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.
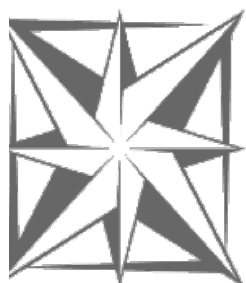
Our Mission

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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Guidelines for Writers

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, 8th 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 editorial staff for SDC is pleased to bring you this double issue. You may have been wondering what happened to the fall issue, and that is a fair question. One of the challenges of making SDC a peer-reviewed journal is that it is much more difficult for scholars to reach accepted status. While we still have room for articles on practice and reflection, our research articles are held to a much higher standard. We simply didn't have enough of those articles ready to go to print in the fall, so we had to wait.

The good news is that this issue was definitely worth the wait!

Cassandra Book's article "Is This Your First Visit?: User-Experience and Writing Centers' Online Presence," presents her extensive user-experience study of the affordances and challenges of using traditional scheduling and client management tools in an online environment. As more of our centers move to include online tutoring, studies like these will provide an important foundation for critical considerations of how to best implement and integrate new systems with older systems.

In "Recalibrating the Hiring Line: One Center's Changing Practices," Mike Mattison considers diversity and hiring practices. Such considerations are particularly important because reflecting the diversity of our clients is a critical part of delivering them the best possible tutoring experience. As a side note, I was personally delighted about how Mattison deftly incorporates lines from one of my favorite Bruce Hornsby songs—bravo for the compelling framing mechanism!

Diversity continues to be the focus for Bailey McAlister's "Non-Binary Gender Inclusivity in the Writing Center: A Review of the Literature." From the importance of being inclusive to making our centers safe spaces to helping everyone on our campuses understand the importance of using appropriate language (we are increasingly asked to weigh in about the singular they), writing centers are once again in the vanguard for demonstrating and sharing best practices.

Our final peer-reviewed article, S. Thomas Wilkes' "A Conceptual Approach to Addressing Black Talk in the Writing Center," rounds out an issue squarely founded on diversity issues. The argument for fostering critical language awareness in our centers is well-considered and should be a cornerstone of our pedagogical designs toward offering sessions that address identity and self-concepts for our clients—and for ourselves.

Our Back to the Center feature takes us on a tour of the Doctoral Support Center at Texas Tech. Our Consultant Insight features discuss the connections of writing centers and libraries and course embedded tutoring. Finally, our Book Review feature examines Geller and Eodice's Working with Faculty Writers.

Extra thanks to John Edgar Browning, Peter Fontaine, James Howard, Joshua King, Leah Misemer, Chelsea Murdock, and Julie Weng for their editorial assistance, as well as to Hillary Yeager for last-minute layout assistance.

They say all good things must come to an end, and so it goes. It has been my honor to be your SDC editor for the past three years. Please help me welcome Scott Pleasant and Devon Ralston as your new co-editors. Send them your important work. I can't wait to read it!

Is This Your First Visit?: User-Experience and Writing Centers' Online Presence

CASSANDRA BOOK

"Simply put, WCOnline allows me to do what I most need and like to do much more easily and cost effectively." (Mika 8, Writing Lab Newsletter)

"We've always found WCOnline to be incredibly user-friendly and very adaptable." (Strang, WCenter Listserv)

"I'm about to tear out my hair. Clients this semester have been very confused about the difference between e-tutoring and online tutoring, though we do mark this in several places and include instructions on the website. So we have clients who have scheduled an online appointment thinking they have an e-tutoring appointment and vice versa. Needless to say, this inherently ends in much frustration on the tutor's part and anger on the client's." (Vorhies, WCenter Listserv)

There is quite a distance between Heather Vorhies' frustration with "clients'" (mis)use of WCOnline and Margaret Mika's and Steven Strang's enthusiasm. Strang and Mika reflect the appointment scheduling and record management system's use from a pragmatic Writing Center Professional's (WCP) perspective—they value efficiency, low cost, and ease of use. The problem, as Vorhies demonstrates, is that a system, no matter how well-designed and

set up from a designer's or administrator's perspective, is only successful when all its end users find it both usable and useful (Mirel). In writing centers, most end users of technologies such as WCOnline are the thousands of writers who visit centers, face-to-face (f2f) or online, for feedback. Instead of assuming the technological tools that WCPs value are useful and usable for writers, writing centers need to reorient decisions and designs for the most important users of physical and online spaces. Integrating the perspectives of writers-as-users will align practices clearly with a writer-centered ethos, a long-standing goal of Writing Center Studies.

User-experience (UX) research provides WCPs a framework for empirically describing and making technology and design decisions based on writers' needs, goals, and actual practices. UX research is situated across disciplines, including Technical Communication and Usability Studies (Redish) in both academia and industry (Cooke and Mings). Embracing UX methodologies can move writing centers beyond imagining what writers need and toward user-informed or centered (Johnson) design for both physical and virtual spaces. UX researchers first gather data about end-users' goals, values, and actual interactions with interfaces or designs. They then analyze and apply the findings into prototypes, designs, and redesigns of systems or processes, with the goal of enhancing the end-users' goals. Further, UX perspectives have the potential to shake up the narrative that writing centers comprise separate "physical" and "online" spaces (see also Healy and Carino). For instance, many students first experience a writing center via a website or scheduling system, so the online experience inevitably shapes the first f2f experience (Metz Bemer).

This article presents a pilot study of how I, situated as a WCP, employed UX to tackle a real problem related to our center's use of WCOnline for scheduling and mediating online tutoring appointments in our "Virtual Writing Center." The pilot study aimed to both understand the processes for online tutoring appointments from writers' perspectives and recommend changes for our center's website and our WCOnline application based on the findings. While UX provides a spectrum of available methods, I gravitate toward participatory UX methodologies that value end-users as co-researchers (Eyman) and acknowledge the ethics of incorporating collaboration with participants (Salvo). While there are limited opportunities to redesign WCOnline, an understanding of how local users' habits contribute to the use and usability of writing center-employed technologies will better situate WCPs to respond to issues.

I am certainly not the first Writing Center researcher to propose that UX methodologies should play a role in writing center administration. In 1998, Stuart Blythe introduced usability to a writing center audience. As he states, "methods already exist for studying interactions of technology and humans—methods that can be adapted to writing center practice" (104). Blythe calls for WCPs to incorporate usability, testing the ease of use of a product or design, as an ethical way to understand writers-as-computer-users in situated settings because it enables "purposeful action" (105). Researchers at Purdue University, focusing on the Purdue OWL, provide a comprehensive model of UX work. Their reports are now valuable open resources on the Purdue OWL (Salvo et al. Purdue). Further, the researchers explain their participatory methodology on two generations of usability testing in several publications (Brizee, Sousa and Driscoll; Driscoll et al; Salvo et al.

"Usability").

Nearly twenty years after Blythe published his call, Amanda Metz Bemer studied the rhetoric and usability of 100 writing center websites and considered how writing centers might better shape their images rhetorically through understanding user experiences. The recent publication of Metz Bemer's article, which strongly recommends usability testing of all writing center websites with target audiences, demonstrates that WCPs may now finally be at a moment where we can begin to shift our technological research energies from key themes such as incorporating multiliteracies (e.g. Grutsch McKinney; Sheridan and Inman) and theorizing online tutoring (e.g. Breuch; Bell) to adjusting everyday designs and practices based on how student writers use digital writing tools and writing center technologies. The range of artifacts in need of UX research is vast and oftentimes context-specific: online scheduling systems, websites, handouts, and physical layouts. However, UX methodologies also have the potential for a broader reach into writing feedback and processes; for example, Megan Boeshart made a strong argument for considering asynchronous feedback and revision through the UX lens in her Southeastern Writing Center Association 2018 conference presentation. In short, UX work is important, and WCPs need a variety of models in order for UX to seem accessible in all contexts. My pilot study aims at the nexus of the website and online scheduling system for online tutoring appointments and intends to show that a highly complex usability study need not be conducted in order to learn significant insights.

Pilot Study

I initially identified usability issues via our service account and phone calls during my normal workday. I noticed that writers who accessed our WCOnline application typically did not have many issues scheduling f2f appointments, but the synchronous and asynchronous online-only appointments in our Virtual Writing Center did have issues. For example, I noted the exact same problem that Vorhies describes in the opening quotation: writers did not realize that the default setting for a virtual appointment is a synchronous video chat session ("Online Consultation"), not the asynchronous emailed feedback option that WCOnline calls, by default, "eTutoring." Many mistakenly scheduled an Online Consultation, leaving their consultant needlessly waiting. Other issues included writers scheduling f2f appointments when they wanted an online-only appointment and writers having trouble uploading their draft for an eTutoring appointment. I developed workarounds for these issues such as manually sending "double confirmation" emails (WCOnline already sends an automated one). While I was aware of these issues, I did not know how to fix them because, to me, the writers were simply not using the system correctly.

When I enrolled in a graduate seminar on Theories of Professional Writing, the course provided me with several lenses, such as studies of workplace writing, usability studies in online writing classrooms, and critical research practices, which helped me identify the issues as system rather than user issues, and the UX methodologies positioned me to address them. I designed a pilot study with the goals 1) to observe writers in an extended interaction with WCOnline and 2) to make modifications that

would reduce confusion resulting in lost consultation time or a missed appointment.   The research questions for the pilot study were:

> 1. How easily does a first-time writer access the University Writing Center's website and schedule appointments for synchronous and asynchronous sessions?
>
> 2. Where are there breakdowns in usability for writers?
>
> 3. How useful are the detailed instructions, located on our center's website, for scheduling online appointments?
>
> 4. What other systems (e.g. email, Blackboard, Google) do writers employ?
>
> 5. Does the terminology employed at our center and in WCOnline (Online Consultation, eTutoring, and Virtual Writing Center) affect the usability of the scheduling system for writers?
>
> 6. What ideal and realistic design and communication changes can researchers and participants recommend to improve writers' user experiences?

The institutional context of the research site is the University of Louisville, an R1 university. The "University Writing Center" (UWC) is situated institutionally within the English department and physically in the main campus library. The UWC provides f2f consultations in the library and one satellite location; online tutoring services are called the "Virtual Writing Center." Currently, using WCOnline as the platform, the UWC provides both

synchronous and asynchronous consultation types in the Virtual Writing Center.

Methodology

Several key conversations in Rhetoric and Composition, Professional Writing, and Computers and Writing provided significant insight to the study's design. For instance, the edited collection Rhetorically Rethinking Usability (Miller-Cochran and Rodrigo) considers usability from the perspective of Rhetoric and Composition research and pedagogy. Rochelle L. Rodrigo and Lisa Cahill's chapter recommends that researchers develop goal-directed heuristics and pluralistic walkthroughs for testing course websites in a controlled environment in order to identify usability issues with the access, navigation, and participation in online courses. Susan Miller-Cochran and Rochelle L. Rodrigo, in "Determining Effective Distance Learning Designs through Usability Testing," make a similar argument. The usability testing in the course-based studies that Miller-Cochran and Rodrigo and Rodrigo and Cahill describe was instrumental in my understanding of applying UX to online writing spaces because they value users as learners and describe conclusions about how they adapted a web course environment based on usability findings.

Yet, Clay Spinuzzi's research on workplace writing habits illuminated a possible solution to one limitation of the usability testing of one artifact (such as a course website). Though methodologies such as Miller-Cochran and Rodrigo's were particularly helpful in describing what Spinuzzi calls users' mesoscopic-level actions, or "the tasks in which people are

consciously engaged" (33), even Miller-Cochran and Rodrigo had difficulty "separat[ing] design issues on the institutional level and design issues at the instructor's level" (100). Spinuzzi's model for "genre tracing" recognizes instead that writing center users are individuals navigating WCOnline within an institution, for various purposes, and as it is networked with other, more familiar, tools and goals. Following Spinuzzi's argument for an integrated scope in workplace research, I paid close attention to all the steps taken for participants to complete tasks and encouraged the participants to go about their assigned tasks as normally as possible.

Such an expansion from usability of one artifact to a user's entire process also aligns with Robert Johnson's insistence that use is individual and local. In other words, the way writers use WCOnline at my institution and the ways (known and unknown) our center is networked to other online institutional spaces cannot be replicated at any other institution: "users understand technology from a unique perspective constructed from knowledge of practice within certain contexts" (Johnson 10). Though I hope other centers see parallels with my research site and their own center and though I try to generalize when possible, use is local and contextual.

Because of the student-centered focus of writing centers, I was also drawn to UX methodologies that insist upon ethical collaboration with participants and critical reflection on positionalities. Michael Salvo understands the process of improving the user-experience as ethical only when it is collaborative with the research participants. Doug Eyman also argues that usability research should be participatory: "From this starting point, where the distance between researcher and participant is minimized, usability studies

can move toward a mode of operation that accounts for the power differential between researcher and participant by granting more authority for action to the user/participant" (219). Both Salvo and Eyman underscore Patricia Sullivan and James Porter's call for critical research practices, in which researchers account for the situatedness of researcher, participants, and research site. While I was not able to incorporate participants into the pilot study's design process from the beginning, I did invite the participants to consider the study's initial findings and provide their perspective on analysis in interviews, while I, too, reflected on my own role at the research site as the Associate Director of the Writing Center. Finally, Sullivan and Porter also advise that researchers recognize the "tensions between ideal methods and realizable possibilities" (164) because of the nature of research methods that aim to take into consideration real contexts. I embraced this understanding of situated research, having to adjust my procedures based on student schedules, technology, and space.

While the researchers I just overviewed had an impact on my understanding of UX's work in related disciplines, several UX practitioners provided more direct guidance in selecting and applying UX methods. My data collection included usability tests and interviews with six participants. Carol Barnum, an advocate for making usability testing accessible for "anyone... who has a hand in development or support of a product of any type" (3) was instrumental in providing concrete guidelines. In terms of participants, Barnum recommends studying subgroups of participants, so, for the pilot study, I identified "on campus undergraduates." After the project was granted IRB exempt status, I recruited students from English department courses for non-majors who fit the criteria of never using the Virtual Writing

Center. The recommended number of participants for a round of usability testing with a subgroup is five, (Nielsen, cited in Barnum 16). All names used are randomly chosen pseudonyms: Jamie, Jo, Sue, Sam, Kyle, and Kim.

The first part of the data collection was usability tests in a controlled environment. To prepare the formal usability test, I wrote goal-directed scenarios (Appendix) as a heuristic for the participants to attempt. Barnum cautions against simple task-based usability tests that do not fully allow users to embrace a goal: "scenarios need to feel real" (128). For example, instructing a participant to "locate the writing center's website" would be a simple task. Instead, a goal-directed scenario would provide the participant the reason for finding the writing center's website. Additionally, Tharon Howard argues that good scenarios understand users' environments. Howard discovered during usability testing of a citation handbook with students that asking users to play roles that they cannot adopt created a false sense of task success in complex situations. Therefore, the goal-directed scenarios I developed focused on scheduling appointments in the Virtual Writing Center and employed a narrative, beginning with the first scenario:

You have a new part-time job this semester, so you are on campus for a limited amount of time each week. You also have a paper due soon in an important class. You would like some guidance from the Writing Center on this paper. You heard that the Writing Center offers a service for which you do not have to go to the physical Writing Center. Schedule yourself an appointment that will work for your schedule during the week of April 3.

With the first scenario, I wanted to observe the process undertaken for what may seem to administrators a simple task ("schedule an appointment"). I also purposefully designed this scenario so that the participants would not be told which type of online appointment (synchronous or asynchronous) to schedule. I wanted to see if they noticed that there were two types and also ask about their assumptions for what an appointment would be like for "a service for which you do not have to go to the physical Writing Center."

The narrative-based scenarios helped the participants understand why they were completing tasks and allowed me to follow the levels of local processes they undertook as they worked toward the goal. I encouraged writers to interact as much as possible as they "really" would so that I could observe more accurately their localized use (Johnson). For instance, when the writers started the usability test, they were on a desktop with no web browser open. I used screen capture software (Camtasia and OBS Studio are two options) to record the screen, audio, and video (of their faces) and asked them to "think aloud" whatever thoughts came to their mind as they navigated the interfaces. I sat near them and took notes; we interacted occasionally in a conversational manner. I later watched the videos and filled in my notes—one side of the page was a descriptive transcription, and the other side of the page included my reactions and analysis.

Although my original research plan, favoring participant collaboration, called for a focus group with all the participants, the participants' schedules did not align for a focus group. Instead, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews after the usability tests. I selected semi-structured interviews because they allow

UX researchers to "gather data on topics where the interviewer is relatively certain that the relevant issues have been identified, but still provide users with the opportunity to raise new issues that are important to them through open-ended questions" (Wilson). All interviews, except the first two, occurred immediately after the usability test. I was able to use the first two interviews to develop the semi-structured interview guide based on the initial findings. Like I intended with the focus groups, I was able to share initial findings and invite participants to suggest modifications or solutions to their issues and confusions.

The usability tests and interviews occurred in my office in the writing center. Ideally, I would have avoided the writing center space, but finding another quiet, private space on our campus is difficult. I did my best to make the participants feel comfortable and welcome. They sat at my desk while I sat to their left. I assured them how much I valued their perspective even though they did not consider themselves "experts." Many were worried or embarrassed about being "wrong," but again, I assured them that understanding their usability "errors" would help improve our system.

Major Findings

I will review the results from my study for each of the research questions individually except question four. Question four inquired about the use of other systems such a Blackboard or Google as the participants interact with UWC's website and WCOnline. I will discuss the findings of that question in relation to the other research questions.

How easily does a first-time writer access the University Writing Center's website and schedule appointments for synchronous and asynchronous sessions?

The two-part nature of this question yielded two opposite findings. First, even though the scenario did not tell participants to find the UWC's website, the embedded task was to locate the website. Participants easily did so, needing only a few steps between identifying the goal and achieving it, though they accessed it in different ways. Four participants used a search engine and found our website on the first page of results; one participant found a direct link under "Academic Resources" from the institution's homepage; one typed in the URL directly. The majority also found the link to our WCOnline schedule from our website fairly easily, which they achieved through clicking on "appointments" and then "make an appointment."

However, all but one participant failed to successfully complete the second part of the task. The five participants scheduled f2f appointments even though the task was to schedule an appointment "for which you do not have to go to the physical Writing Center." They could schedule either an "Online Consultation" or "eTutoring" to successfully complete the task, but instead they chose f2f appointments, which is the only option available on the default schedule screen (fig. 1). Although there may be other options for using WCOnline with multiple f2f and online locations, we have our WCOnline schedules organized by "center:" f2f library location, f2f satellite location, and Virtual Writing Center. The default schedule is the f2f library schedule; all others are accessed via a drop-down menu (fig. 1). Five participants overlooked the drop-down menu. In

their interviews, most agreed that they felt fairly confident that they had successfully completed the task, until they realized it was a f2f appointment or I pointed out their "mistake." Their feelings ranged from frustration at their mistake during a "test" to embarrassment that they would have missed an appointment. Some realized their "mistake" on their own; in other instances I pointed it out to them during the test. I intervened because I designed the tasks to build on one another, and it would have been impossible to continue to task #2 without completing task #1.
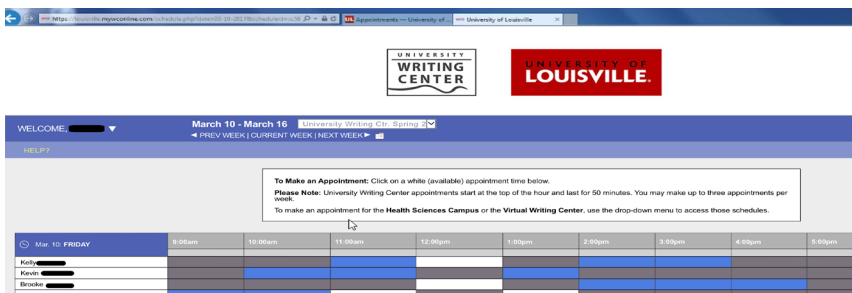
Figure 1: The first screen users see after registering and logging in is the "University Writing Center" schedule, which shows available f2f appointments in the main location. Other schedules are accessible via the dropdown menu near the upper middle of the interface.

Participants seemed so focused on part of their goal— to schedule an appointment—that they forgot to consider the detail that they needed to ensure that they were scheduling an online appointment. They assumed they were succeeding in their task if they did not receive an error message. Jamie described the approach as "let's try and do it" (without reading instructions), and Kim said she was "a little click happy." Once logged into WCOnline, they saw "writing center" and "appointments" and did not question that they could be in the wrong place. There are only small clues to help writers recognize the appropriate schedule or even that there may be other scheduling options. Moreover, on the

UWC website, next to the instructions and explanation for virtual appointments, there is a "Make an appointment" link, but it defaults to the same WCOnline login screen as f2f appointments. New users of the Virtual Writing Center have no reason to consider how the UWC would integrate scheduling f2f and online appointments into one system.

Where are there breakdowns in usability for writers?

The main breakdown in usability was the participants overlooking the drop-down menus (on the login screen and all the schedule screens) to select the schedule for virtual appointments. Administrators in the UWC previously tried to mitigate this confusion and clarify how to use the WCOnline schedules. We included instructions and information in a textbox that appears between the menu options bar and the appointment scheduler, called an "announcement" (fig. 2). Announcement boxes with instructions and information, like figure 2, appear at the top of the Virtual Writing Center schedule and the "Appointment form" (the form completed with information about the appointment before it is reserved). Participants treated all these text boxes the same way, as if the information was extraneous. In her interview, Jamie told me that she read the beginning of the first line of the box, "To make an appointment…" and determined that the whole box would be providing instructions to schedule an online appointment, which seemed to be straightforward to her. She did not read further to the last line regarding use of the drop-down menu to select the schedule for online appointments. Kim admitted that she had not really seen the announcement text or the drop-down options; Jo "skimmed" the box.

To Make an Appointment: Click on a white (available) appointment time below.

If the schedule is full, click on the clock icon next to the date to add yourself to our Waiting List.

Please Note: University Writing Center appointments start at the top of the hour and last for 50 minutes. You may make up to three appointments per week.

To make an appointment for the **Health Sciences Campus** or the **Virtual Writing Center,** use the drop-down menu to access those schedules.

Figure 2: The announcement box on the University Writing Center's schedule with instructions about scheduling an appointment. The last line reads, "To make an appointment for the Health Science Campus or the Virtual Writing Center, use the drop down menu to access those schedules."

Once users locate the Virtual Writing Center schedule interface, the announcement boxes located on the schedule and in the appointment form define synchronous (Online Consultation) and asynchronous (eTutoring) appointment types. Half of the participants scheduled the default synchronous option, even for the task that described asynchronous feedback: "Since you are so busy, you would really prefer that the Writing Center give you comments on your draft and send them to you." Some were able to figure out how to modify their appointment, or they completed a "work around" where they canceled and rescheduled the appointment correctly. Others did not realize their "mistake" until further on in the usability test.

Attaching a file to an eTutoring appointment is necessary to receive asynchronous feedback; however, all except one participant missed the prompt to attach a draft. The prompt only appears after "saving" their appointment. The "attach a file" link is the same font and size as the other text in the box (fig. 3). The "Close window" button is big; users simply clicked "close window" without fully reading the instructions to attach their draft (fig. 3).

Success!

Your appointment was successfully added on the following date: March 21, 2017.

If you would like to **attach a file** to this appointment, click here.

Figure 3: Screen capture of a writer clicking "close" before reading the "attach a file" prompt.

WCOnline provides the functionality to attach a draft at a later date. The idea is that writers can schedule an eTutoring appointment even if they are still working on a draft. Two participants successfully attached their draft after exploring the interface a bit. Three others needed help or encouragement to figure out how to attach their draft. One gave up. For instance, I would say, "OK now you have your appointment, but your tutor needs a draft to respond to." The first place they logically looked to attach their draft was in their appointment form itself, which they can access by clicking on the (now) bright green box (their appointment) on the schedule. Unfortunately, there is no option to attach a draft in the appointment form; the attach a file (later) link is a yellow file folder on the main schedule screen in the top left.

How useful are the detailed instructions, located on the University Writing Center's website, for scheduling online appointments?

The instructions, including text and video, on the UWC's website were not helpful because they were not used during the WCOnline aspects of the usability tests. No one watched the tutorial video, which is a voice over demonstration of scheduling virtual

appointments. In their interviews, participants expressed little interest in watching a tutorial video for something that, to them, should be simple. Sam recognized that he watches tutorial videos on his own to learn how to do something complex, but not for simple tasks: "I'm not sure if someone's always going to want to take the time out of their day [to watch a tutorial for] something like a writing center appointment. If I was trying to schedule that, I probably wouldn't look into it that much." The fact that we offered instructional information did not seem to matter to these participants because they did not see it or use it.

However, one of the final tasks directed participants to our website and engaged them specifically in finding out unspecified information about the UWC: "You've never been to the Writing Center before and you want to get an idea of what it is like. What questions do you have? Where would you go to find answers?" In this scenario, participants were able to find helpful information to answer their questions. Most browsed the homepage, appreciating the scrolling photos, which gave them a visual picture of what the center is "like." In addition, Jamie, reviewing the Frequently Asked Questions page, noted: "Most of my questions can be answered by the FAQs."

Most striking for me was the fact that when participants tried to find information about the Virtual Writing Center, they could not locate it. Our website's information, particularly our Frequently Asked Questions, only discussed f2f appointments. The Virtual Writing Center information was at the bottom of the general "appointments" page and in the video tutorial. Many did search,

but they did not know to use the search term "Virtual Writing Center."

Does the terminology employed at our center and in WCOnline (Online Consultation, eTutoring, and Virtual Writing Center) affect the usability of the scheduling system for writers?

The terms "Online Consultation" and "Virtual Writing Center" seemed logical and meaningful to the participants. Two identified the option and interface of the Online Consultation module as the aspect of the experience that they liked best. The term "eTutoring" did seem to create confusion and lead to usability issues. Kyle and Sue noted that "eTutoring" could be mean either asynchronous or synchronous: "eTutoring sounds like essentially it would be the online appointment, but in this case it is an email appointment, so I would say change it to 'schedule live chat appointment' or 'schedule email appointment'" (Sue). Moreover, even after I explained "eTutoring" in the interview, Sam still was not sure what it was.

Recommendations and Next Steps

RQ6: What ideal and realistic design and communication changes can researchers and participants recommend to improve writers' experiences in the Virtual Writing Center?

Barbara Mirel describes the flexibility of software architecture as "user adaptability" and argues that it is an important component of usefulness of product (xxxi). WCPs, as administrator users, can modify some WCOnline settings. Moreover, WCPs can make stra-

tegic use of their websites as an additional space to frame writers' experiences. I provided our Writing Center Director with a complete report of recommendations based on the usability tests and interviews; we have implemented most of them already. I have summarized the key changes below.

Modifications to WCOnline

We changed the name of "eTutoring" (for asynchronous) and "Online Consultation" (for synchronous) appointment options. Although prior to this study I was not aware that WCOnline gives administrators the option to change the name on the appointment form, though it still appears as "eTutoring" and "Online" on the main schedule. Since all my participants agreed that "eTutoring" is vague, I would recommend that all centers change the name to clarify. The participants suggested "email feedback" or "feedback." After discussing the options with the Writing Center Director, we decided to try "Written Feedback" and "Live Video Chat" to clearly distinguish between the two appointment types. An easy way for centers to rename these types of appointments in a way that takes into consideration local context would be to poll repeat online writing center visitors about their preferences.

Next, we redesigned the announcement boxes at the top of schedules. The goal was to make the information more visually appealing, which is what the participants wanted. The boxes do not have to be plain text. There are editing tools in WCOnline's settings that allow for font changes, hyperlinks, and photos. Our redesigns are now more visual, based on the participant's recommendations. We used a bigger font, added color, incorporated icons and

symbols, and reduced the amount of text. For instance, the box on the default schedule now includes a big arrow to direct writers to the drop-down menu for the other schedules. On the Virtual Writing Center schedule, we used icons along with our new names for appointments to indicate the two options (fig. 4). We included hyperlinks that direct users to specific (some new or revised) pages on our website with instructional information (FAQs and the tutorial video). In the interview, Jo recommended that if we wanted users to watch the videos, they should be "actually posted where you make an appointment…Put it on the actual site." In Johnson's concept of user-centered technology, he specifically calls out instructional texts as problematic because they put the burden of use on the user instead of the system; the first step to improving instructional texts is to understand how local users interact with the system and users' goals. Often, instructions are simply ignored as a "time-consuming nuisance" (118), which the participants in my pilot study demonstrated in their attitude toward the announcement boxes. Now the instructions are better positioned to get their attention, if they are needed.
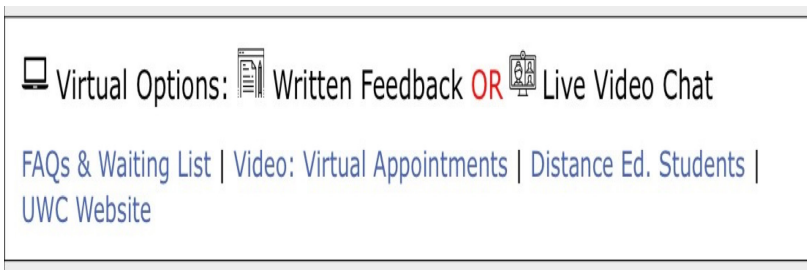

Figure 4: The revised announcement box for the Virtual Writing Center schedule includes descriptive icons and informational hyperlinks. Icons from www.flaticon.com: laptop and video call by Freepik and browser by Smartline.

Similarly, we revised the information box at the top of the appointment form for online appointments to include instructions for attaching a draft after an appointment is saved. Participants returned to their appointment form when they were searching for instructions to attach a draft but found no clues about how to do so. At this point, they did pay attention to the text box at the top of the form.

UWC Website Modifications

Since I noticed a disconnection between the information we had available and the ability of the users to easily find it, we completely redesigned the "Appointments" page on our website. The new design includes icons for our three different centers. The first heading on the page is "What type of appointment would you like to make?" We deleted the text-heavy instructions for scheduling appointments; users no longer have to scroll to the bottom of the page to find information about the Virtual Writing Center. Instead of the text-heavy instructions, we linked to new pages for the videos and FAQs. Instead of generalized "appointment FAQs," we made sets exclusively for the two f2f centers and the Virtual Writing Center. Again, we also link back to these resources (videos, FAQs, website) from the announcement boxes in WCOnline.

We also made small changes, such as setting WCOnline to open in a new window and using metadata, which included adding search terms to web pages. Several participants mentioned in the interviews that they would like WCOnline to open in a new window when clicking on it. They said they might be more likely to

"go back" to the website. I also noted the participants' reliance on searching Google for the information, hence the adding of search terms. Including search terms can make the difference between a user finding the "Virtual Writing Center" or not when searching for "online writing center."

To be clear, for this description of a pilot study to be a model of UX, the methods would be repeated again to test the modifications, preferably with different subgroups. Although I have not repeated the usability tests and interviews yet, other measures indicate positive outcomes. We recorded twelve fewer "no show" virtual appointments in the fall 2017 semester compared to the fall 2016 semester. In addition, in the f2f writing center, based on my observations, fewer writers scheduled f2f appointments when they actually wanted an online appointment. And finally, in comparing the page views for the original Frequently Asked Questions in October 2016 with the newly revised Frequently Asked Questions pages in October 2017, the number of views for the Frequently Asked Questions pages doubled. Overall, there seems to be less confusion about the different schedules and appointment options, and users seem to be using the available resources.

The UX pilot study described here focused on usability of artifacts (Miller-Cochran and Rodrigo), integration of scope (Spinuzzi), participant collaboration (Salvo), and the value of local use (Johnson). It has given our center a peek into student assumptions, expectations, and navigation tendencies when accessing our website and WCOnline scheduler. But it is certainly not the entire picture. Ultimately it is our center's goal to continue to provide and grow usable and useful online resources and services

for all writers at our institution, not simply to fill up appointment slots. For this reason, we will continue to conduct usability testing on the use of the online schedule and resources, specifically listening to and working with frequently marginalized student populations. At the University of Louisville, those populations include part-time students, multilingual students, first generation students, returning adult learners, graduate students, and students with disabilities. While some of the writers in my study may have identified, for example, as first generation or a student with a disability, the pilot study did not focus on isolating those populations through sampling. Moreover, this article has not highlighted the principle of access, but access to resources should be the paramount goal when developing and designing for online users, as Brizee, Sousa, and Driscoll argue and demonstrate through the necessary redesigns of the Purdue OWL (see also CCC Committee). Finally, I echo Metz Bemer and Blythe's calls for all writing centers to participate in UX for their local centers. The long-term value of understanding writers-as-users will likely outweigh a short-term investment of time and perhaps a little money. While WCPs cannot fundamentally change a system like WCOnline, WCPs can rearrange workflow processes and artifacts shaping an artifact's use, as shown in the modifications that we have implemented.

Acknowledgements

Appendix: Goal-Directed Scenarios for Usability Test

Instructions

Read through each numbered direction completely before starting the activity. You should go through these tasks as you would normally, so you may use whatever resources you need (e.g. websites, searches).

As a reminder, when you go through the tasks you are asked to "think aloud." In short, this means you speak your thoughts and reasons for your navigation choices. Any identifying information that is captured will be removed from the recording.
In these scenarios, you are in the process of writing two papers. The drafts of those papers can be found on the desktop of this computer, named "Draft 1" and "Draft 2."

Tasks

1. You have a new part-time job this semester, so you are on (the University's) campus for a limited amount of time each week. You also have a paper due soon in an important class. You would like some guidance from the Writing Center on this paper. You heard that the Writing Center offers a service for which you do

not have to go to the physical Writing Center. Schedule yourself an appointment that will work for your schedule during the week of April 3.

2. Since you are so busy, you would really prefer that the Writing Center give you comments on your draft and send them to you. Schedule another appointment during the week of April 3. You want an appointment where you will receive written comments on your Draft #1.

3. Now that you have an appointment, when do you expect to receive a response from your tutor? (Speak aloud when ready).

4. Another one of your professors just gave you an assignment with several components that you are having trouble sorting out before you get started. Schedule an appointment during the week of April 10 so that you can participate in a live online chat session with a tutor.

5. Imagine that your feedback is ready for "Draft 1" (from task 2). Locate your feedback.

6. Imagine that it is the date and time for the live chat appointment you scheduled in task 4. Go to it.

7. Please go to (the UWC website URL) and tell me:
      What's the first thing you notice?
      What can you do on this site?
      Who is this site intended for?
      Just look around and say everything that comes to mind

8. Stay on (the UWC website URL). You have to write a paper and your professor requires Chicago Style citation, which you have never used before. Find a resource for it.

9. You've never been to the Writing Center before and you want to get an idea of what it is like. What questions do you have? Where would you go to find answers?

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Recalibrating the Hiring Line: One Center's Changing Practices

MIKE MATTISON

That's just the way it is
Some things will never change
That's just the way it is
Ah, but don't you believe them

   -Bruce Hornsby

One of the most important responsibilities for writing center administrators is the hiring of peer tutors. The tutors are the heart of any center, conducting a majority of the sessions and engaging in the one-to-one conversations with writers that can be so valuable to their individual essays and to their development as writers. Yet that hiring process, like many activities, can sometimes become rote—we hire in a particular manner (and we hire particular people) because "that's just the way it is." That's the way we've always done it. At least that was true for our writing center: we had developed and maintained a hiring process that we believed successful, and we had not raised many questions about it. In the last couple of years, however, we began to ask ourselves if we were doing all that we could to ensure that we hired a diverse, qualified set of tutors who represented and could work with the writers who came through our door. We discovered that we could do more.

This essay describes how we in the Wittenberg Writing Center revised our hiring materials and process in search of a more diverse applicant pool. In addition, the piece also gives an overview of the literature on hiring practices for writing centers in general, as our center closely followed the same practices through the decades and made many of the same assumptions. This is a chance, then, to examine our hiring practices as a field and in particular at one writing center.

A Look Back

In 1980, Leonard Podis wrote that most of the writing tutors at his school were "junior or senior English majors who write well themselves and have good intuitive knowledge of grammar, mechanics, and essay technique" (70). These students, for the most part, were nominated by faculty, and many of them were "planning careers in teaching" (70). As part of the hiring process, Podis asked the candidates to "correct a sheet of ten sentences" and then respond to some sample student writing that contains both "major and minor problems" (71). The prospective tutors were expected to respond to the writing in two ways: analyze it for its "strengths and weaknesses" and offer comments to the writer of the piece "as a first step towards revision and improvement" (71).

Though Podis was not looking for "expertise" in this hiring process so much as "promise," his approach has been a fairly common one in writing centers through the years. Tutor candidates are discovered through faculty recommendations, and they usually are asked to display some facility with language, grammar, and/or essay construction. In addition, they are often asked about, or asked to display, certain personality traits. For

example, Deborah Arfken suggested in 1982 that applicants should be informed that they need "certain academic and personal qualities to work effectively as a tutor" (111). In addition to a high score on a grammar test, a recommendation from an English faculty member, and a "lucid writing sample," Arfken's candidates should also exhibit "diplomacy and self-control," "patience and sensitivity," and "reliability and perseverance," among other qualities (112). Or, as Nancy Wood put it, "Tutors should be pleasant, unabrasive people who will make students comfortable" (qtd. in Arfken 112). It's not just a question of what applicants can do, but who they are.

Though these descriptions of hiring practices are nearly forty years old, there are echoes of their approaches in more recent work, such as Paula Gillespie and Harvey Kail's 2006 piece, "Crossing Thresholds: Starting a Peer Tutoring Program." They argue that "you might look for tutors who do well in composition courses," but they avoid limiting that pool to English majors (325). They also suggest that "it helps to find students who enjoy the collaborative process in their classes, who are good listeners and good communicators." Also, "it helps to find tutors who are outgoing" (325). The main way to find such students, according to the authors, is through faculty recommendations. Not only does asking faculty for candidates lead to a strong pool of applicants, but it also "builds good connections with faculty" and gives them "a stake in [the center's] success" (326). That advice aligns with what Loretta Cobb and Elaine Kilgore Elledge argued in 1984, that one of the most important parts of the hiring process is the faculty recommendation because if "faculty are encouraged to assist in selecting and training the staff in a center, they will naturally feel that the writing center is theirs" (125). The idea of faculty buy-in

has been important for decades.

Another more recent example is Kristen Komara's approach, described in 2008, of a "rigorous but even-handed hiring process," one that can "build the reputation of the writing center" with both students and administrators (1). For this process, students need a GPA of 3.0 or above, must submit a writing sample and application letter, and must sit for an interview. In the interview, the applicant's answers should "show thoughtfulness, good general communication skills, a positive attitude about writing and learning more about writing, and a positive attitude about helping other people" (3).[1] This is not far removed from what both Arfken and Wood wanted in their candidates.

It should not be surprising, really, that writing centers have an overlap in their hiring practices and desires. Writing center administrators might even paraphrase Quintilian as to their ideal tutor: a good student speaking (and writing) well. They want committed, compassionate, collaborative writers in their centers. And, most likely, they do want faculty support for those tutors and their work. At the same time, the field's hiring approach has been called into question on occasion. Given the described approach(es) and criteria, which students are brought into the centers—or, more

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[1]*For one extreme approach to hiring, consult Vincent Puma's 1989 piece, "The Write Staff: Identifying and Training Tutor-Candidates," which describes a "thorough, systematic and cost-effective method for identifying, selecting, screening, and training tutors" (2). Quite simply, the students in this approach were identified before they arrived at school, utilizing test scores and high school CPA's. In addition, their social skills were measured by "each student's extracurricular activities and recommendation letters" (2). Then, in rather frightening terms, "students who have demonstrated the ability to move in and interact within and among peer group are retained, the others deleted" (2).*

precisely, which students are not?

For example, to counter Podis's point about a majority of English majors in his center, Henry Luce in 1986 advocated for heterogeneity in his hiring process and sought out "prospective peer tutors from majors all across the curriculum" (3). Yes, there was still a requirement for a 3.0 GPA and applicants needed to be "mature and responsible" with a "good sense of humor," but the goal was to represent as many majors as possible. The result, Luce claimed, was that "the Writing Center is imbued with a special, richer atmosphere, one that tutors find particularly rewarding both academically and personally" (4). They share ideas from their varied disciplines and writing experiences, and they show other students that "a concern for good writing, and the need for good writing, exists in all departments" (4). Nowadays, such a blending of disciplines in a writing center is fairly standard.

Then, in 1995, Lisa Birnbaum raised concerns about the predominance of women in the writing center, arguing that we "need to suggest that supporting others as they write is the work of admirable women and men, evenly represented on the writing center staff" (6). Toward that end, Birnbaum made some changes to her call for recommendations, adding in benefits such as "coaching skills for management majors" and "communication skills for pre-med," though she did not explicitly ask for male candidates (7). A few years later, in 1998, Michael Pemberton raised a similar question, given that a majority of writing centers had more female tutors than male. As he said, "writing center directors must think about the ethics of gender representation in their centers" (14). To jump back to Birnbaum, the point is that "[g]ender should matter to writing center directors—so that it

doesn't matter to students when it is not relevant" (7).

For Pemberton, though, gender was not the only concern. He did raise the point about academic majors, as did Luce, and he suggested a balance between new and veteran tutors; but then he also asked "Are minorities adequately represented in the writing center?" and "How can minority recruitment be enhanced if they are not?" (14). For his center, at that time, minority representation of tutors was less than he wished, but there did not seem to be many avenues for changing that situation: "Competition for qualified minority TA's is pretty tough" (14). The essay did not delve into ways to increase diversity of the staff and instead turned towards training suggestions for those who were employed. Pemberton's concern, however, has been picked up by others over the past couple of decades, mostly notably (at least for our center) Nancy Grimm and Ann Green.

Grimm, in her 1999 book Good Intentions, makes an eloquent appeal for reconsidering our hiring narrative:

> Learning to see one's perspective as perspective is more likely to happen if writing centers are staffed by people from diverse majors and diverse backgrounds. The common practice of hiring English and education majors is not likely to produce this mix. Nor is the practice of screening applicants for their high GPAs. Learning to take risks in recruitment is essential to forming a writing center staff that not only looks like a place that students from different backgrounds can trust but also accustoms students from mainstream backgrounds to working with

> people whose cultural, class, and racial histories are
> different from their own. (114)

In addition to avoiding a reliance on GPAs, Grimm also cautions against "screening out applicants whose language is marked by these different histories" (114). Much of the previous hiring criteria can be called into question with Grimm's work.[2]

So too does Green, in 2004, ask the field to reconsider how it approaches recruitment and hiring. She documents how she and her tutors have attempted to build a "multicultural, multilingual" writing center that creates "democratic opportunities for language" and "space for writing in multiple genres" (102). To do so, she recruits "peer tutors according to their ability to negotiate a variety of discourses, their willingness to challenge their own thinking and question their own subject positions, and their interest in writing as activism" (103). This seems a far step from Podis's collection of English majors with "intuitive knowledge" of essay technique.

Our Story

At this point I want to bring our own center into the conversation, for we exemplify, in many ways, the arc of the above history. The Wittenberg Writer's Workshop[3] first opened its doors in

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[2]*In thinking about hiring practices, I'm also struck by J.D. Vance's recent work, Hillbilly Elegy, especially the section where he describes his initial ignorance about the hiring process: what to wear, how to act, how to respond (182), and one where he discusses "social capital" and how "not knowing things that many others do often has serious economic consequences" (222). How many writing centers assume a certain knowledge of and familiarity with a process that includes an application, a cover letter, an interview?*

1980, the same year that Podis's article came out, and our hiring practices were much in line with those he described. We solicited recommendations from faculty members, and many of our tutors were English majors (and female). Over the next few years, as we added a tutor training course ("Peer Editing") and a WAC program, we did expand the call for recommendations to other departments, and we have had for many years a strong representation of students from many majors. Yet we also proceeded in a manner that limited the number of students we considered for the position of tutor. Based on recommendations, the director would interview students (and read a writing sample) and enroll them as they were accepted. It was a rolling process, and the class was filled one by one.

In 2010, we decided to change the process (due in large part to a change in directorship), and we opened up the application process to all students. We did still solicit recommendations from faculty members—and we sent invitations to apply to any students named by faculty—but we also advertised on campus email and through posted fliers; students could nominate themselves. And the current tutors were also encouraged to make their own recommendations. What students did they know who they thought would be strong additions to the staff? This way we created an application pool from which we needed to select an incoming group of tutors rather than just filling up the course. We had more than forty applicants the first year for twelve positions.

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[3]*For context, Wittenberg is a residential, liberal arts college of approximately 1800 students in southwest Ohio. A majority of the students identify as Caucasian, and a majority of students are from Ohio. The Writing Center (renamed in 2000) employs about twenty-five advisors, and we conduct close to 3,000 one-to-one sessions each year.*

As for our decision-making process, it morphed to resemble the one described by Matthew Capdevielle for the writing center at Notre Dame. Recruiting and hiring is the "largest-scale collaborative project" in their center, as it is in ours. We have a hiring committee, as we believe that "tutor involvement in the process is an essential component of our identity formation as a center." One difference is that Notre Dame conducts group interviews, whereas we ask applicants to interview with a member of the hiring committee and then with the director, but we both hold a "final round-up," where all members of the hiring committee get together to decide on the next group of tutors. Capdevielle calls this "the most important piece of the process," where the "real magic happens, because here is where we give full voice to our commitments and articulate our values as a group, collaborating to bring into focus a communal vision of what the Writing Center is and should be." I agree. It is a wonderful opportunity to share with the tutors and create not only a vision of the center but also invite in the people who will carry that vision forward.

All this was, we thought, a positive change. We wanted to be fair and open in our hiring process. And the system led to some productive conversations. For example, how closely should we follow our standard expectation of a 3.0 GPA, or at least good grades in English or writing-intensive classes? What of a student who has struggled to write an essay but has made liberal use of the Writing Center and can speak enthusiastically and clearly about its benefits—and has shown improvement on their papers? Are they a stronger candidate than someone who aced their essay with a strong first draft and has not been given much to revising their work? The hiring committee has made it a point to value

how much applicants know about their writing/revising process, and we also strongly recommend that applicants have a session or two in the Center before they apply.

As the hiring process changed, the training course also underwent a shift in approach, as well as a name change, to "Writing Center Theory and Practice." One of the works that was eventually incorporated into the class was Green's "Notes Toward a Multicultural Writing Center: The Problems of Language in a Democratic State." This essay was usually assigned somewhere just after the midpoint of the semester, and it might be accompanied by a work like Barbara Mellix's "From Outside, In" or Nancy Baron and Nancy Grimm's "Addressing Racial Diversity in a Writing Center." Granted, the approach was one that is deftly critiqued by Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan as a "pedagogy of coverage" (127). The course was giving students a "disembodied set of writing conventions/processes, tutoring methods, or best practices" rather than helping them "develop a critical lens through which to interrogate the implications of different choices" (126). We did have provocative discussions around the articles, but those discussions did not seem to move beyond that particular week. Did we cover racism and diversity in the writing center? Check.

In 2015, however, after we read Green's article, one of the students in the course asked if we couldn't do more with our discussions about diversity—and she did extend Green's and Barron and Grimm's arguments about race out to gender and sexual identity. In particular, she wanted to conduct a workshop for the current tutors about gender issues, and she wanted us to be more deliberate about our hiring practices. Without having read

their article, she was asking us to follow Kathryn Valentine and Mónica F. Torres's call to "be assertive when it comes to hiring" (205). Directors, they argue, need to "take care to recruit, hire, and support a diverse population of tutors." Or consider Geller et al.'s call for us to "challenge our assumptions about hiring … [to] actively recruit students who reflect the racial and ethnic make-up of our student population" (102). Our staff did not reflect the whole of our student population—it was likely that many students did not see themselves when they looked through the door of our center.

Throughout our hiring history, we had not made it a point to be deliberate about creating a diverse staff, at least not one that extended beyond a diversity of majors. Even with our "open" policy, our advising staff did not change a great deal—white women, many English majors, who came from relatively similar backgrounds. They "wrote well" and had an "intuitive knowledge" of essay techniques and grammar. Some of our faculty also noticed this, and when we did ask for recommendations, they made a point to nominate students who did not fit that particular mold:

> STARRED ENTRY: S_____ is a really bright biracial student who has improved from a B- on her first essay to an out-of-the-park A on her second essay—one of the biggest improvements overall in the class. She had one of the strongest thesis statements in the class on this second essay—one that really went beyond what we've discussed in class in key ways; it seriously took my breath away. I point out her ethnic background because it's fairly rare that there are non-white writing tutors, and I believe it is

> critical that non-white students see role models in positions
> of authority, and have at least one person whom they
> can be more sure will not make assumptions about their
> abilities based on their race. I hope you will make an extra
> special effort to recruit her.

We did, and she joined our center, but a note such as this was a rarity—no doubt many faculty also made assumptions about the type of students who could, and should, work in a writing center.[4]

Thus, we decided to be more assertive.

With our 2016 hiring process, we looked to be more deliberate in finding applicants, both in terms of our application itself and our recruitment procedures. For example, here is the change in wording on our application, a copy of which was available on our website and through a campus-wide email:

> From our 2015 application:

> The Writing Center does not discriminate in its hiring practices
> on the basis of race, gender, religious affiliation, or sexual
> orientation. Please be aware that all application materials are
> reviewed by Writing Center advisors as well as the director and
> are kept confidential.

> From our 2016 application:

> The Writing Center does not discriminate in its hiring practices

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[4]*Even in Capdevielle's article, he mentions that his hiring group tackles difficult questions about candidates—"How might he contribute to the diversity of the staff? What do we mean by 'diversity' anyway?"—but there are no details on how those questions are answered.*

on the basis of race, gender, religious affiliation, or sexual orientation. We are actively looking to expand perspectives and bring in both advisors and writers with diverse backgrounds. For example, many of Wittenberg's ELL students have sessions at the Writing Center. If you have experience with different languages and dialects, please consider mentioning such skills when answering the "contributions" question. Additionally, if you feel comfortable doing so, please feel free to write about your identity w/r/t to race, sexuality, gender expression, or religion, and in particular what you feel your personal perspective can bring to our center.[5]

In addition, the tutor who originally broached this idea wrote to the faculty advisors for the Diversity House, the Concerned Black Students (CBS) organization, and the Gay Straight Diversity Alliance (GSDA), asking for their advice.[6] Here is what she sent to the advisor for CBS:

I was wondering if I could ask for your perspective on how best the center can encourage students from diverse backgrounds to apply to work as advisors. While the center has always done its best to showcase itself as an accepting work space, we are a

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[5]*To note just how difficult it is to catch every assumption, one of the reviewers for this article asked what "background literacy" was assumed for an application to know "w/r/t." An excellent point, so we shall change the application for next time.*

[6]*One glaring oversight on our part was not doing more with the American International Association (AIA), a group that promotes "cultural diversity" and is made up of American and international students, and which was led in 2016 by one of the tutors. She pointed out to the hiring committee that we do more outreach with them, and we will work with AIA in the coming years on our recruitment and hiring process.*

> predominantly white one - much whiter than the campus as a whole. I wanted to know if you had any advice for ensuring black students that the center does not discriminate, and that we are in fact interested in seeking such students out.
>
> I've attached a draft of the WC application for this year - if you have any thoughts/suggestions to offer on how the Center is accomplishing the above goals, I would be very grateful. Additionally, if CBS has any ideas for working with the Center to publicize such interest, please let me know …. Finally, if possible, it would be great if you had contact information for any other groups at Witt that advocate for non-white students. CBS is a great resource I've known about since freshman year - I'd be happy to have insights from other groups as well.

The responses she received were valuable, with each advisor willingly offering up some advice and suggestions on recruitment or at least agreeing to help us advertise the positions. For example, the advisor from the GSDA suggested that we might want to "include 'gender expression' among the list of categories that do pose road blocks in the hiring process" because it does more than "gender" to connote the transgender experience. He also said the term can have a ripple effect, sending "a message of inclusion to other minority experiences." When, say, international students see the term, it might showcase the Writing Center as more accepting of their experiences also. And the advisor advocated for a question during the interview process that allowed a candidate to express their preferred pronouns as "there is a need out there for some students to be able to claim a gendered identity." We incorporated both of those suggestions.[7]

The results have been promising. We had thirty-four applicants for the fall of 2016, and, given a large graduating class in spring of 2017, we accepted seventeen students into the tutoring course. Two of those were students of color, and we had one non-native speaker, along with eight men. This was a different class than we have had previously. And then, in the fall of 2017, we brought in another advisor of color as well as a non-traditional student and a high school student (we have a growing number of high school students in our general education courses). We seem closer to achieving something near to Judith Kilborn's idea of "cultural diversity," one that "includes minority, non-western, and western—Caucasian as well as African American, Hispanic, and Native American; rural as well as urban; southern as well as northern; non-traditional as well as traditional, and so on" (393). Her definition, she says, "is inclusive rather than exclusive." We are looking to make our course, and our Writing Center, the same.

Our hiring meeting also led to some fascinating discussions about other areas of diversity. One applicant, for example, was thought to be not the best fit for the Writing Center because he was quiet. We need people who can talk with others and bring energy to the table, said some of the veteran tutors. But another tutor suggested that some students might appreciate a less enthusiastic welcome to the Center. Could being overly social and welcoming put some students off? Another student, during this exchange, said that we should look for neurodiversity in our hiring. That's

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[7] *The suggestion about preferred pronouns has also been incorporated into our online registration process, as has been the case in other centers. Pronoun use has been a topic on the WCenter listserv, too; for example, see the thread on "gender-inclusive pronouns" begun by Rachel Robinson.*

a valid point, and it raises several more questions about how we recruit, hire, educate, and support writing tutors. Works like Susanne Antonetta's A Mind Apart and Margaret Price's Mad at School would be valuable starting points for that conversation. In the case of this applicant, I think it might be less a question of neurodiversity and more a matter of a quiet student, like the kind described by Mary Reda in Between Speaking and Silence. (I also knew from previous experience that he produced excellent written feedback to his peers' writing. With our asynchronous email sessions, he would be a strong advisor. And fortunately he accepted our invitation to join the Center.)

Looking Ahead

Yet as much as I want to shout out numbers and claim success, describing the class in this way makes me nervous because it sounds much like what Stephanie Kerschbaum has called "the language of the global market," which can "commodify individuals' racial and ethnic backgrounds" (36). How many African-Americans do you have? How many Hispanics? How many women of Asian descent? Diversity becomes a numbers game, and it divides categories that students might rather share and also suggests identity is static. Better, Kerschbaum argues, to think of difference "as dynamic, relational, and emergent." With students, we are "always coming-to-know" them, and "coming-to-know is a never-ending process, not a fixed destination" (57). That is true in our classrooms and in our writing centers, both with tutor-to-writer relationships and tutor-to-administrator ones.

So where does that leave us?

Quite simply, I think our work has put us further along than

where we were but nowhere close to done. In recent years, our center has tried to diversify its hiring practices and its staff—we wanted to go farther and wider in terms of representation of our student population. These past two hiring cycles represented our most successful yet in terms of those goals: more students on campus can now see themselves in the Writing Center. That's important. We are, however, not close to being finished (if that's ever possible). Making the small changes we did has led us to understand that our desire to diversify and fairly represent all students must be an ongoing one. Nor can it be done without constant reflection on what we're doing and why we're doing it. For me, Margaret Weaver's reminder about responsibility stands out: "We do have a responsibility as White writing center practitioners to manage diversity, but we need to be honest about how and why we do it" (89). That is true not only for calculating numbers and percentages about writing center use but also about writing center hiring.

And for tutor education. This article did not focus on the tutoring course we have, but what we have learned about our hiring extends to our approach to that realm. What Kerschbaum says about teachers is the same for tutors: they "never arrive at a place where they know a student … they situate what they know from personal experience and professional training alongside interpersonal interaction that enrich, complicate, and challenge those forms of knowing" (57). What we are hoping to do in our writing center is to expand the personal experiences that incoming advisors bring with them and that they work to recognize such experiences in others. Again, that means we should be open to as many possibilities as we can, and we should hesitate to think we have created change just by checking off boxes based on race

or language or gender or because we read an article during the twelfth week of class. In fact, in the class in spring of 2017, we had a reading from Claire O'Leary on gender in the writing center that examines how males and females interact in sessions—the "conversational accommodations" that tutors make "for student gender behaviors" (484). This year, though, we noted that the article does establish a gender binary—masculine and feminine—that might not represent all writers and tutors. I do not think we would have made that observation had we not been so deliberate about our hiring practices the last few semesters.

To close this essay, I want to return to the epigraph from Bruce Hornsby. His song, "The Way It Is," was written in reference to the Civil Rights Movement, and it asks the listener to refuse the idea that things cannot change. Interestingly, that song was sampled by Tupac Shakur for his song "Changes," and a line was changed:

That's just the way it is

Things will never be the same

That's just the way it is

Our hiring process has changed—and will keep changing. And that change will influence other areas, from our tutoring course to our sessions with writers. We hope, in our Center, "things will never be the same." We don't want the same staff, the same status quo, the same expectations. To borrow from Harry Denny, we understand that "[b]y helping anyone become aware of difference, the hegemonic status of the same, the standard, is challenged" (28).

For us, that's now the way it is.

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Non-Binary Gender Inclusivity in the Writing Center: A Review of the Literature

BAILEY MCALISTER

University Writing Centers, by nature, are safe spaces facilitated by welcoming staff whose goals are to provide excellent service that brings out the best in student writers and their writing. Because of the personal nature of writing and the reputation of Writing Centers as convivial spaces, Writing Center professionals must take all aspects of student identity into consideration when learning how to address and interact with students in ways that respect and affirm their identities. Many would agree that gender plays a huge role in how students identify themselves, and most would affirm that analyzing gender identity is essential when reflecting on nondiscriminatory practices. Non-binary gender identity, an umbrella term encompassing all who identify outside of or in between the binary of women and men, is being discussed now more than ever, and one of the largest issues surrounding non-binary gender identity in academia is the argument over whether or not to include the singular they in academic writing. As the only well-established third-person epicene pronoun in the English language, the singular they is a vital linguistic element for many non-binary people. Therefore, Writing Center professionals must

be open advocates of the singular they if they want their spaces to be truly inclusive for gender-nonconforming students.

While most Writing Center personnel would express interest in making their spaces more inclusive for non-binary students, many still feel their unique authoritative role in the university does not allow them to take an official stance on the singular they – despite the pronoun's increasing rise in popularity and acceptance. Students come to Center staff for assistance with their writing, yet these students – and, therefore, we Writing Assistants – must answer to the higher authority of those who will eventually evaluate the students' work. Writing Center tutors are often willing to take a stance on progressive language but still feel the need to let students know, when it comes to controversial language opinions, the professor always has the final say. However, if Writing Centers are to truly uphold our reputation as progressive, inclusive spaces for writers of all identities, then we should be able to use our authority as writing professionals to argue in favor of the singular they, which allows the voices of our gender-nonconforming students to be included in academic writing.

For years, select members of university Writing Centers have discussed the singular they and asserted their individual support. Many Writing Centers have adopted gender-inclusive practices, but whether or not the singular they specifically is allowed in academic writing is still debated. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of the argument in favor of the singular they and to urge Writing Centers to finally take an official stance on this pronoun's inclusion in academia.

The review includes a compilation of the grammatical arguments in favor of the singular they, a discussion of academic organizations' limitations of this pronoun, and a visual of what our goals, as Writing Centers, should be for the progression of non-binary inclusivity in writing.

Grammatical Foundation

The grammatical argument for the singular they is not a new concept. In 2012, Jonathon Owen of Copyediting presented a concise yet comprehensive argument in favor of the singular they in his article "The Case for Singular They." He begins his argument by pointing out the issue we have when it comes to referring to gender-neutral people in third person: "English lacks a suitable gender-nonconforming pronoun" (1). English language users cannot accurately and adequately identify gender-neutral nouns if we do not have an epicene pronoun to correlate with these antecedents. Owen mentions that, while some throughout history have attempted to use the generic "he" in these situations – "Someone left his book on the desk" – and while others have attempted to create new epicene pronouns for the English language, neither of these solutions have remained permanent (1). Newly-coined epicene pronouns, as members of closed-class morphemes, are too difficult to fully implement into a language, and the generic he "has fallen out of favor over the past several decades with the rise of feminism and the push for gender equality" (1).

Owen cites a few major language authorities to back up his proposal of the singular they as the best candidate for an epicene pronoun in English. He discusses the American Heritage Dictio-

nary's stance on the pronoun, saying that a "growing minority of the dictionary's usage panel accepts singular they when referring to genderless nouns, and a majority now accepts it when referring to indefinite pronouns" (1). He also mentions how Philip B. Corbett, associate managing editor for standards at the New York Times, believes the singular they's acceptance will eventually win out, but we should avoid using it until then (1). However, Owen questions Corbett's position: "If its acceptance is growing and inevitable, why avoid it? And how are we supposed to know when it's finally OK to use it?" (1-2).

The real issue with anti-singular-they arguments, according to Owen, is that they are founded on false evidence. "First, they treat it as a relatively recent innovation that is infiltrating written language from spoken language. Second, they claim that it's simply ungrammatical to use a plural pronoun to refer to something grammatically singular" (2). Owen uses these opinions as the basis for his historical and grammatical arguments in favor of the singular they.

First, he outlines a brief history of the singular they, discussing how it has been used by esteemed writers such as William Shakespeare, Jonathan Swift, Jane Austen, Lord Byron, Edith Wharton, and W.H. Auden (2). Lindley Murray was the first to attack the singular they and prescribe the generic he in its place (2). Then, in 1850, Parliament "legally prescribed generic he over he or she or they" (2). Owen's historical evidence proves that the singular they is not a new phenomenon; in fact, language authorities' prohibition of this epicene pronoun is relatively new and, more importantly, arbitrary.

He then presents what is perhaps the most important grammatical evidence in favor of the singular they. Most prescriptivists against the singular they would say that "a plural pronoun simply doesn't agree with a singular antecedent," but Owen points out the major flaw in this argument:

> Fortunately, it's not as simple as that. There's another plural personal pronoun that English has used as a singular for centuries: you. It started life as a plural, contrasting with singular thou, but it began to be used as a formal singular pronoun in the 13th century. In English, the purely singular second-person form, thou, fell out of common use by the 17th century, leaving us with a plural pronoun pulling double duty. If pressing a plural pronoun into service as a singular were going to destroy our language's sense of grammatical number, it would have happened over 400 years ago. (2-3)

Here, Owen debunks prescriptivists' notion that accepting the singular they will problematize our understanding of the difference between singular and plural antecedents. This argument also reflects the very real concept that language shifts are the result of our culture's ever-changing linguistic needs, and prescriptivists who attack the progression of the singular they forget "that language doesn't come crashing down around us, leaving us all grunting and gesturing wildly in hopes of somehow being understood" (3).

Linguist Anne Curzan's argument for the singular they, as briefly outlined in her book Fixing English, reflects many of Owen's points. Curzan's main argument is that, since the pronoun has already gained so much popularity in spoken English, it seems

unreasonable to fight for its restriction in written English (128-129). She says that "the pronoun they functions as a singular in the language and is, therefore, not ungrammatical by linguists' definition of ungrammatical" (128). From a linguistic perspective, they's accepted meaning as a singular and plural third-person epicene pronoun in spoken English proves its worthiness for formal written language.

Curzan is not the only language authority to point out this argument. In 2015, the American Dialect Society (ADS) voted for the singular they as Word of the Year. The pronoun "was recognized by the society for its emerging use as a pronoun to refer to a known person, often as a conscious choice by a person rejecting the traditional gender binary of he and she" (American Dialect Society). The ADS's argument in favor of the singular they reflects Curzan's claim: it makes no sense to restrict usage of a word already prominently utilized in our language. The ADS mentions the singular they's usage throughout the centuries, discusses how it is a "sensible solution" to English's pronoun problem, and points out that it "has the advantage of already being part of the language." Moreover, the ADS takes Curzan's argument a step further by not only directly correlating this pronoun with antecedents' whose gender is unknown or irrelevant but by also associating this pronoun with antecedents who are gender-nonconforming individuals. The ADS declares that those using the singular they as a personal identifier influenced the society's decision to vote for the pronoun and promote its "newer usage" as a gender-nonconforming identifier.

From this brief review of the literature on the singular they, its history, and its progression, it is clear that the pronoun's grammaticality (or supposed lack thereof) is not a solid argument against the acceptance of the pronoun in academic writing. In his more recent article, "Singular They Revisited," Jonathon Owen discusses the singular they's progression since 2012. He points out that members the American Copy Editors Society are annoyed with those who object to the singular they, mentions Buzzfeed's endorsement of the pronoun in their style guide, and quotes Ben Zimmer's comments on the pronoun's progression (1). Then, Owen once again addresses his naysayers and uses their false arguments to fuel his own argument. He rejects the notions that the singular they is confusing and/or ungrammatical and instead asserts that "the primary objection to singular they has to do not with grammar but with acceptability" (1). He then argues that "the only real thing standing in the way of singular they is editors," who fear their readers' reactions to informal language in published writing (1). Owen ends his article with a declaration of his new authority over his own house style guide and a call to action for others to follow him in his decision in allowing the singular they in formal writing (2).

Outdated Style Guides

Despite the strong grammatical argument in favor of the singular they and despite the pronoun's dramatic increase in popularity over the last few years, most style guides remain outdated in terms of epicene language – that, or they simply still neglect to take an official stance. The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) is the most up-to-date guide on the singular they – The University of

Chicago published a new manual in 2017 in which they devote a section to discussing this issue. Though the University of Chicago "recommends avoiding its use," they do bring up the grammatical foundation of the singular they – comparing it to you, your, and yours in a manner similar to Owen ("The Case" 2-3) – and, most importantly, they emphasize that "a person's stated preference for a specific pronoun should be respected" (241). While the University of Chicago does not officially give their support to the use of the singular they in academic writing, they at least present the idea that respect and accuracy should be the driving forces behind language choices involving pronouns.

The Modern Language Association (MLA), the language authority behind most academic writing in the Humanities, also updated their style guide recently – they came out with an eighth edition in 2016. However, this newest guide does not offer much guidance on the subject of non-sexist language. Instead, the eighth edition of the The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers focuses more on research and citation guidance, leaving us with the seventh edition for advice on rhetorical style. The seventh edition contains a small section dedicated specifically to nondiscriminatory language in which they conclude with suggesting students consult "one of the guides to nondiscriminatory language listed" in the back of the manual (MLA 50). Yet most of the guides they suggest were published in the 1980s, the most recent one listed being published in 2001 (MLA 259-260). Thus, MLA sticks writers with an outdated style guide containing even further outdated information.

The American Psychological Association's (APA) Publication Manual is not any better – they have not published an updated guide since 2010. Their gendered language section is slightly more thorough than MLA, though, as they do mention the sexism behind using the generic he, provide alternatives to using the conjoined he or she, and outline specific guidelines on how to correctly and respectfully refer to transgender people (73-74). However, APA does not mention non-binary gender at all, and they do not provide any guidance on using epicene pronouns or gender-neutral language in their manual.

But the guidelines in perhaps the worst shape of all are those of the National Council for Teachers of English. This organization, generally thought of as responsible for maintaining a progressive authority over composition teachers of all levels, boasts a set of "Guidelines for Gender-Fair use of Language" on their website. These guidelines, published almost two decades ago in 2002, provide authority on gender-inclusive language and practices. NCTE's guidelines, from the very beginning, are blatantly discriminatory towards non-binary individuals, as the introduction of the webpage states that NCTE is "concerned about the critical role language plays in promoting fair treatment of women and girls, men and boys" – thus excluding non-binary teachers and students altogether. As for their position on the singular they, NCTE echoes other authorities: "[The singular they] is becoming increasingly acceptable. However, classroom teachers need to be aware that state and/or national assessments may not regard this construction as correct." This statement is somewhat understandable since grade school teachers do need to be concerned with the regulations of standardized tests. But if NCTE is so blatantly direct about their

other stances on gendered language, then why wouldn't they want to take a strong stance on epicene language, too?

Furthermore, a group of members of the International Writing Center Association sent a collaboratively-written letter to NCTE asking that they update their guidelines. While the NCTE responded favorably, the guidelines still have yet to be updated. Perhaps this situation is reflective of what most style guides might think about the singular they: it is not regarded as important enough to be discussed immediately. There is a chance that language authorities have been discussing this pronoun, especially since it has become such a relevant issue. But perhaps many do not have the time or resources to put their stance on the singular they at the forefront of their priorities – even more reason why Writing Centers need to step up and take the lead on this issue.

Writing Centers' Role

Because the singular they has a strong grammatical foundation, because style guides have yet to formally authorize the use of the pronoun, and because encouraging the singular they in academic writing is necessary for creating a truly inclusive space for all students of all genders, it is imperative that Writing Centers take an official stance in favor of this pronoun. Fortunately, some Writing Centers have already begun to argue in favor of the singular they. The Writing Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has a webpage dedicated to "Gender-Inclusive Language." Within these guidelines is a section on the singular they explaining how this pronoun looks in context. The UNC Writing Center offers this explanation on their position on the pronoun:

> Some people are strongly opposed to the use of "they" with
> singular antecedents and are likely to react badly to writing
> that uses this approach. Others argue that "they" should be
> adopted as English's standard third-person, gender-neu-
> tral pronoun in all writing and speaking contexts. Keep
> your audience in mind as you decide whether the singular
> "they" is a good solution for any gender-related problems
> in your writing.

This position statement, obviously, does not reflect a final stance
on the issue. However, UNC at least offers an explanation behind
why it is taking so long for the singular they to be officially ac-
ceptable. Most importantly, UNC mentions the fact that many do
believe in the singular they as the epicene pronoun we need to fill
the gender-neutral, third-person pronoun gap, which is more than
many other style guides have done.

Like UNC, Jamila Stevenson of Warren Wilson Writing Center
also puts extra effort into discussing the singular they in her article
"Using Gender-Neutral Language In Academic Writing." Ste-
venson argues, "Gender-neutral or non-sexed language includes
pronouns that do not indicate one's gender, allowing us to ad-
dress people without making gender assumptions, and allowing
a safer, more inclusive learning environment" (1). She supports
this argument by providing an example of how the singular they
would look in writing as a replacement for the conjoined he or
she, pointing out that "while non-sexist language works solely
within the gender binary of male/female, the usage of singular
'they' acknowledges those who identify entirely outside of this
dichotomy or somewhere along the gender spectrum" (1). Her
argument and evidence prove that not only is the singular they

easily integrated into written language, its integration is also vital for acknowledging non-binary individuals in writing.

Furthermore, Stevenson provides a section of "Tips for Promoting Gender-Neutral Language," which can be easily adopted by any Writing Center (3). For students who come to the Writing Center inquiring how to integrate progressive language into their academic writing, Stevenson gives four suggestions:

> •When using gender-neutral language in your academic papers, use footnotes to explain this language and encourage a dialogue with your professor.
> •Be consistent! If you start using gender-neutral language, do it throughout your entire paper. Make sure you aren't using 20 different gender-neutral pronouns in your paper.
> •Provide literature about gender-neutral language to your professor.
> •Realize that professors are people with their own beliefs and backgrounds. Try not to be dogmatic when talking to professors about gender-neutral language. (3)

Stevenson's advice not only gives students the confidence to use progressive language in academic writing but also encourages students to discuss this language with their professors; having these discussions, especially with academic authorities, is crucial in gaining acceptance for progressive language in academia.

Stevenson ends her article with a list of tips for staff on how to be more gender inclusive and promote gender inclusivity (3). She echoes what many of the previously reviewed writers have said, arguing that allowing students to identify themselves with their preferred pronouns and respecting these students by consistently

using these pronouns helps create an atmosphere of inclusivity
(3). She also encourages staff to participate in workshops on gen-
der identity issues, attend events such as Trans Awareness Week,
and read literature on the issues gender-nonconforming people
face (3). Finally, Stevenson urges her audience to "start dialogues
with your students who are openly trans and genderqueer," so
that these students' voices can be heard, considered, and respect-
ed in academia (3).

In addition to these Writing Centers' attempts to lead the singular
they revolution, the Kennesaw State University Writing Center
has presented a large amount of informal information on the sub-
ject at different conferences over the last few years. Members of
this Writing Center first presented on gender identity inclusion in
the Writing Center at the Southeastern Writing Center Association
conference in 2015, and, in response to a surprising amount of
positive feedback from conference participants, they brought this
presentation to the 2016 and 2017 SWCA conferences and the 2016
International Writing Center Association conference. Further-
more, this presentation was taken to the 2017 Southeastern Wom-
en's Studies Association conference in hopes of spreading aware-
ness of the importance of the singular they to academics outside
of Writing Centers. The KSU Writing Center has stood strongly in
favor of the singular they over the years, and yet members of this
Writing Center, too, recognize the issue of promoting language
use that university professors could penalize students for. The
overwhelming evidence is clear: many Writing Center profession-
als desire to be on the progressive side of the gendered language
revolution, but most are unsure of when this revolution will jump
forward.

Conclusion

The issue with normalizing gender-progressive language into academic writing is that few believe they have the authority to facilitate these changes. Many too often become submissive to the rules of outdated style guides, insubstantial grammatical arguments, and self-proclaimed authoritative prescriptivists. So, when a student asks, "Can I use the singular they in my writing?" to a Writing Center Assistant, we often feel torn between our power as someone who can easily authorize the usage of such language and our duty as someone who serves students in helping them create writing that instigates positive evaluation by their professors. What Writing Center professionals need to understand is that, by becoming advocates for progressive language, we are both using our power and serving our students, as our principal goal is to get our students' voices heard through their writing. For gender-nonconforming students, progressive language is fundamental in allowing their voices to be heard. Thus, we must diminish this cyclical mentality Owen describes: "We can't accept it yet because it's not acceptable" ("The Case" 3). Instead, Writing Center professionals, as academic writing authorities, must use the literature we have to support our argument that true inclusivity starts with the acceptance and encouragement of progressive language.

The main goal of this literature review is to display the timely need for Writing Centers to officially authorize the use of the singular they in academic writing. It is clear that we cannot rely on authoritative style guides to give this pronoun the attention it needs, so Writing Center professionals need to take control of

the revolution ourselves. Furthermore, the goal here is to show that the action of authorizing the singular they is long past due. Gender-fair language use guidelines have been cultivating for over twenty years, and the singular they itself has been a hot topic for the last decade. But, for the last few years, this revolution has plateaued at the idea of not being able to fully promote an un-authorized pronoun. Perhaps, though, we should instead utilize our own role as language authorities and put the needs of our students ahead of our fears of other language authorities. Perhaps Writing Centers are the perfect vessel for this revolution, as we have the power to cultivate language change at any time. Perhaps the secret to moving forward with the singular they revolution lies in the goals and dedication of each Writing Center individual with a desire for change.

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A Conceptual Approach to Addressing Black Talk in the Writing Center

S. Thomas Wilkes

Introduction

In 1974, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) adopted "The Students' Right to their Own Language," a resolution aimed at shifting how the interplay of language, race, ethnicity, and culture was understood in writing instruction (Kynard 360). Rather than acquiescing to the notion that there existed one standard and correct American dialect, the CCCC instead proposed that such a claim was constitutive of one social group's attempt to exert its dominance over another ("Committee on CCCC Language: Background Statement" 3). This idea reflected an evolving understanding on part of the group on how the language patterns of students were associated with their self-concepts (6).

As opposed to highlighting their roles in "fixing" students' language, the CCCC instead affirmed that teachers must have training and experiences that would allow them to become capable of fighting for their students' linguistic rights within the classroom (3). Unpacking this idea is of considerable import for writing centers in that, four decades later, research shows that centers still struggle with implementing pedagogical changes that acknowledge

the validity of students' language patterns while also preparing them to be proficient in the language of the academic and professional mainstream (Bir and Christopher 4; Barron and Grimm 75). I propose that the next step in realizing the CCCC's mission in the writing center is predicated upon establishing tutors as agents capable of confronting linguicism as well as promoting the development of positive self-concept in students.

Black Talk

Over the past several decades, conversation in the composition community has regarded how the home languages of students should be incorporated into the academic space. Progressively, scholars have begun to push for the development of pedagogies geared toward Second Language and Standard English as a Second Dialect learners (Sato 259). One group of students accounted for in this progression are Black Talk speakers.

Here, the term Black Talk is used to signify African American speech's cultural and linguistic independence from English. As Smitherman observes, "The roots of African American speech lie in the counter language, the resistance discourse, that was created as a communication system unintelligible to the members of the dominant master class" (3). This unintelligibility originated during the early antebellum period when English and African language patterns were absorbed into one tongue by the enslaved population (6). Commonly, alternative or antithetical semantics were assigned to familiar English words and phrases, giving them altogether new meanings (3). Consequently, Black Talk served as a vehicle through which enslaved Africans could speak back to authority and organize resistance to their oppression

(Baldwin 6). By using this term, as opposed to the more common African American Vernacular English, I hope to better frame the aforementioned conversation on language as one predicated upon culture, identity, and power as opposed to syntactical or grammatical correctness.

Historically, instead of equipping Black Talk speakers with an understanding of how language is associated with power, pedagogical recommendations concerning how to assist them have focused specifically on causing them to recognize when it is or when it is not appropriate for them to use their home language (Howard 265). By focusing exclusively on the what (that language patterns must be modified according to place and context) instead of the why (because extant social factors mandate this), these recommendations often reinscribe the notion that there is indeed one legitimate language of power in the mainstream world.

Self-Concept

The term "self-concept" has been used to refer to an individual's awareness and understanding of their competence, self-worth, and identity (Bong and Clark 141). As a socially constructed phenomenon, it is maintained not only by one's individual self-reflections but also through the comparison of "one's perceived competence and attributes to some known standards and norms" (Bong and Clark 141). In organizational contexts, positive or negative associations can be afforded to certain identities or behaviors in order to have individuals modify their self-concepts accordingly (Rogers et al. 223).

Smitherman coined the term "linguistic push-pull" to refer to how prevailing attitudes toward Black Talk have caused its speakers to modify their self-concept, noting that linguistic push-pull is "Black

folk loving, embracing, using Black Talk, while simultaneously rejecting and hatin on it" (6). In academic contexts, this has been fostered through the use of pedagogies that assert "the superiority of the standard code" by asking that students abandon their home language entirely or that they "master the standard for purposes of upward socioeconomic mobility" (Howard 265). In neither of these cases are Black Talk speakers afforded agency with regard to deciding when they code-switch. Instead, they are instructed to distance themselves from what society determines as the negative aspects of their culture in order to obtain cultural capital (Ladson-Billings 476). As Smitherman's definition demonstrates, this refusal to acknowledge the validity of Black Talk causes its speakers to constantly judge their worth against what is normalized or standardized by the dominant culture. Unfortunately, there persists the promotion of pedagogies that continue to negatively affect the self-concept of Black Talk speakers.

Imagining a Linguistically Pluralistic Writing Center

This issue became increasingly apparent to me while I was serving as a peer tutor in my university's writing center. Across four semesters, I worked with a number of Black Talk speakers who had received feedback from instructors chastising their use of "broken English" in their academic writing. In these sessions, I consistently found myself in a dilemma with regards to how I navigated helping these students fashion their writing into something that would be accepted by their professors while also trying to comfort them in the fact they were still competent communicators. I observed that in the writing center, we, as tutors, are obliged to incorporate strategies into our sessions that

we believe best promote the success of the students that we serve. However, the strategies that we find useful, and our conceptions of what constitutes success, are often not without bias and may unintentionally undermine the agency that the student has in the writing process. In my experience, this has meant that many Black Talk speakers have sat through sessions that stress the importance of Standard English in academic and professional writing but provide very little support to critique the power systems that maintain Standard English as the dominant language used within society. In response to this trend, I suggest the adaptation of a conceptual approach that forefronts the development of critical language awareness in tutor training so that tutors are better prepared to confront linguicism in their sessions while also helping Black Talk speakers develop positive self-concept.

Critical language awareness has been explained as a critical understanding of how language usage and attitudes toward language are derivatives of larger ideological conflicts that are often invested in maintaining linguistic norms, particularly as the result of a linguistically dominant group's desire to maintain said dominance (Alim 28). Proponents of critical language awareness see it as a valuable tool for helping students of linguistically marginalized groups understand how language policy can be used to oppress them (Alim 28). Beyond its development in students, however, researchers have also studied how critical language awareness can be developed in teachers, helping them to see beyond their own linguistic privilege and enabling them to acknowledge systems of power in their teaching (Godley et al. 51). Within the writing center, I see the opportunity for a similar development of critical language awareness in tutors. Ideally, this critical language awareness will be fostered through a renewed attention to embedding the tenets of pluralism

into tutor training, better allowing tutors to navigate the power dynamics inherent in their own sessions while also attending to the development of positive self-concept in the Black Talk speakers they assist.

In language education, pluralism was posited as a paradigmatic response to earlier approaches that "stressed the superiority of the standard code" in language instruction (Howard 265). As opposed to asking that students completely abandon their home languages, or that they passively code-switch in order to adopt the dominant language and its affiliations with heightened social and cultural standing, pluralism instead seeks to encourage the development of critical language awareness in order to allow students to question the inequities inherit in the privileging of the dominant language (Redd and Webb 55). In this way, pluralism challenges linguicism in language and writing instruction by transforming what is commonly understood as a student's struggle with language into a society's misrepresentation of the value of particular languages.

Pluralism has the potential to be an efficacious element in writing center pedagogy because of its focus on challenging linguistic power dynamics. By cultivating a pluralistic approach to addressing language within the writing center, tutors can sustain the self-concept of Black Talk speakers by acknowledging the value of Black Talk while also demonstrating how prevailing attitudes toward language necessitate the ability of Black Talk speakers to code-switch into Standard English. Through this approach, Black Talk speakers can become proficient in Standard English while also gaining the ability to critique the inequities supporting Standard English's privileging in the academic and professional worlds and the clarity to recognize that critiques concerning their own

language usage are reflective of this privileging.

This process allows Black Talk speakers to have agency in regard to how language is negotiated within the sessions that they have in the writing center. In such a case, the assignment being workshopped serves as the visual representation of a dialogic give-and-take led by the student and supported by the tutor. Such an approach can combat linguicism and empower Black Talk speakers when combined with scaffolding that moves toward not only having them become proficient in using Standard English in their writing, but also towardsallowing them to critically analyze the inequities supporting, and stemming from, the normalization of Standard English.

Before any of this can take place, however, tutors must be capable of challenging their own biases and recognizing the value inherent in a multidialectal society. Accordingly, writing center theorists have responded to this issue with a number of varying suggestions. One, best in line with the tenets of pluralism, is that the tutor actively acknowledges "the validity of the tutee's home dialect and culture whenever possible rather than devaluing it" (Bir and Christopher 5). This relatively simple gesture strays away from negatively affecting students' self-concepts while nicely falling in line with the idea that through pluralism students can be taught not only normalized linguistic proficiency but also the ability to challenge these systems of normalization.

Of course, one preliminary step is that tutors familiarize themselves with the varied grammatical and syntactical patterns used by the students within their universities (Bir and Christopher 5). By coming to a more comprehensive understanding of the varied dialects and languages of their student populations, tutors place themselves in a better position to be able to center their sessions around the specific

needs of students and to empathize with how these students' languages are associated with their conceptions of themselves. In this regard, the ability to recognize the linguistic variation surrounding them is an integral component to the development of critical language awareness in tutors.

Tutors cognizant of their own biases, and of the linguistic variation surrounding them, are much more capable of engaging in pluralistic writing center sessions that confront linguicism and promote positive self-concept in Black Talk speakers. In these sessions, code-switching can be promoted as a way to help Black Talk speakers make informed decisions about when to switch between Black Talk and Standard English. Necessarily, this should be accompanied by dialogue that critiques the inequitable distribution of power that privileges Standard English over Black Talk. This aids in the development of positive self-concept in Black Talk speakers by shifting the blame away from them and placing it on unjust social structures and by providing them with the context and vocabulary to eventually resist these structures themselves.

A number of strategies can be taken by tutors to ensure that they are constantly negotiating the distribution of authority within their sessions and that they are working to maximize the agency that Black Talk speakers have in regard to revising their writing. Specifically, with a pluralistic orientation in mind, tutors can encourage code-switching as a way to help Black Talk speakers negotiate when, and why, shifts between Black Talk and Standard English should occur in their academic and professional writing. With an understanding of the features of Black Talk already established, tutors can help point out to students when linguistic patterns emerge in their writing that would appear inconsistent

with the use of Standard English and suggest how these patterns may be revised to reflect that use. In these cases, consent is established between the tutor and student in regard to why changes are being made to the writing, and the student is permitted to see Black Talk and Standard English as two equitable forms of communication that can be used strategically in varying contexts to permit varying forms and levels of access.

In this respect, sessions should be conceived of as dialogues that students and tutors are both engaged participants in (Severino 59). Within these dialogues, the tutor's role can be metaphorized as that of a guide whose place it is to address the expressed needs of Black Talk speakers while ensuring that they become confident in their ability to use Standard English to accomplish their academic and professional goals. Because Standard English is seen as the tool that students must adopt to achieve these goals, assuming a dogmatic view that maligns the desired acquisition of Standard English could be just as problematic as a view that maligns the use of Black Talk (Severino 57). For this reason, it is important for tutors to respond appropriately to the desires or expectations of the Black Talk speakers in their sessions and that they adjust the support that they extend to these students on the basis of these desires. As a function of critical language awareness, this understanding on the part of tutors would acknowledge that extant social norms mandate the use of Standard English for upward social and economic mobility. By helping Black Talk speakers become proficient not only in using Standard English in their writing but also in recognizing what dictates that it should be used, tutors can help Black Talk speakers work toward obtaining that aforementioned upward social and economic mobility while also acknowledging the value of Black Talk.

Additionally, this tutor-student dialogue should be scaffolded in a way that moves Black Talk speakers further along in their abilities to utilize Standard English in academic and professional writing but should also ensure that the recommended changes made to get their writing to this point are collaboratively negotiated. To a great extent, the linguistic distinctions between Black Talk and Standard English can be conceived of as operating on a spectrum, and the student and tutor work together to make changes to the student's writing to move it from one position to the next depending upon context. In this way, the student retains agency in the writing process while also gaining the proficiency to use Standard English in academic and professional contexts, the awareness to comprehend and critique why this is necessary, and ultimately the decision-making ability to choose whether or not this will be done.

Conclusion

Contemporary writing center theory has remarked on the importance of making programmatic and professional decisions within the center that embrace and celebrate diversity as well as challenge extant and unjust conceptions of best practice. Barron and Grimm note that "Because so many writing administrators are white, because the professional organization is predominantly white, most of our programmatic and professional decisions have been based on assumptions informed by white experience that has rarely been challenged" (72). While these decisions may be successful in eliciting desirable traits in composition as they relate to the demonstration of normalized language, they do very little to build the self-concept of Black Talk speakers and may very well work to do the inverse. Resultantly, I have proposed the

embedding of strategies to develop critical language awareness in tutor training in order to demonstrate a first step that writing centers can take toward confronting linguicism and promoting positive self-concept, particularly as it relates to Black Talk speakers. Drawing from pluralism, these strategies are thoroughly invested in increasing the agency with which Black Talk speakers possess in relation to their ability to navigate their own language use, as well as to provide them with a critical understanding of how social norms seek to affect this use.

Ultimately, this essay is submitted with the intention of suggesting that the fostering of critical language awareness in tutor training is a well-needed step toward realizing the CCCC's goal of promoting students' linguistic rights within every corner of the academic space. Ideally, this suggestion will prompt scholarship that empirically examines the best practices of developing critical language awareness in tutoring training, as well as provide writing center tutors and administrators with a few conceptual hooks to address the cultural experiences of their students. As it concerns Black Talk speakers in particular, hopefully this will invite a critical reflection of how decisions made within the writing center concerning training and pedagogy can affect the self-concept of students.

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Back to the Center

A Centerless Center: The Doctoral Support Center for Writing & Research Excellence at the College of Education, Texas Tech University

AMBER LANCASTER

The coffee cup sits on the warmer, as a colored ring forms on the surface and clings to the edges of the cup. "I'll drink it soon," I think, as I'm engrossed reading a manuscript. A knock at the door, a phone call coming in, an instant message pops up on my screen, an email alert notifies me a new message is waiting, a notice appears to inform me a new draft was submitted and someone is waiting for a writing coach to respond.

I pause and think, "Writing coaches are busy people. It's nice to be busy and in-demand." I smile and finally sip my coffee.

I am a dissertation specialist and writing coach. I am one of four full-time professional staff who works in the Doctoral Support Center for Writing & Research Excellence and serve about 700 doctoral students in the College of Education at Texas Tech University. My team includes two writing specialists (I with a PhD and another with a Masters in English fields) and two

subject-matter specialists and methodologists (both with PhDs in Education fields). We are a small Center, but we are mighty in how we serve.

On average, the writing coaches in our Center read and respond to between 265 and 300 pages a week—with over 500 drafts last year (nearly doubling the number from the year before). We hold writing consultations daily on a variety of documents. We guide students with research proposals, research design, and methodologies, among other research-related tasks. We host several workshops and writing and research events each semester. We serve on university committees, help administer our Center's operations, participate in service projects, conduct research, and represent our university at academic conferences and in publications. Some of us also teach courses. Indeed, we are busy people.

Location of the Center

Located in the College of Education, an entire three-story building, the Doctoral Support Center for Writing & Research Excellence is comprised of four individual offices spread out in the building, an online submission portal, and, when needed for staff meetings or special events, conference meeting rooms that are shared with other College of Education programs. Our "space" is unique, to say the least, in that our Center has no physical center—rather we meet our students for consultations in our personal offices and online.

Our Clients & Services

Opened in the fall semester of 2014, our Center was developed to address the growing demands of academic writing and research support for our doctoral students. Our student population fluctuates each semester and consists of approximately 30% onsite and 70% distance students, creating a high demand for delivering services in virtual spaces.

Our Center offers doctoral students comprehensive support with academic writing and research-related tasks that include assignments for coursework, professional writing (CVs, resumes, cover letters, teaching philosophy statements, research agendas, etc.), conference proposals and presentations, publications in journals, IRB proposals, dissertation proposals, dissertations, and defense presentations.

Our Center also provides motivational support for students through activities such as writing and research intensive events (we call these writing & data rallies), writing groups, write-ins, an annual writer's retreat, and a monthly lecture series. Some of these events are held in entirely virtual spaces, both asynchronously and synchronously in Blackboard. For example, past writing and data rallies and writing groups were offered as discussion forums in Blackboard with live small-group activities facilitated in Blackboard Collaborate. We created groups in Blackboard for students to engage in peer review activities (i.e., file exchange, discussion posts, and synchronous meetings).

Other events are held in blended "spaces," where onsite Center

staff and doctoral students gather in physical meeting rooms that offer webinar and teleconference capabilities for online students to also attend. For instance, past writer's retreat events were hosted on campus where students lodged at the campus dorms and used the Reading Room, small meeting rooms, and classrooms in the College of Education for individual writing and small-group activities.
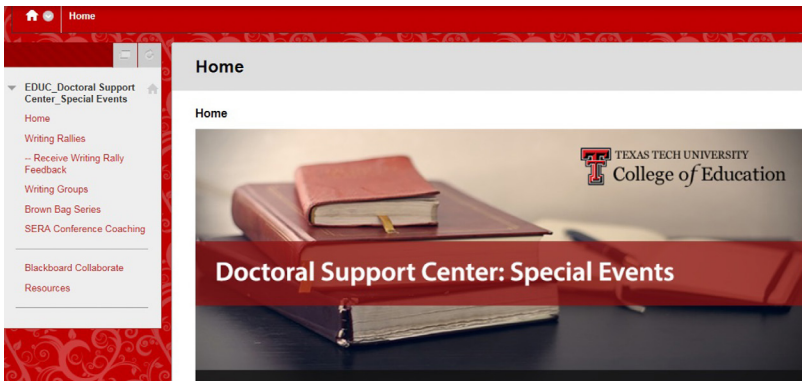
A past writer's retreat event also included an online synchronous dissertation workshop delivered in Blackboard Collaborate led by a guest speaker from a university in California. The online dissertation workshop was open to all graduate students on Texas
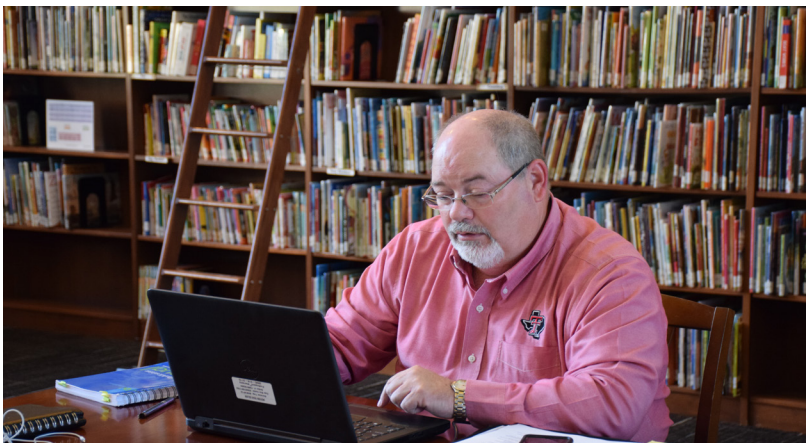
Tech's campus, extending our Center's services to a broader audience. Additionally, our monthly lecture series takes place in a blended "space" (the Learning Resource Center Conference Room) that we share with other College of Education programs.

The holistic nature of our Center supports students' writing and research development but also provides supplemental guidance to many distance students on the tacit knowledge of graduate studies typically learned through traditional graduate residency. Our Center provides an academic safety net for students who often struggle to persist in doctoral programs due to poor writing skills, lack of acclimating to the demands and rigor of the academy, and feelings of isolation—common graduate student struggles identified in existing scholarship (Autry and Carter; Jimenez and Gokalp).

Best Practices Learned: Successes and Challenges

Our first-year efforts focused largely on building infrastructure. Mostly, we promoted and built up our one-on-one coaching services by developing a Center website, brand logo brochures,

mission and vision statements, and a Center handbook for students seeking services. We met with faculty and students to promote our services and gather input about students' writing and research needs. We also piloted two writing enrichment events: our summer writer's retreat and a hybrid writing rally (both took place over an extended weekend).

Initially, we learned that events held between 8 am and 5 pm were poorly attended because many students work full-time jobs during the day and then take evening classes, so small-group special events had to be offered from 5:30 to 6:30 pm (before evening classes) or on the weekends.

We also learned that students were eager and excited about the writer's retreat and writing rally, but that a four-day weekend was not enough time for them to truly accomplish solid progress on their writing. We knew that our future enrichment activities needed to be longer in duration, provide more individual writing time, yet accommodate those who work full-time hours.

In our second year, we developed even more diverse offerings of writing and research enrichment activities. Additionally, these second-year activities included a monthly Brown Bag lunch lecture series offered exclusively virtually at first (which transformed into a hybrid format at the request of onsite students). We also developed a virtual writing group, a virtual week-long writing rally (both of which also later became a hybrid format), and a hybrid data rally. We also piloted off-site coaching services by sending a coach to a regional Education conference that many of our students attend. This off-site coaching offered

students an opportunity to meet with a writing coach in person but also to receive feedback on their presentation at the conference.

Our efforts to engage more with students (and faculty) proved successful in expanding our roles and coaching services. We learned that providing all-virtual activities, though it leveled the playing field for all attendees, was not as well received by our onsite residence students. Our big take-away from this second year was that we needed to meet the needs of two unique types of students (those who were distance and accustomed to virtual platforms and spaces and those who were onsite and accustomed to physical spaces). We also learned that extending the duration of writing and data rallies and offering a variety of scheduled times for sessions, workshops, and one-on-one coaching worked well for meeting more students' schedules.

Completing our third year now, we have continued offering our core one-on-one coaching services and, once again, offering the monthly Brown Bag lecture series (which now regularly hosts faculty talks), hybrid writing groups, hybrid writing rallies, an annual writer's retreat, and off-site coaching. We also added write-ins: first as part of the writing groups and then as part of the International Write-In event with writing centers across the globe.

What we have learned from these activities and student feedback surveys is that one-on-one coaching continues to be students' most popular service but that diverse sub-groups of students have also appreciated the supplemental writing and research enrichment activities to boost their productivity.

Looking to the Future & Concluding Thoughts

Our first few years have been highly productive, and our services have been extremely well-received. The number of drafts submitted and consultations requested continues to rapidly grow. We are developing better and more diverse services to support our students. We also have started formal conversations with administration to create research assistant positions in our Center for program assessment and to hire additional writing coaches to meet the growing demands of our Center.

We face what many successful "starts-ups" do—our growth and demand for services is fast outpacing our available resources. "It is nice to be busy and in-demand," I reflect.

CENTER inSIGHT

The Doctoral Support Center for Writing & Research Excellence, founded in 2014, currently serves a population of about 700 doctoral students in the College of Education at Texas Tech University.

- Center Started: Fall semester of 2014
- Director: Dr. Mellinee Lesley, Associate Dean for Graduate Education & Research
- Dissertation Specialists & Writing Coaches: 3 full-time, non-tenure track, exempt professional staff with Doctorate degrees
- Senior Editor & Writing Coach: 1 full-time, non-tenure track, non-exempt professional staff with Masters degree
- Location: College of Education, main campus
- Hours Open Per Week: Each coach works 40+ hours a week, 8 am to 5 pm and after hours by appointment (160+ hours each week of Center resources to our clients)

Consultant Insight

Connecting Writing Centers to Libraries, from an Undergraduate Tutor's Perspective: a Brief Literature Review

KATIE COYER

More and more frequently, libraries are resituating their writing centers, encouraging cross-campus collaboration. We can see examples of this in the University of Wisconsin- Madison's Ott Memorial Writing Center, as documented in "Won't You Be (More Than) My Neighbor? Writing Center/Library Partnerships" written by Heather James and Rebecca Nowacek, and the NOEL Studio at Eastern Kentucky University, as described in "Collaboration Station" by Melissa Ezarik. However, as a peer tutor in a small liberal arts college where the writing center and the library are still treated as two separate entities, I have always seen the acts of writing and of researching taught as completely unconnected activities. In actuality, they are two parts of a larger whole.

Given my own personal interest in library science as a potential career path and my school's writing center's plan to move to the library, I was interested to learn more about how the center

and the library work together. My goal was to find sources that explore this collaboration and that would prove useful for other writing center staffers. The usefulness would be evident when working with students grappling with this pedagogically divided, yet simultaneously enacted, process of writing a research paper.[1] In this essay, I connect a range of sources that peer writing consultants might find useful in helping students understand that the writing process begins during the research process.

The fact that the pedagogies of research and of writing are performed separately from each other but that first year students have to figure out how to do them at the same time was something I had never considered before taking on this project. James Elmborg details this separation in "Locating the Center: Libraries, Writing Centers, and Information Literacy." Elmborg argues that the writing center and the library are "fundamentally interconnected" through student writing but that there is a "disconnect" between their approaches. This is illustrated by Elmborg when he describes the approach generally taken with writing instruction as focusing on "language usage" and "questions of academic genre," while information literacy instruction relies on how to write "good search statements" and to "evaluat[e] … sources." By the end of the article, Elmborg wants the reader to recognize writing and research as one single activity. This realization was significant for me because peer tutors are at the center of this divide. As a peer tutor, I couldn't help but wonder how my own treatment of sessions would have been different if I had any awareness of

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[1] *It is important to acknowledge that every source I found was directed largely, if not entirely, at librarians. I was unable to find any sources that included voices or examples given from peer tutors in a significant way.*

this discourse when working with students struggling with the combination of the two. My instinct is simply to have a conversation with the patron about as much of their project as possible before I feel too out of my league, and I then recommend a visit to the library itself. What if I had realized that I could open that conversation up to include those librarians that I was sending the students to anyway?

The main problem is summarized in Barbara Alvarez's "A New Perspective on Reference: Crossing the Line between Research and Writing." She argues that there is an institutional separation between the library and the writing center; this divide forces students to "cross the line" between the two while doing academic work. She wants writing center staffers and librarians to cross this line with them through both "an adjustment of perspective" and "a holistic view of the research-writing process" (5). Essentially, librarians would take a more personal approach with students, focusing more specifically on the individual and the assignment, as opposed to helping them find as many sources as possible. This requires librarians to reexamine the types of questions they are asking and calls on them to adopt the philosophy: "work on the writer, rather than the writing" (7). While this argument is directed at librarians specifically, peer tutors should familiarize themselves with the benefits of this approach, as it is instrumental to understanding the process of writing/researching utilized by their potential patrons and how those they hope to collaborate with are working/thinking.

One way to reframe this conversation is through the discourse of space itself. Elmborg discusses the "crisis of space" that seems to be happening in both writing centers and libraries (9). He asserts that writing centers are often associated with "bad space, assigned as they are to isolated, hard-to-find office with insufficient technology," while libraries are in "a crisis of space," referring to the changing nature of libraries as new technologies emerge (9). He argues that both spaces benefit when they become centers of collaboration (9-10). This assertion of the redefinition of the library's space is echoed in Andrew Ashton's "The Entropic Library." He argues that, rather than theorizing the library's move towards a more digital realm as replacing what already exists within a library, we should instead "explode [the library's services] out into a complementary state of empathy" (141). He maintains throughout, however, that the role of the librarian within this space has remained the same—that they are still "gatekeepers and guides for information resources" (142). In "The Wrong Business for Libraries," Christine Madsen contests this claim surrounding the role of the librarian within this changing space. She argues that libraries are not simply buildings with books in them, but rather spaces for discourse, discussion, and interaction. This function was lost along the way, she argues, because of the shift from the "scholar-centered model" to an "information-centered one" (143). Madsen claims that if we continue to focus on how libraries provide access to information and nothing more, then the system will fail. Instead, we should view libraries as "a collection of services" (144). While Ashton and Madsen do not directly disagree, Ashton takes a resigned approach to the role of librarians while Madsen calls for a reform. Writing Center tutors, then, should look for opportunities within this reform

to actualize closer relationships with librarians, expanding and exploring the ways they can collaborate to serve students.

Elmborg introduces yet another way to grapple with the under-standing of changing space in his piece, "Libraries as the Spaces Between Us: Recognizing and Valuing the Third Space."[2] Using Homi Bhabha's definition of Third Space, Elmborg argues that the library can function as this Third Space because it already is a place for people to come where they are "intellectually crossing boundaries" (346), but the real distinction for whether a library is a Third Space or purely rigid and designated for particular tasks lies with the librarian and the patron. If a librarian is to take on the task of making a Third Space, Elmborg says they must engage with the student, learning more about who they are and what they care about, which ultimately means that "librarians need to see themselves as personally engaged with the personal lives of library users" (348)—crossing boundaries into a person-al/intellectual space that they may not be familiar or comfortable with. While this discussion in no way incorporates writing cen-ters explicitly, the underlying principles and goals are integral to being a successful writing center staffer, especially engaging with the patron on a personal level, which is something that is already explicitly part of the center's training. Peer tutors always begin a session with a few minutes of informal conversation, establishing a personal connection with students that lays the groundwork for an open, collaborative reviewing process. Understanding that the

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[2]*Elmborg describes Bhabha's definition of Third Space as one where those "with less obvious social, political, or military power" are still capable of resisting existing dominant structures and exerting influence simply by "occupying" and "appropri-ating" that space (345).*

pedagogies for research and writing are two very different roads to the same end goal, roads that ultimately do not need to be so separated as evidenced by the existing shared spaces, is perhaps the most important takeaway, perhaps one that peer tutors can help librarians with through collaborative engagements.

However, even as peer tutors can help librarians to cross boundaries, the opposite should also occur. I participated in an embedded tutor project my junior year, where along with one of my coworkers from the center we worked closely with a single First-Year Research Seminar class. We attended session where prompts were handed out, went to workshops at the library with them, gave personalized letters as feedback, and had individual meetings with each student in the class. I attended the workshops at the library where the students received instruction on how to research, what types of questions to ask, and where they could look for beginnings to their answers. Students were given an exercise where they were asked to write three different potential research questions. The librarian leading the workshop then called on me and my colleague to go around and check in on the students. I remember feeling jolted into place. I had been listening intently, but I had not actually foreseen myself as part of what was happening. Up until that point my role in the class existed in those individual meetings. I immediately did what was asked, and to the best of my ability, but I can't help but feel that an understanding of Third Spaces would have made me a better tutor in that situation. If I had from the start seen myself as integral to the workshop run by the librarian on the research process, something I normally do not see in my sessions with patrons, perhaps I would have more discernibly been a collaborator in that space. As writing centers

move to libraries, sessions are going to change. As writing centers move to libraries, tutors and librarians can work together to create a supportive environment for student writing and research.[3]

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Consultant Insight

Notes from the Grey Space: An Open Letter to Instructors Participating in Course Embedded Tutoring Programs

Kate McMahan

Much has been discussed about course-embedded tutoring (CET) and its role in the writing center, in the classroom, and within the university setting—from the assessment of course-embedded programs (see Dvorak et al.), to the importance of the role discipline and content area knowledge plays (for example, see Kiedaisch and Dinitz; see Cambridge), to the ways in which course-embedded tutors ("writing fellows") also serve as "reading fellows" (Bugdal and Holtz). However, there is a persisting gap in this ongoing conversation: discussion about course-embedded work within first-year writing courses from the perspective of the tutor. As noted by Francesca Gentile, "Tutors…bring an important perspective to pedagogy courses, perspectives that are not necessarily represented in the relevant literature."

Taking into consideration my experience as a CET and as a researcher, in this paper I will address three core tenets for instructors to consider before taking part in a course-embedded project. Establishing clear expectations, developing course

architecture well in advance, and recognizing complicated relationships between tutors, instructors, and staffers allow for a more robust experience for all involved.

Along with eight other writing center staffers at Transylvania University (TU), I took part in a semester-long pilot pairing tutors and instructors from across the disciplines to teach in our required first-year research seminar (FYRS) course. Like many student learning assistance centers (SLACs), TU's FYRS program echoes Gladstein et al.'s description of "a program of writing-intensive, topic-based seminars that are explicitly labeled as the institution's writing requirement…an approach long associated with small colleges" and intends to "introduce students to the research community in the context of an interdisciplinary theme, generally coupled more or less tightly to the instructor's own area of research" (Gladstein et al.). Each section of the course is themed-based on the instructor's discipline area; however, it is primarily a general introduction to academic writing with shared assignments across sections. Along with participating in the pilot, I interviewed fellow CETs at midterm and during finals week to discuss successes, concerns and observations in their respective sections. At the conclusion of the program, I also took part in an independent study focusing on scholarship discussing course-embedded tutoring.

To be clear, there are a range of CET programs, each with different emphases, course landscapes, and exigencies. The purpose of this research is not to suggest that all should walk lockstep or that they even face the same challenges. However, given my experience as a staffer and researcher, I assert that there are a few necessary

overarching concepts for faculty and instructors to consider when looking into participating in such work. These concepts are not fixed variables but more like permeable membranes: components that are both fluid and inextricably bound. By connecting my interview work with moments from existing scholarship, I offer a grassroots, ground-level approach to the successes and challenges of course-embedded pedagogy.

1.   Making the implicit explicit:

In research conducted at California State University Channel Islands, DeLoach et al. assert that "…most, if not all, of the problems that arise generally are rooted in incongruous expectations: student expectations of ICTs [in-class tutors] and faculty, ICTs expectations of faculty and students, and/or faculty expectations for their students and ICTs." Like other first year writing courses at SLACs, our instructors came from different disciplines and subsequently tend to see writing through different lenses. Scholars Lori Salem and Peter Jones examined faculty attitudes towards writing instruction courses, noting that certain faculty "have stronger commitments to their disciplinary identities and knowledge than they do to teaching, particularly when they have to teach 'skills' like writing" (71) and that these faculty "simply don't believe teaching writing should be part of their jobs in the first place" (72). Although each faculty instructor is aware of and committed to the goals of our course overall, this pedagogical difference and the "incongruous expectations" related to it played into some of the challenges in our own pilot.

In particular, the pedagogical worldview of one professor in our CET pilot (a seasoned and well-respected professor by student and administration standards) did not match that of his paired tutor, a student of music technology. The interviews I conducted with the tutor at midterm and during finals week indicated that the course was not as successful as it could have been, largely stemming from a lack of explicit expectations concerning the role of writing (and subsequently, the role of the CET) in the course. While other sections kept a fairly standard pace in assignments and consultations with students, this particular class section seemed to focus more on content and literary texts and lagged behind the agreed schedule for peer responses and other supports that are common to the CET experience as described by Severino and others. Throughout the interview, this staffer reported being "lost and confused" – a warning sign for any troubled CET relationship (Raleigh, 22 February).

On the other end of the spectrum, expectations of writing, writing instruction, and course planning were made explicitly clear from the beginning of my CET work, largely because of the collaboration between the instructor, a professor of neuroscience, and myself. My partner was new to this course; I was a relatively seasoned tutor. She consistently conferred with me for help navigating the terrain of the assignments and writing concerns and was explicitly open in her desire to become a better writing instructor.

This brings me to a critical cornerstone of such a project: each pairing will look different, and that is okay. However, it is equally true that key elements must be established, beginning with

deliberate course architecture, including the rhetorical positioning of the tutor in relation to course content and the balance and distribution of authority between instructor and tutor. With the pressure of additional due dates, given that students are required to submit assignments to tutors two weeks prior to final submission to the instructor, consideration of course architecture is an imperative cornerstone in the success of a collaboration.

Having considered what such a course should look like in terms of planning, it is also critical to rhetorically situate the CET within the course with deliberation. Gentile suggests that "specialist knowledge" of a tutor is a major component of success in CET programs, arguing that "disciplinary knowledge empowered [tutors] to push back against student misunderstandings about the assignment or material or attempts to gloss over faculty expectations." In agreement, Susan M. Hubbuch notes that a knowledgeable tutor "knows the appropriate questions to ask" (Hubbuch 25). However, the successful CET pairings from our pilot illustrate the importance of recognizing (particularly within the framework of a first-year writing program) that the background knowledge of each pairing will strike a different balance, which can either serve as an advantage or a challenge.

For example, the partnership between a professor of philosophy and his CET, who was his advisee and a student of philosophy, held true to Gentile's and Hubbuch's sentiment. The philosophy CET described his relationship with his faculty partner as such: "We are able to play off of on another very well…I think this is largely attributed to him being my adviser and in my area of study. He allows me to give subject feedback as well, which I think places

me in a weird almost TA position sometimes" (Cunningham, 9 March). Although this CET was successful in his situation as a self-assessed "TA," he was deliberate about delegating authority to his partner. This delegation of authority is the most tangible line to maneuver—other lines are grey, subtle, slippery. What works for one pairing will not work for others. The role that one CET plays may not be the same as the role of others. For example, another pairing in our pilot demonstrated the potential for the CET to act as a "role model" student as a result of the deliberate negotiation of her role within the course. In her interview, the CET noted: "…they also—and this makes me happy—have grown in email etiquette…I've noticed they've starting writing emails like me" (Burton). She modeled for students not only writing techniques within this particular course but also served as an example of how to navigate and communicate within the university setting.

2. Good Things Come in Threes:

Gentile writes of the "'symbiotic relationship' that emerges from writing fellows' efforts to bridge specialist/generalist and WAC/WID discourses for the mutual benefit of students, faculty, and departments" and asserts that "tutors act as agents of change to the degree that their movements facilitate increased contact" between "multiple discourse communities that constitute a writing program." She nods to the necessity of nurturing all legs of the triadic relationship, conceding that while there is a certain authority embedded in a tutor's position as just that, a tutor, the students within the program identified the "personal relationships" and "intimate connections" made with tutors as the

During the interviews, most tutors expressed an increased level of comfort and trust that had developed between themselves and the students in their section throughout the course. One CET referred to the comfort generated through his consistent relationship with students both during his midterm interview and final interview. For example, during the CET's midterm interview, he noted that he perceived a "different way of interacting with students…compared to traditional WC appointments," specifically that students were "more comfortable talking about their writing" (Cunningham, 9 March). By finals, the tutor noted that many of the students in his section were "much more comfortable…outside of the course even to ask questions or look at drafts…after conferences" (Cunningham, 19 April). This staffer's experience illuminates what the relationships formed between student, staffer, and instructor make possible.

3. Building Bridges:

The ideas of course-embedded programs as ambassadors of the writing center and as vehicles for "building bridges between writing programs and classrooms" are not new ones. Scholars such as Carol Severino assert that CETs have a window of opportunity to serve as "ambassadors" of the writing center—to the student body and to faculty instructors alike. Carpenter et al. contend that the students in these programs' "willingness to participate (or not) in course-embedded initiatives—from classroom instruction to outside-of-class consultations—impacts relationships and the ongoing development of programs," a sentiment which is echoed throughout Spigelman and Grobman's On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring. As Carpenter et al.

suggest, one considering participation in such a program must not only take into account the perceptions and future encounters of the particular students enrolled in such a course but, particularly in such a small school as Transylvania, must also think in terms of seven degrees of separation (or, realistically, two or three degrees). The students within the course inevitably shape the perception, discourse, and utilization of the writing center space. And for this reason, the writing center both in practice and in physical location must be carefully and deliberately heeded.

4. Conclusion:

From my point of view as a CET and researcher, establishing expectations, developing relationships with deliberateness, and recognizing the writing center both in its physical and ideological space makes all the difference in the success of a program. This was further illuminated through a final discussion I had with my faculty partner after the close of the program. Her feedback on having a "phenomenal ally that was there to augment the writing part" of the course was, honestly, gratifying. She also recognized that the pilot "allowed [students] to see…I can do this" and an increase in the students' "confidence in their own abilities" (Jurs). The end goal, then, is not only to assist students with individual writing tasks but also to establish a culture of writing in the university—a goal that calls for a strong relationship with the writing center, through all departments and courses.

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Book Review

Writing Studio Pedagogy: Space, Place, and Rhetoric in Collaborative Environments

JENNIFER P. GRAY

Review:

Geller, Anne Ellen and Michele Eodice, eds. Working with Faculty Writers. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2013.

ISBN: 978-0-87421-901-2

Pages: 305

Price: $29.95

Placeholder:

The current era in higher education values scholarly production over teaching and service, and "measuring scholarly output remains a staple of the academic marketplace" (6). With that in mind, editors Anne Ellen Geller and Michele Eodice compiled a 16-chapter collection presenting practical and thoughtful guidance regarding writing support for faculty. This collection of diverse and experienced voices offers proven suggestions for administrators and faculty who are considering different writing

support programs or who wish to overhaul or assess their current writing support programs. In addition, the collection expands our thinking about current faculty writing support, moving from support as punishment to support as enhancing a thriving and varied community of writers on campus.

The collection involves 44 authors across the 16 chapters. This diversity helps readers find a common point of entry, whether the reader is an adjunct faculty member, a WPA, a Center for Teaching and Learning director, or a junior tenure-track faculty member. The text begins with a Foreword by Robert Boice that emphasizes the strengths of this collection as it provides "real-life accounts" of the difficulties faced by faculty writers (vii). Geller moves on to provide the introductory matter, which lays out the plan of the book and highlights the editors' goals of sharing proven varieties of best practices for developing, maintaining, and assessing faculty writing support programs to create a positive and productive campus culture of writing. Geller explains the collection's hopes and goals: "...we hope this book will help more institutions imagine how to develop writing support for their faculty, many of whom might feel they would be stigmatized locally if they were to ask for such support without being able to provide models of how it can work effectively and why it is important for all faculty" (5).

The bulk of the text is divided into three segments, grouped thematically. The first section, "Leadership and Locations," includes four chapters that focus on crafting, leading, and structuring different types of faculty writing support options. Readers who are beginning to defend and develop writing support on their campus may find this section particularly helpful.

Chris Anson starts this section by providing some background on the history of faculty writing groups. The legacy of faculty workshops, stretching back to the 1970s, is explored more in the second chapter by Brian Baldi, Mary Deane Sorcinelli, and Jung H. Yun, as the authors highlight multiple writing support programs that could be "customized" to different campuses or initiatives (39). This chapter is especially important for faculty working on starting writing support programs, as the authors defend the reasons why such support is necessary and beneficial to a university. Lori Salem and Jennifer Follett focus the third chapter on the common misconception that faculty writing support is needed for deficient faculty members or those struggling with publication. Instead of focusing only on publications as the motivation for support, the authors explore the idea of a center focused on literacy development and literacy communities. The first section concludes with a unique fourth chapter by Gertrude Fraser and Deandra Little that uses a dialogical approach to enact and illustrate the type of critical reflection advocated in their faculty writing program at the University of Virginia: Professors as Writers (PAW).

The second section, "Writing Groups/Retreats/Residencies," provides readers with specific examples of current writing support programs. This section will be helpful for readers who are considering what programs could be offered at their campuses. Chapter five by Tara Gray, A. Jane Birch, and Laura Madson, focuses on thirteen years of successful writing support options across two institutions: New Mexico State University and Brigham Young University. The authors believe that a teaching center can provide the best location for support options, as faculty writing support is closely tied to effective writing instruction. The sixth

chapter, by Angela Clark-Oates and Lisa Cahill, utilizes the concept of third space to highlight a way to centralize writing support outside of the classroom, writing center, or teaching/learning center, and chapter seven, by Jessie L. Moore, Peter Felten, and Michael Strickland, focuses on the successful summer writing residencies offered at Elon University. The eighth chapter moves from the concept of residencies to retreats. Ellen Schendel, Susan Callaway, Violet Dutcher, and Claudine Griggs are writing center directors at four different institutions, and they collaborated to assess how participants received the retreat activities (such as goal setting) and outcomes (such as a sense of community between writers). They also examined how these results impacted faculty writers in the long term after the retreat and used their assessments not only to improve the retreat experience but also to "generate ideas" and "shape" further "writing support programming" at their campuses (143). Chapter nine, by Virginia Fajt, Fran I. Gelwick, Verónica Loureiro-Rodríguez, Prudence Merton, Georgianne Moore, María Irene Moyna, and Jill Zarestky, presents a multi-voiced discussion about how interdisciplinary writing groups created "collaboration and professional growth for its members" (163). The chapter identifies the successes of the groups, such as being more productive as writers and having a safe and supportive haven for their writing. Finally, Chapter ten, by Trixie G. Smith, Janice C. Molloy, Eva Kassens-Noor, Wen Li, and Manuel Colunga-Garcia, concludes this section by zooming in on a successful writing support group at a Research I university to highlight the successful reading and responding techniques used in this high-pressure environment.

Section three, "Issues and Authors," expands the discussion to spaces that are often omitted from consideration in scholarly

publication. This section shows readers proven samples of writing support initiatives, such as writing retreats and faculty writing groups, including assessment results and even schedules for activities from events. In chapter eleven, by Michelle Cox and Ann Brunjes, the authors focus on community colleges and teaching institutions that privilege service and teaching over publications. They identify some of the pitfalls faced by faculty writers at these institutions, such as time constraints, and chapter twelve, by Letizia Guglielmo and Lynée Lewis Gaillet, furthers the discussion by examining ways to support contingent faculty who face publication demands in order to move into more secure academic positions. Chapter thirteen, by William P. Banks and Kerri B. Flinchbaugh, focuses on the need to rethink writing support programming and questions if faculty "really see themselves as writers" (228). They suggest that writing behaviors, such as writing for a certain time period a day, are not sufficient for change; instead, writers must adopt the ethos and identity of a writer. William Duffy and John Pell in chapter fourteen focus on the differences between collaboration and coauthorship in the faculty writing process. Coauthorship can be isolating, as writers often work separately on individual sections, but collaboration can be more reflective in nature as it meshes the two minds into one document with a "new shared voice" (251). Chapter fifteen, by Elena Marie-Adkins Garcia, Seung hee Eum, and Lorna Watt, illustrates how graduate writing groups can provide a space for graduate students to practice being experts in their disciplines with "safe" mentoring based around peers (264). These scholars show specific examples of the activities conducted during their writing groups and explain how their experiences in the group impacted their future work in writing instruction. Finally, chapter

sixteen by Carmen Werder, explores the idea of self-authorship and how the three dimensions of this theory (cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal) can be applied to move faculty writers from short-term goals to longer lasting goals.

Eodice provides a conclusion to the collection with an Afterword, which stresses the need to "turn toward each other" (297) when thinking about and implementing faculty writing support initiatives. She highlights the ever-increasing solitary nature brought about by screen time rather than face-to-face time that can cripple a campus writing community, especially when the pressure to produce further isolates writers. Her call to action states that "it will be more and more imperative for faculty to turn toward each other—not inward, not isolated with a screen and device. In turning toward and forming communities, faculty of all types can together consider some of the pressing questions" of our future, such as labor relations and intellectual properties (297).

The collection is a worthy resource for WAC program directors, WPAs, writing center directors, and staff working in Centers for Teaching and Learning. The strength of the text is its diversity. Readers from institutions ranging from community colleges to Research I universities will find options for faculty writing support programs that will fit their institutions and constraints. Some of the programs have no cost, so even the most financially restricted readers will have options. Finally, if readers find themselves in a situation of having to justify support initiatives, this text provides plenty of proven programs, complete with assessment data and actual activities, to defend the benefits of faculty writing support.

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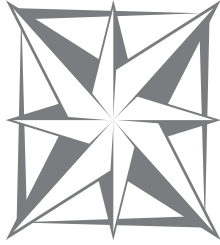
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