effectiveness, as well as ways in which we as staff members can holistically support our students, such as learning about campus support services and student engagement techniques.

Space
Each Writing Center space hosts four to five oval or rounded tables, four to seven desktop computers, and private cubical spaces for students who might need a little more privacy or less distraction when working with a tutor. In addition to these workspaces, we also have a comfortable sofa and chair, a check-in desk, multiple bookcases filled with writing resources, games, and artwork, as well as a magazine rack filled with free reading materials, a box of free school supplies, and hanging wall dividers that display, for easy access, our created writing handouts.

Further, each Center implements bits of color and added interest to our white walls and dark blue carpeting with student artwork, natural light, and staff creations such as banners, bulletin board decorations, and a plant or two. Both spaces serve as hospitable zones on our campuses and, in many ways, fill the void that exists due to the lack of traditional student union spaces.

With regard to technology, our Sparks Writing Lab host 25 computers and an instructor podium with projector and speaker access, and our Wallace space hosts 101 plus a podium and projector. These spaces also contain printers for student use; access to computers is important for our students since many of them do not own or bring personal computers to campus. All of these computers are set up with word processing software.

Growth
This semester, we have provided 594 from Dothan and 241 from Eufaula thus far, which provides a snapshot of how much our reach has grown since of first full semester of operation in summer 2014, in which we hosted a total of 102 appointments in Dothan and 44 in Eufaula. Since spring 2015 to current spring 2016 semester as of March 31, 2016, we have conducted 2,228 appointments in Dothan and 968 in Eufaula. In addition, since our doors opened, we have collaborated with staff and campus partners to develop engaging and literacy-driven programs, including our Book Clubs, Group Help Sessions, Open Mic Events, and the creation of Wallace's first online literary journal. Further, we have assisted with developing and leading in-class workshops and writing activities for faculty across our wide range of disciplines, including Criminal Justice, Biology, Physical Therapy Assisting, Orientation, English, and Practical Nursing. We are also proudly growing our online support for students through our new "The Writing Center at Wallace Community College" Facebook and YouTube pages, where we continue to produce staff-created instructional videos and content that provide out-of-class support in areas in which our instructors and students request additional knowledge.

Regarding the specific at-risk population growth that we are tracking for our grant work, our collaborations with the English and Developmental Studies departments have increased at-risk student completion rates in English 101 courses to an overage of 88.4% from 2014-2015, which shows a 24.84% increase from the original completion baseline. Further, at-risk student fall 2014 to fall 2015 retention from English 092, 093, and 101 course success has increased 4.87% since its original baseline as well. Overall, our efforts at student engagement and retention through the aim of providing writing support and care for our students is making an incredible impact on these two campuses and, while we are proud of what we have accomplished in such a short period of time, we look forward to opportunities to impact more students in the coming semesters. Or, as one student put it in a recent evaluation, "It (the tutoring session) took my confidence level from 0 to 10."
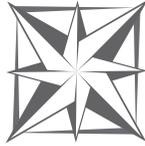
Consultant Insight

"Lessons from the Students We've Never Met": On the Benefits of Peer Tutor-Led Research in the Writing Center

Logan Clem
Troy Bryant

The types of data that many writing centers collect can help us to address and explore the problem of students whose needs are not being met. At our newly opened and rebranded Writing and Communication Center at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga[1], for instance, each student who visits completes an exit survey in which they rate their experience, describe what they learned, and offer general feedback and suggestions. This exit survey gives us some insight into how a student feels after having an immediate, first-hand experience with an actual representative of the writing center; but, as this survey is only available to those students who do actually come in for an appointment, this data does not tell us anything about the students who do not or cannot use the writing center. To address this deficit, we developed a new survey for those students who had not yet visited our writing center. We presented those results at the 2016 Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference in Columbus, Georgia.

As we discuss inclusivity of all students at our center, we must not simply consider the student writers that we serve, but also

Logan Clem and Troy Bryant are peer tutors at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Writing and Communication Center. They have presented at the 2016 Southern Writing Center Association conference in Columbus, GA. This is their first publication.

those we do not—and why. In our presentation, we discussed how our writing center might use such knowledge, not only to improve outreach, but to better achieve true inclusivity. However, if we are truly going to achieve inclusivity in the writing center, we must also—as Brian Fallon suggested in his keynote address at the Fall 2011 NCPTW— "pay more attention to peer tutors, to what [we] tell [the community] about learning, teaching, and writing, and to what [we] bring to our scholarly conversations in the writing center and composition study fields." In this paper, we relay the results of our peer tutor-led study as presented for SWCA; each of our authors provides a peer consultant's personal perspective on the benefits of performing such research as an undergraduate tutor and examples of those lessons learned.

The Study: Methods, Results, and Confessions

 For this study, we wanted to get a bigger picture of how students at our university view the writing center. We set out, initially, to see what perceptions and maybe misconceptions the student body holds about our center's activities. We designed a one-page survey consisting of three sections: a demographic section asking the respondent's major, gender, race, year in university, and home language; a section asking which (if any) of a series of reasons for not visiting the center applied to the respondent's situation; and a section asking which services the respondent believes that the writing center provides. Our four separate occasions, we passed this survey out to students. First, we handed it out in the library and later moved on to the student union building next door. We sorted the data from all 162 completed surveys into several categories using Qualtrics. Of the many demographic categories into which we divided our responses, one in particular (as the following select results will show) revealed a surprising and unanticipated trend regarding the inclusivity of our writing center.

Among the non-white[2] population surveyed, 41% of respondents reported that they would feel anxious about sharing work with peer consultants at the Writing and

Communication Center. This number was quite surprising compared to the only 25% of white respondents who reported the same. In addition, 61% of white students reported feeling as though they do not need the services provided by the writing center, but only 24% of non-white students reported similar feelings.

Based on these figures, non-white students that we surveyed are much more inclined to feel as though they need the services we provide, but they are also overwhelmingly more anxious about visiting than their white counterparts. The students who report needing us the most are too nervous to ask for our help. This paradox presents a serious hurdle that our infant program must overcome as it continues to mature.

Some confessions: as a team of undergraduate tutors conducting what was, for most of us, our first experience with primary research, we ran into some roadblocks, and some of our methods and results were less effective than we expected. For example: we used a paper survey. We passed out nearly 200 surveys, and 162 of them found their way back to us completed. This method was incredibly inefficient. We also potentially caused our participants additional anxiety as those handing out the survey were required to later return and collect the completed form face-to-face. As the survey did not ask for student names, the results remained confidential, but our presence during the process likely skewed some responses. Despite the faults of our inexperienced team, we still gathered (as the following sections will show) usable data, invaluable personal experience, insight into the state of our writing center, and created an agenda to change our program.

Troy Bryant

When our director suggested that my fellow consultants and I conduct a study, it was definitely something I was eager to participate in. I saw it as the perfect opportunity to get involved in some aspect of campus that was greater than myself and to learn valuable skills about group coordination,

organization, and leadership that I could take with me to law school in the fall. I also looked forward to the camaraderie of working side-by-side with my 4 co-workers, whom I had formed a friendship with that stemmed outside of the Writing Center. Though I anticipated that this experience would strengthen my relationship with my friends and co-workers, the project unexpectedly strengthened my relationship with our clients, even the ones I had yet to meet.

During our study, we handed the survey out to students who happened to be present within the library and university center. Generally, I consider myself a people person, so I was more than happy to approach complete strangers to ask them to take our survey. Although I didn't anticipate learning anything prior to getting the data back, the experience was surprisingly insightful. It's one thing to see 28% printed next to the "Anxious about sharing their work" option. It's another thing completely to see and interact with the students who make up that 28%. Although the survey was anonymous and I had no way of knowing who answered what, that unknown made me all the more aware that literally anybody that walked through our door may be anxious about being there.

Having handed out surveys to over half of our 162 student participants, it was humbling to realize that a good portion of the very people I had been face-to-face with felt anxious about their own work or didn't have confidence in themselves. Again, it's one thing to see a number on a page; it's another to know some of the faces that those numbers represented. As our study continued, I began to realize that we have a terrific opportunity. We are peer tutors, emphasis on peer. We represent an interesting position; we are essentially the middleman option for students. Unfortunately, bringing a paper to a professor may be intimidating. After all, they are the ones who will be grading the paper, which naturally creates an uneven power dynamic. While your friend may not be the best source of feedback for a paper that you've written, given the possibility for distraction and the likelihood that they may not feel comfortable criticizing

a friend's work, peer tutors are the perfect middle-ground where no power dynamic or distraction exists.

Given how important the interaction between a client and a tutor is, I realized just how critical sincere human connection can be. I can't view clients as just a number in our data or a block in my daily schedule. They're people who have their own individual needs, concerns, strengths, weaknesses, and assignments. In my time as a peer tutor, I've realized how important a simple minute conversation can be. An appointment that starts with a sincere "So how is your day going?" is usually better than an appointment that starts with an unenthusiastic "So what are we working on today?" It's a constant reminder that I need to reaffirm to our clients that we aren't automatons who are going to mark up their paper in red pen for every comma splice they have. We're fellow students who can sympathize and understand our clients, while also offering a level of feedback that goes beyond the average classmate.

This focus on person-to-person interaction isn't only useful for our clients, it's useful for me too. A specific client of mine with whom I have worked with on multiple occasions has her own set of challenges and difficulties. She started college several years ago and took a break once she found out she was going to have a baby. After a few years of juggling a full time job and motherhood, she has come back to get her degree, working two part-time jobs while maintaining her parental duties. After a couple of appointments and a few casual conversations, this client ceased to be just another appointment during my shift; she was a person with her own story and goals. We connected not as a tutor with a mighty red pen and the author of a paper that needed correcting, but two everyday normal people which made her gratitude all the more meaningful at the end of our weekly sessions.

After working at the Writing Center for nearly two semesters, I have several stories like the one above. I can't count how many clients, current and past, I see in the halls that wave to me, or say hey, or stop and talk for a minute or two. I'm not just "that

guy from the Writing Center." I'm Troy, who expressed a sincere interest in their work and genuinely wanted to help. With this dynamic, I find repeat clients are generally more open and willing to communicate what they're unsure about in their own work. They seem more relaxed and comfortable. I'm no longer a factor in the unknown, but a familiar face that they know on some personal level. A little humam-to-human interaction goes so much further in a session than correcting a couple of run-on sentences ever could.

For a study grounded in statistical data, the conclusions I drew were not necessarily quantifiable. Although I knew the study would strengthen my friendship with my co-workers, I never anticipated that it would strengthen the rapport with my clients to the degree that it has. Though it seems like such a simple and obvious conclusion, the recognition that our clients are people with their own stories has not only made me a better, more attentive tutor, but has made the job more rewarding than I ever could have imagined.

Logan Clem

When our writing center's director first pitched the idea of this project to our staff, I thought, "Cool, this will be a great opportunity to practice some skills I will need for grad school in a year. This will look great on a resume." Those outcomes certainly were benefits I gained from taking part in this project, but as we talked more about inclusivity in the writing center and developed the topic for our study, I realized that, since I began working with the center, I had not once considered that a student might have aversive feelings toward visiting the writing center.

To begin forming our methods for this study, we discussed as a group reasons we thought students might be apprehensive about visiting the center. I have several friends in STEM fields, and when I tell them about the writing center, they respond with something like: "I'm a biology major. I don't really write essays." At the onset of the project, this was honestly the only option I

could suggest to include in our survey. Another tutor working in our group suggested we consider the following: "I would feel nervous about sharing my work with a peer writing consultant."

As an English major, I am constantly inundated with words, constantly thinking about what words mean and how words work together. Writing and language are an essential, mundane aspect of my daily programming; so when I started tutoring with the writing center, I didn't realize that complex sentences and semicolons could be just as terrifying for some students as integral calculus and rates of change were for me in math classes.

But as we continued to collect responses to our survey, I realized that there are so many more nuances to that terror than simply feeling some nebulous sense of anxiety about writing. As our data reveals, 41% of non-white students in our study sample specifically marked that they felt nervous about having a peer consultant read their work. That result is troubling from a professional standpoint because it reveals that our center is not perceived as a safe place for all students to share their work. It's also troubling from a personal standpoint because I have zero experience feeling the kind of anxiety these students must be feeling. I am not naturally inclined to empathize with these students' situations because I have not lived them. This empathy is something that I must pursue, that I must make an active effort to develop if I want to be a truly effective writing tutor.

New tutors hired at our center read selections from the St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors before they begin tutoring. In one essay from that collection, "'Whispers of Coming and Going': Lessons from Fannie," Annie Dipardo tells the story of Fannie, a Navajo student studying at an "overwhelmingly white, middle-class campus" (234), and a tutor with whom Fannie worked. Through this story of closing cultural gaps, Dipardo urges us to "make vital connections" and to become "worthy students of our students" (234), a process which involves "becoming students of ourselves as well" (247). However, reading about an encounter with cultural diversity and actually living

through a tutoring session wherein this obstacle presents itself are as different as our students are from one another.

I recall a session with student, a frequent visitor to our center. This student, a Master's and native Japanese speaker, had quoted a line from a source but wanted to change the wording, to paraphrase the idea using her own language. I told her to "just change the words to something else that means the same thing."

She looked at me puzzled for a moment, then said, "You know, that is much harder to do than you think when English is not your first language." I was simultaneously embarrassed and enlightened by her stern response to my hastily and inconsiderately dictated suggestion. After profuse apologies and an extended (admittedly uncomfortable) silence, we both laughed and worked together with a thesaurus to find new words to add to this student's vocabulary.

I remember wishing that this experience had come much earlier in my tenure with the writing center. The lesson I learned here—that my understanding and perceptions of language do not always match those of the students with whom I work—would have been immensely helpful as my tutoring skills were first developing. I can recall my own struggles with perfecting the art of writing and manipulating words, but that period of my growth is so far in the past now that I often forget just how daunting a blank page can be—especially for someone writing in a second (or, in this student's case, third) language. I was grateful that she was so understanding toward my ignorance of the struggles she faced when writing. However, as the results of our study suggest, many other students confront similar difficulties, and they might not be as understanding as this particular student. Until now, I could have easily been part of the problem, part of the cycle of anxiety preventing so many students from entering Room 327.

Through just this one student, I have learned to tailor my approach to each new student individually. When I was first learning to tutor effectively, I found one or two generalist approaches that worked for most situations. Sure, tutoring this

way helped students with their more generic problems and perhaps moved them along in the writing process, but neither of us truly learned from the experience. My experiences with this student and the results of this project have taught me that each individual comes to our Center with a history, a background, and her own anxieties, her own strengths to be reinforced and her own struggles to overcome—that each new student I meet is entirely unlike any student I have met before and needs for me to be as open to learning the nuances of that student as a human being as she needs to be open to improving her writing.

Conclusions: An Open Dialog About the Future of Our Writing Center

As this study was a group effort, and as this paper focused specifically on the benefits for our tutors, we feel an open dialog between our authors will reinforce the benefits of increased communication among our staff about our center facilitated by this experience.

Logan: *Troy, what will you take away from this experience? How will you be implementing what you learned in your daily efforts at our center?*

Troy: *The study as a whole has been an enriching opportunity to consider the job of peer tutor from other angles, to really put myself into the shoes of the clients. What about you?*

Logan: *I agree. Investing that extra time into the well-being of the center and seeing first-hand the impact our attitudes have on the students with whom we interact really brings my self-awareness up to another level. After this experience, I am constantly aware that what we do has a real effect on our campus. How do you think we can implement our own findings in the training of future tutors?*

Troy: *I think just to remind tutors to be empathetic with all clients that come into the Writing*

Center. It's easy to check out and view the person you're sitting

with as the paper you're working on, but they're not. Tutors have to be adaptable.

Logan: *Exactly. Adaptability is a tutor's most necessary and valuable trait. How do you foresee our center addressing the issue of non-white respondents reporting twice as frequently that they were anxious about visiting the center while also being the group reporting the most need for the center?*

Troy: *I think those numbers were a realization that we could use some additional diversity within the Writing Center. Not only in race, but in major as well.*

Logan*: Our staff is relatively homogeneous, with most of us being white humanities majors. This diversity will certainly need to be a consideration in future hiring practices at our center. Overall though, I think you're right about empathy needing to be a major aspect of tutor training. That's been the biggest revelation I've had as a result. I worry that, had we not had the oppurtunity to pursue this project, I might not have realized it. Though many aspects of our project were naïvely informed and flawed, I think—should future tutors follow up on our work—that we have had a hand in permanently changing the face of UTC's writing center.*

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. For years, the UTC Writing Center occupied a tiny room in the ground floor of a three-story building nestled in the far northeast corner of campus which housed four disparate academic departments: English, Biology, Psychology, and Philosophy / Religion. The room was small, cramped, and largely inaccessible to many students. And because the Writing Center was located across the hall from an active Biology lab, it constantly smelled like formaldehyde. In January 2015, UTC opened a new library, and the Writing Center—now rebranded as the Writing and Communication Center—moved into a larger, more open room in this more centrally located, more accessible, less smelly building.

2. This distinction includes respondents who self-identified as either African American, Asian, Hispanic, Mixed, or Native American.

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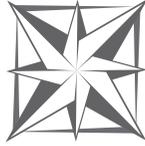
Consultant Insight

Listening Insights

GEORGIE SYNDOR

"So, what do you got?" I plop into the chair next to the girl, beside her, never across from her. I want her to think of me as an ally, a peer, not a professor.

"What are we going to work on?"

"So this is for my freshman seminar," she clears her throat. "I turned in my first draft a month ago, and now we have a second draft due on Friday."

"Oof. Cutting it close!" I give an exaggerated grimace.

"I know!" she laughs. "I put it off. I'm really not sure ... he wrote a lot of comments on my first draft. He says my argument isn't very clear."

"Cool. Let's work on it then," I give her a smile and a confident voice. "I've helped with a million freshman seminars this week. Have you been here before?"

She gives a headshake--hummm.

Georgie Syndor is a recent of the College of William & Mary where she was a peer tutor in their Writing Center. This is her first publication.

"Well welcome! First, it's very important that you read your paper aloud to me. It helps a lot for you to hear the way the paper sounds. We encourage everyone to do it. Plus, I can't read it anyway, so there's really no way around it if I'm going to help."

My grin widens. I assume she knows that I can't read; she saw me swing in with my cane three minutes ago. But if I don't put it out in the open for her, it's likely she'll assume it's an untouchable subject, something I'd rather not talk about. She already feels uncertain toward me as her consultant; I don't need her feeling awkward toward me as a blind person on top of that.

Since starting my freshman year at William & Mary, I felt driven to find a job. I need one, I told myself, I need to know how to do something other than take notes and pass tests. But before I'd even begun my search, I felt as if snakes were in my stomach. No one's going to hire me! They won't believe a blind girl can do anything without being led by the hand. Unfortunately, my first few attempts at job acquisition affirmed my fears. After the first few rejections I felt extremely disheartened and more than a little bitter. Looking back, I believe that I took those minor failures too seriously. Today, my memories of that time are colored with rosy relief, because I'm certain none of those jobs would have fit me as snugly as being a consultant in the Writing Resources Center.

After talking it over with friends and family, I realized I needed to apply for a position that I was so qualified for, something I was so good at that they couldn't possibly turn me away. My sophomore year, as I looked up the writing center job application, I started up a mental pep talk:"You're an English major, and you do well in your classes. You won that poetry contest in high school, remember? And you double in psychology. English and science paper-writing background, you're a double-threat!" Then an image flashed through my mind: my freshman roommate, standing on our ratty carpet and staring at my first graded paper in college, her head tilted quizzically.

"I'm impressed. I'm just kind of surprised."

"Why?" I asked, defensive.

"I know you're smart. I just didn't think you'd be a great writer, being blind."

I withdrew from the memory and began composing an email to my English professor, asking if I could use my recently-submitted essay from his Romantic period class as the writing sample for my application to become a Writing Resources Center consultant. "At least she was honest," I thought. "This woman whose going to interview me won't have the freedom to say what she thinks about my blindness. She won't be able to bring it up unless I do."

So I went into my interview with Sharon Zuber, Director of the WRC, determined to be the first to point out the cane-wielding elephant in the room and to meet her firestorm of questions and doubts with my own well-rehearsed responses. I would tell her about disability services, and my experience accommodating classes, and the ADA, and, and... none of it was necessary. About ten minutes into the interview, once I'd navigated the initial get-to-know-you questions, I decided it was time to inform Sharon that I would be able to do the job, but I wold need to do it a little differently than everyone else.

"So," quick breath, "I won't be able to actually read their papers, not if it's on printed paper. I can't see well enough to read. But," I rushed to continue, "I could ask students ahead of time to email their essays. Or, if it's a last minute appointment, they could put it on a flashdrive. I'll have my computer, and we're in the library, so they could use any of those computers..." I felt so uncertain. I was convinced Sharon was thinking, "Why should I hire this person when I could hire literally any other student who could just read the papers? This girl will need to do so much extra work to do this job, and that's not fair to her. So many extra steps, just to read the papers!" But I kept talking, because why not? It couldn't hurt my chances. "Or I could have them read the essays out loud even. I have a lot of practice listening," quick smile, "I just mean, I remember what people say very specifically."

Sharon was smiling. I could hear the smile in her voice as she said, "One of our policies at the WRC is asking consultees to read their work aloud. Every tutor listens to the essays; it wouldn't only be you. Of course, the rest of them would get to see the writing as well as hear it, and you couldn't do that. But, I bet relying completely on hearing the paper will actually be a good thing. You won't be tempted to take the work from the student and make all of the corrections yourself. And you'll be able to focus on the *sound* of the paper, the *feel* of it as a whole. No, I don't think that will be a problem in the slightest."

A quarter of an hour later, I left full of first impressions. The interview: quiet and comfortable, smooth. Sharon: sharp and intent and driven, genial and slow to judge others. The writing center: impressive yet welcoming. I saw it as a place ticking with purpose, rotating around a single goal, and taking pride in its successes. But it also seemed warm and casual: a place where people, papers, and fresh ideas were met with thorough scrutiny and genuine enthusiasm. I loved it. In the first few months of training, I would find that working there wouldn't require a single accommodation beyond my own own problem-solving and adaptability and other's open-mindedness and support. It only took a few days to see that all of these were in limitless supply.

I've always seen my blindness very casually, but only recently have I learned to speak of it that way to others. My job at William & Mary's Writing Resource Center involves speaking with people for about an hour, people who probably walk into the WRC not even realizing that they believe a blind person can't help them with their papers. They aren't trying to be prejudiced; they just live in a sighted world. Good writers are good readers, and reading does not come to most people's minds when they think of a blind person. I do in fact love to read, but I don't think reading and writing help me the most as a WRC consultant. The key skill is listening.

For me, consulting is all about listening. I listen to what a consultee says, how she says it, and what she doesn't say.

Listening starts as soon as we introduce ourselves. Each of our consultees at the WRC begins the appointment by filling out a sheet with his name, class year, major, and the kind of assignment he wants to work on. The consultant is supposed to look over this information right away, but of course, I can't read the consultee's penciled responses. But this little disadvantage gives me an excellent way to begin the conversation. Having to ask my consultee about her class and major allows me to slip in questions that aren't on the sheet, things that help me establish rapport, "So you're a Freshman, how do you like it so far?" or assess her attitude toward the class or assignment, "Who's your prof? Are you liking the class" At the end of the first five minutes, I've collected a lot of information. But listening becomes more important as the consultation goes on.

Just as Sharon explained to me in our interview, one of our strategies at the WRC is to ask consultees to read their work aloud to their consultants. Again, this rule doesn't just apply to the consultees working with me; everyone who comes in is asked if they are comfortable doing it. Hearing their own words spoken aloud can give consultees a feel for their writing's pace and tone, and I've often found it helps them catch typos and minor grammatical errors without needing a consultant to point them out. But while the consultee's ears may not be fully tuned in to what they are reading, mine are open wide, simultaneously focusing on specific details in order to catch any misused vocabulary or verb tense, and taking in the writing as a whole, hearing and assessing its voice.

Usually I have consultees stop after each paragraph, and we go over the material they've just read. I'll recap the general and the specific. I explain how the paragraph feels overall—good topic sentence, could use more quotes, a little too vague, etc. But I'll also say, "Can you reread the lines starting around the second sentence? Something sounded strange there." The consultee will often reply, "That part sounded funny to me too," showing just how helpful listening to one's own writing can be. Because I can't glance back over their writing myself, I need to listen very closely to every word. This keeps me focused, and the consultee

leaves feeling as if his paper received the attention it deserves. I'm left tired but pleased. I'm sustained by the idea that I may have affected someone's life in a small, positive way, and I did it as an individual, without a sighted person peering over my shoulder.

Ironically, my favorite consultations could be seen as the most challenging to my listening skills. I most enjoy working with students who speak English as a second language. William and Mary has a large number of international students, many of whom are non-native speakers of English. I imagine it takes a heavy dose of bravery in order to leave home to go to school continents away, where material is delivered in a language different from the one you hear in your head. These students impress me. Understandably, ESL students often find writing in English at a university level very challenging. Subsequently, more than a third of our consultees at the writing center are ESL.

My very first consultation was with an ESL student, and I was terrified. I thought my reliance on sound would hinder me when the speaker had a heavy accent. Since I couldn't read her writing for myself, what would I do if I couldn't understand her? My panic was unnecessary. I've discovered that accents are no barrier to my careful ears, and most students are not at all bothered by my asking them to repeat a word or two. I think if I wasn't physically unable to read their writing, many of these students would be hesitant to read their work aloud. They may feel self-conscious about their spoken English as well as their writing. With this in mind, I give hesitant ESL consultees my friendliest, most casual, most laid-back attitude. If they mispronounce a word, I shrug and say, "It's pronounced like this. But that word is silly isn't it?" or, "You used it correctly in the sentence, and that's more important in this case." Sometimes my efforts to put them at ease have consultees laughing their way through our consultations. My blindness forces them to read their work aloud, and my

demeanor allows them to take mistakes lightly.

My focus on listening also keeps the consultee from becoming bogged down by tiny details. Many ESL consultees come in to the WRC just wanting their grammar double-checked. But they quickly learn that being able to write well is much more than mastering tenses and appropriate article use. When I work with them, because they can't literally point out their concerns on the page, I'm able to pull their focus outward, encouraging them to look at each paragraph, and more widely at the entire paper as a whole. I found that I enjoyed working with ESL students so much that I went on to take a second job as an English language assistant. This job is part of a second program at William and Mary, not connected to the writing center. Without my time at the WRC, I wouldn't have had the experience to get this second job nor the knowledge that I'm interested in working with ESL speakers.

Listening also helps me focus on issues brought up in staff meetings. We had been giving extra appointments to a consultee who was struggling with severe dyslexia. Normally, a student could only come in for two consultations per week in order to allow more students access tp the WRC. However, the school's disability services granted this student permission to take as many spots as she required to get adequate help. So she would come in for hours each evening, highly stressed by the lack of support she received from her professors and overwhelmed by her assignments. She was uncooperative and frustrated, due to the lack of suport, even though we attempted to help her. Of course we wanted to help, and she certainly deserved special services, but I firmly believed that we needed a better way to help. It was time to speak up.

After a meeting with her, I slipped into Sharon's office. I explained my thoughts about the situation and offered to speak with disability services on the writing center's behalf. Sharon encouraged me to do so. I felt primed to go. This was my chance to do something for the writing center that no one

else could do. Being blind, I had gotten to know the people in Disability Services (since renamed Student Accessibility Services) before I even chose William and Mary as my college. For this reason I knew right away that part of the problem came from the fact that Disability Services was currently without a dean. They were at that moment conducting interviews with prospective candidates, many of which I and other disabled students had taken part. So when I considered our dyslexic consultee, my first thought was, "They must be overwhelmed over there, being run by deans who are just stepping in temporarily and still have their own departments to take care of." My second thought was, "They are going to welcome any suggestions that could help them out with this situation." So I went to them not with complaints but with ideas. I met with a graduate student I knew who, in the absence of a dean, had stepped up and taken the lead in Disability Services. After sharing my thoughts with her, I felt confident that Disability Services would soon contact Sharon with a proposal. A few days later, Sharon informed me that disability services had granted the WRC funding to give Melissa 10 hours of consulting separate from the official schedule. Consultants who had more training working with dyslexia were offered these hours, allowing the student to work with people who felt comfortable with her specific needs. It was almost exactly what I had suggested. I was pleased. I had almost single-handedly resolved a problem for the WRC as well as a fellow disabled person. Finally, I wasn't just keeping up with my sighted coworkers; I had accomplished something that none of them could do. I felt myself a valuable member of the team.

Today, I've graduated from William and Mary, and soon I'll start my new job as a literacy tutor. I'm proud of myself. Over 70% of blind people are unemployed, and I was secure in a job less than one month out of college. But along with pride comes gratitude. My work at the writing center is what made my current employment possible. At job interviews, I was able to sit back and talk about all my work experience. Toying with the top of my cane and telling stories about the writing center, I was able to show that I was blind but not a useless burden. I couldn't have built that image, that self-assured self, without the foundation blocks I found as a consultant in the William and Mary Writing Resources Center.
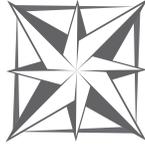
Book Review

Tutoring Second Language Writers

MELISSA ABERLE-GRASSE

Review:

Bruce, Shanti and Ben A. Rafoth, eds. Tutoring Second Language
        Writers. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2016. Print.

ISBN   978-1-60732-406-5

Pages 266

Price: $26.95

Editors Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth's new volume *Tutoring
Second Language Writers* (2016) appears during exciting shifts in
U.S. university writing centers. Most apparently, we continue to
see an increase in international and multilingual students to our
schools and writing centers. In fact, according to the Institute for
International Education, in 2014 U.S. enrollment of international
students in colleges and universities increased 10% over the
prior year, the highest rate of growth since 1978/79.

Ahead of and accompanying this population trend, writing
center and related scholarship in applied linguistics has grown.
A survey of dissertations in composition studies and our writing

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guage Institute and in the GT Communication Center*

center journals as well as the edited collections in recent years show relevant, verifiable research and demonstrated effective strategies. At the local level, this scholarship and the complexity of working with advanced language acquisition is more often guiding our work.

I glimpsed this recently at the Georgia Institute of Technology's communication center. As a second language (or L2, the term used throughout the text to persons whose first language is other than English) specialist, I was leading a peer tutor meeting. I wasn't surprised when two students energized the room: Kiran Rampersad, an international student from Trinidad and Tobago, and Keertana Subramani, born in Tamil Nadu in India. But I noted that they emphasized culture more than language. "Tutoring someone in their second language is about helping them obtain new ideas, new cultural insights and new dimensions of thinking," Keertana emphasized.

The editors' new volume goes beyond basic 'how to's' of tutoring L2 writers and instead digs deeply into the complex cultural, social and linguistic concerns that our centers face as we seek to not only effectively assist second language writers, but also create more multilingual centers. Similar to previous volumes by the editors (*ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors* 2004 and 2009), this book is written for tutors by a range of authors. Timely for this volume, the 14 individually-authored chapters represent a wider range of perspectives, in particular voices from writing centers outside the U.S. and tutors' involvement in research.

In chapter one, editor Ben Rafoth begins with a charge to writing center tutors to join a community of reflection, in the freshly illustrated tradition of John Dewey. Tutoring is complex and potentially transformative work, Rafoth insists, in particular tutoring that supports the advanced literacy of multilingual students. In response, tutors "must expand their capacities for teaching and learning in systematic and discovery-oriented ways." Rafoth illustrates the qualities of active reflection with examples from this text and closes the

chapter with the inspiring story of Atul Gawande's self-imposed coaching and reflection period when he was a mid-career successful doctor.

Each of the book's four parts opens with a brief overview that introduces the themes of the section; each chapter is followed by references but also salient discussion questions designed for group dialogue. Part one, "Actions and Identities," unifies three authors who connect multilingual tutoring to universities' wider responsibility for promoting justice and tolerance. In chapter 2, Frankie Condon and Billie Olson recount their story of confronting intolerance and racism toward international students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. They explain their process in which leaders and peer tutors conducted research that resulted in a book that aims to "create a house for diversity" in their writing center. Chapter 3's author Michelle Cox analyzes how identities—of multilingual students and their tutors—are constructed in writing center work, including an in depth analysis of the labels we use and how we assess the 'accents' of written World Englishes. In chapter 4, editor Shanti Bruce examines interviews at a writing center in Puerto Rico which focused on the dynamics of resistance and commitment to bilingualism.

Part two, "Research Opportunities," presents three chapters which inspire a mode of inquiry that arises when tutors pay attention to challenges of language or interaction and commit to disciplined investigations. Chapter 5 and 6 both continue the topic of chapter 4, English among first-language Spanish speakers, an appropriate theme for 2016. From 1996 to 2012, U.S. college enrollment among Hispanics ages 18 to 24 more than tripled (240% increase), outpacing increases among blacks (72%) and whites (12%), according to Jens M. Krogstad of the Pew Research Center.

In chapter 5, author Kevin Dvorak writes about the positive and negative pedagogical results of 'code-mixing' Spanish and English in tutoring sessions in their university writing center in Miami-Dade County. He involved tutors and students in in-depth interviews and reflections, which slowly resulted in their center

more boldly promoting multilingualism on campus. In the next chapter, Glenn Hutchinson and Paula Gillespie, also working with an increasing Hispanic population, reflect on multilingual tutoring through a tutor-led process of video recording and reflecting on their own tutoring sessions. The tutor-chosen and analyzed clips have been made available for other researchers online. In chapter 7, Rebecca Day Babcock writes a highly accessible, tutor-focused overview of research methods and inquiry topics that could further the work of multilingual tutoring.

The title of Part 3, "Words and Passages," is a metaphor for four shorter chapters by authors reflecting on individual research projects or experience in tutoring. Elizabeth (Adelay) Witherite explains the results of her thesis for which she interviewed tutors about social justice in tutoring. Chapter 9 details Jocelyn Amevuvor's encounter tutoring a Ghanaian student, which prompted an examination of cultural issues affecting language development. Chapter 10 extends chapter 3's topic of multilingual students' identity. Pei Hsun Emma Liu illustrates how multilingual writers can retain their written 'accents,' signs of their culture's rhetorical and linguistic patterns, while still successfully negotiating North American academic norms. Chapter 11 tells Jose L. Reyes Medina's story of immigrating to the U.S. as a young adult with limited English, and the habits and structures that best encouraged his adult English learning.

Part 4, "Academic Expectations," is the most practical section, encompassing responses to specific challenges tutors face when seeking to help multilingual writers compose or edit texts. In chapter 12, Valerie M. Balester confronts the ways in which entrenched tutoring practices can limit the skills and language of international students, and explores strategies for writing centers to learn from culturally diverse ways of thinking. Jennifer Craig, in the next chapter, discusses discipline-specific L2 writing with well-explained strategies and three anecdotes of successful tutoring sessions. Finally, Pimyupa W. Praphan and Guiboke Seong enter the ongoing debate about the efficacy of correcting

errors in L2 writing, presenting both strategies and examples that demonstrate versatile solutions for tutors.

Among its strengths, this text includes emerging educators in writing center work and devotes pages to discussion questions and narrative introductions that invite dialogue. As such, this collection does not offer a comprehensive span of writing center research about applied linguistics, but it does not propose to. Instead, the editors provide relevant, sound research that investigates new aspects of these issues as well as strategies that are both fresh and well-tested.

In his introductory chapter, Roth writes, "For writing tutors everywhere, perhaps the takeaway from this book is to keep learning—about language, languages, writing, and writers." Reading, discussing, and incorporating the insights in this text would be a profitable way to accept that invitation.

Call for Proposals

Special Issue of WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship
Transfer of Learning in the Writing Center

Guest Edited by:
Dana Lynn Driscoll (Indiana University of Pennsylvania) and Bonnie
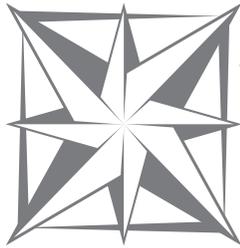Devet (College of Charleston)

A vital topic in higher education is transfer of learning, or what is generally known as students' ability to adapt, apply, or remix prior knowledge and skills in new contexts, including educational, civic, personal, and professional. As recent writing center scholarship attests, transfer of learning is of key importance to the work we do in writing centers, both with our work with clients but also with our tutors themselves.
For this special issue of the WLN, we encourage contributors to consider, as starting points, some of the following questions related to transfer and centers:

- How might transfer be defined and considered in a writing center context?
- How does transfer help characterize the development of consultants, both novice and expert?
- How do consultants transfer knowledge between settings?
- What strategies can consultants use to support and encourage clients' transfer of prior knowledge and skills during sessions?
- How do clients use the writing center to transfer writing knowledge between courses?
- What role do dispositions play in transfer in a writing center context?
- What can writing center directors do to help prepare tutors to better support transfer?
- How can transfer of learning be a primary mission for writing centers?

We welcome proposals for articles that are no longer than 3,000 words including Works Cited (fewer if there are figures and/or tables], written in MLA format, and a Tutor's Column that is no longer than 1,500 words in MLA format including Works Cited. We encourage articles that are RAD-research oriented, practical, or theoretical to consider the above and other questions surrounding transfer.

Proposals of 500 words will be accepted until May 1, 2017. Invitations to submit full articles will be issued by June 1, 2017. Invited authors submit drafts Sept. 1, 2017. Revised manuscripts will be due by Jan. 15, 2018. Send proposals to wln-learningtransfer@gmail.com