

SOUTHERN
DISCOURSE
in the CENTER

A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation

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--Lauren Beard
- Establishing the Writing Center's Educational Role in the Academy by Stressing Peer Tutor Development
--Bonnie Devet

Consultant Insight

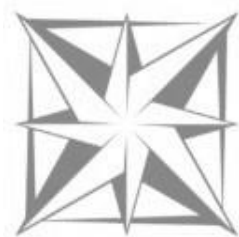
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Back to the Center

- Creativity, Collaboration, Community: The Transylvania University Writing Center
--Jordan Long and Katherine Tucker

Book Review

- *Out in the Center: Public Controversies and Private Struggles*, reviewed by Emily Harbin



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Southern Discourse in the Center: A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation (SDC) is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal published twice per year by the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA). 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 doubleblind review. To honor the journal's historical context, future issues will include special sections that profile the work of regional associations, emerging undergraduate research, and centers across the country, providing a sustained look at regional and national concerns that centers face in the 21st century.

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If you would like more information about SDC or would like to be a reviewer, please email the editors at sdcs@southeasternwritingcenter.org or visit our web site (<http://southeasternwritingcenter.wildapricot.org>).



Our Mission

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

The Journal

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

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Southern Discourse in the Center 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 manuscripts to SDC@iwca-swca.org.

Article Submission Guidelines

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” Submission Guidelines

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, goals, and hopes for improvement. By incorporating visual images, each “Back to the Center” piece should give readers an authentic sense of the ethos of the center and of the work done there. Each “Back to the Center” submission should 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” Submission Guidelines

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.

Book Review Guidelines

Each issue will usually include at least one review of a book relevant to the focus of SDC. Book reviews should be approximately 750-1,500 words in length. Please contact the editors if you are interested in submitting a book review.

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From the Editors

Scott Pleasant

Devon Ralston



Both of us are honored to be trusted with the task of editing this publication. When we took over as co-editors at the end of Karen Head's term as editor, our main goal was to continue the excellent work she and her team did by publishing peer-reviewed scholarship along with book reviews, tutoring insights, and profiles of writing centers in the SWCA region. As we go forward, we hope to expand the readership of the journal and feature authors from all IWCA regions.

We hope you will agree that this issue contains some fine examples of scholarly research and other article that will be of interest to *SDC* subscribers and others who work in writing centers or related areas.

Lauren Beard's article, "Diversifying Consultant Skill Sets: Refiguring Peer-to-Peer Feedback through Feminist Disability Pedagogy," shows how tutoring practice can be more effective by incorporating a philosophy of and strategies for inclusion.

"Establishing the Writing Center's Educational Role in the Academy by Stressing Peer Tutor Development," by Bonnie Devet, examines the work of writing centers in the institutions they are part of and encourages administrators and tutors to consider how they fit into the academic structures of those institutions.

In "Keeping a Clear Head: Enhancing Graduate Student Wellness through Meditation and Journaling in the Writing Center," Janine Morris, Veronica Diaz, and Noemi Nunez discuss the importance of the affective domain and self-care for writing center tutors.

Jordan Lang and Katherine Tucker provide a thorough overview of the Transylvania University Writing Center, with particular focus on how

the TUWC contributes to a campus culture of creativity and collaboration.

Emily Harbin's review of *Out in the Center: Public Controversies and Private Struggles* provides insightful commentary on a book that looks at various kinds of identity issues in the writing center context.

Taken together, the pieces published in this issue share the goal of shaping our practices and informing our views on some of the most important issues writing center professionals face. We hope this issue contributes in a positive way to the work you do, and we look forward to hearing feedback from subscribers.

We also want to encourage readers to become involved in the journal by joining the list of reviewers or submitting a manuscript for publication. On the final page of this issue, you will find a call for submissions for our next two issues. The Fall 2019 issue will serve as a retrospective on the 2019 SWCA Conference in Myrtle Beach, SC, and will feature the keynote and plenary addresses as well as papers that grew from presentations given at the conference. We may continue to publish similar conference retrospective issues after future SWCA conferences if this upcoming issue is as successful and well-received as we hope it will be.

Thank you for supporting this journal and the SWCA organization as a whole. We look forward to hearing from all of you as we work to make *SDC* an important part of the professional and scholarly life of SWCA members and others who work in the writing center field.

Diversifying Consultant Skill Sets: Refiguring Peer-to-Peer Feedback through Feminist Disability Pedagogy

Lauren Beard

This paper posits a new way of training consultants in communication and writing centers to provide the most effective feedback for clients with disabilities. I explain how I first came to this research and analyze the current literature regarding how we train our consultants to interact with these clients. Then, using my background as a feminist rhetorician, I propose two specific methods for giving consultants the confidence to engage ethically in providing feedback to their clients with disabilities while avoiding ableist practices. The first is a critical awareness of subjected identities in society, academia, and the Centers, and the other is rhetorical listening. After examining these approaches, I relate a case study in which I have employed these strategies over the past year with a client of mine who has disabilities. My interactions with this client have been successful and ongoing. Ultimately, this type of critical awareness and ethical engagement should be an important aspect of training in regards to marginalized bodies in our centers.

Backstory and Beginnings

As a graduate assistant at a mid-sized state university, I deliver workshops about public speaking to diverse audiences. These workshops mostly consist of strategies to understand and improve organization and delivery competencies. One morning, however, I was giving a workshop on the elements of public speaking delivery, and was just finishing up the spiel on managing anxiety, when a young woman raised her hand and asked, “But what do you do if you just have an anxiety disorder in general?” It was in this moment I realized just how much I had fallen

short in identifying the ableist language that could weave itself into our theories and practices as multiliteracy scholars and advocates.

After this workshop, while back at my desk, my mind reeled with similar instances I had barely noticed before: giving a workshop on methods of utilizing space with individuals in the audience who were in wheelchairs or walked on crutches, explaining adequate public speaking volume to a deaf woman, emphasizing the importance of posture to people in the audience with motor neuron disabilities, etc. In short, I felt small; I felt like I had egregiously failed an already marginalized population. I was walking into these classrooms as an authority and a liaison for the student-empowerment-centered space of the University Communication Center, yet while spouting research and theories on what makes a “good” public speaker, I ignored the binary I was creating between students who could practice the things I said they should do and students who could not. As Center participants and innovators, we must take these moments of failure and reflection seriously. We are responsible for the space of authority and rhetorical meaning-making we create when consulting clients. As such, we must not let able-bodied normativity be our default for the feedback we give students and train consultants to give students.

I began to investigate this problem in the physical space of our Communication Center and quickly realized that I was not alone in my sentiments. The undergraduate students that I train and who work under my leadership were also experiencing moments of perceived failure to meet the needs of students whose bodies did not fall into academically normative categories. I told them my frustrations, and they released a torrent of similar circumstances they had also encountered throughout their time as consultants. In some of these situations, they came to me or another member of the leadership team in the moment of the consultation and said, frazzled and anxious, “I don’t know what to tell them!”

These consultants have gone through a semester-long class where they learn the importance of peer tutoring, student empowerment, and meeting people where they are. They closely adhere to the hallmarks of communication center theory that say it is a space of equality and “a site wherein students can better meet the educational outcomes of communication while avoiding...the traditional hindrances of power that are inherent to a conventional classroom setting” (Pensoneau-Conway and Romerhausen 39). Every single trainee must read and write on a

series of essays that posit Communication Centers as what Sandra Pensoneau-Conway and Nick Romerhausen have dubbed “Critical Sites of Intervention and Empowerment.” This phrase means that Centers should intervene in the traditional pedagogical method wherein students act as sponges that soak up whatever information the instructor disseminates and then squeeze it out later on a test. Instead, centers are in the unique position of encouraging students to exercise their own powers of thinking critically and epistemologically, and resist a structure that values certain bodies over others. These consultants in the Communication Center know and practice this theory of intervention, so they know something is not right when faced with meeting the needs of clients who have disabilities. The following article will detail potential practical and customizable ways consultants can better meet the needs of students with disabilities in the Centers.

Introduction and Argument

Subscriptions to “isms,” racism, sexism, ableism etc., both subtle and overt, are not uncommon occurrences in higher education. For years, feminist organizations on campus and off have fought tirelessly against the exclusion of marginalized bodies in academia. Two groups in particular that have made a massive impact on creating a safe and non-judgmental environment on campus are the University Communication Center and Writing Center. These centers, while being resources clients can visit for peer feedback on various oral and written projects, are also spaces of dialogue and community. For example, Ward and Schwartzman write that, in the space of a Center consultation, clients should “see their consultants more as partners in building supportive relationships rather than as superiors dictating instructions” (371). One purpose of this article is to explore how consultants can help cultivate this supportive relationship with clients who have disabilities by interrogating their own potential ableism in the moment of the consultation. These strategies will enhance consultants’ awareness of hegemonic discourse that could arise in consultations, as well as how to silence these biases in order to create a more ethical, feminist environment for all parties. In this environment, differences are celebrated and feedback is rooted in a growth-oriented mindset instead of a mindset that juxtaposes clients with a rigid, ableist standard of what a successful writer or speaker should look like. For the purposes of this

research, I will focus mainly on Communication Center consultations, but these strategies can apply to Writing Centers as well.

This article will use Jay Dolmage’s definition of ableism from his book *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education*. According to Dolmage, “[a]bleism renders disability as abject, invisible, disposable, less than human, while able-bodiedness is represented as at once ideal, normal, and the mean or default” (7). This particular definition is significant in that it articulates the hegemonic framework inherent in how society categorizes and values bodies. This is not to say that consultants automatically see clients with disabilities as abject or disposable, but this definition does expose and articulate how ableism could sneak its way into a consultant’s feedback.

Investigating the Literature

Writing center scholars Sharifa Daniels, Rebecca Day Babcock, and Doria Daniels posit disability accessibility as a key component of writing centers’ theoretical and practical mission. They assert that,

Writing centers, if we are true to our ethos and values, should be at the forefront of tirelessly working for policies that take disability into account . . . We should constantly monitor, evaluate, and re-examine our practices. Writing centers therefore have a dual charge: claiming that the writing center is a place where students with disabilities can feel at home and that our pedagogy can meet their needs, and then to make sure that it does. (26)

My article expands upon this research and demonstrates how a rhetorically collaborative approach to tutoring students with disabilities can be applied across Multiliteracy Centers. There is very little written about disability in Communication Center theory and pedagogy, and much of what is written does not provide adequate space to explore the innovative possibilities of working with students who have disabilities. For example, Kathleen J. Turner and Theodore F. Sheckels’s cornerstone work *Communication Centers: A Theory-Based Guide to Training and Management* devotes only two pages to “disabled speakers.” Also, the disabilities Turner and Sheckles delineate privilege specific physical disabilities over less visible ones by focusing only on “those who are

wheelchair bound, those who are deaf, and those who are blind” (153). These limited, specific cases do not leave room for an organic, customizable, holistic approach to consulting clients with disabilities. It is not to say this book is not a well-conceived, useful “guide to training and management”; many Communication Centers, including mine, utilize its methods and advice in real time. However, we as consultants and directors should be critical of this unfortunate lack of space devoted to students with disabilities.

Also, Turner’s and Sheckels’s explanation of disabilities assumes a systematic expectation on the part of the consultant about what these clients with disabilities are going to need help with before they even sit down and start having a conversation. This kind of blanket approach to feedback is problematic if the goal is to have a dialogue with the client. Moreover, the feedback advice they propose seeks to reconfigure bodies with disabilities to “seem” less disabled or to accommodate the expectations of the able-bodied students in the audience. For example, they write that, “A blind student can create the illusion of eye contact by sensing where the audience is. The student can angle his or her head up or down and move it side-to-side so as to bring the eyes in line with where the audience is” (154, my emphasis). This method of faking able-bodiedness for the sake of the audience can have detrimental effects on both the client’s ethos and their speaking confidence.

Of course, one could argue that not faking able-bodiedness could also damage this client’s ethos with their audience, but the role of the Communication Center is to provide a space of dialogue and collaboration with the client, making sure to listen to their needs first instead of stigmatizing and diagnosing their shortcomings as an able-bodied society would. Taking the time to hear the client communicate their own experiences as a speaker or writer before going into a predetermined feedback spiel will help improve the quality of both the consultant’s feedback and the ethics of their interpersonal competence. A client with disabilities should never leave a consultation with any feelings whatsoever of inherent inferiority or defect.

Communication studies scholarship is just beginning to focus on students with disabilities in the classroom, and I believe their observations can extend to a center’s space as well. Bettina Brockmann and Michael S. Jeffress in their article “Unleashing Disability Perspectives in the Public

Speaking Course” offer strategies for ethical awareness and pedagogy in the classroom. For example, they write about “unlearning” the “uncertainties” and social fear we have when discussing disabilities or communicating with someone who has disabilities:

Unlearning means stepping out of our comfort zones . . . Instead of succumbing to fear, we should model how to introduce and communicate new and complex subjects. This does not mean that we must have all the answers. It means . . . exploring these issues together. Through this process, all participants are involved in an encompassing and rewarding experience of producing knowledge. (208-209)

By admitting our uncertainties and allowing ourselves to engage in a vulnerable space with a person who has disabilities, we create an environment of radical empowerment and a rhetorical meaning-making that emphasizes equality. Also, Brockman and Jeffress call on bell hooks’s “engaged pedagogy” to further an idea of ethical openness with students who have disabilities. They assert that we must be “open to learning from people who are different from us ... [and] ‘that empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks’” (209). Therefore, we can see that in the past year, communication instructors have been giving critical thought to radical, pedagogical engagement in the classroom. I believe these same concepts, combined with the feminist disability concepts I will discuss shortly, are readily transferable to consultations in the Communication and Writing Centers.

Feminist Disability Pedagogy

Effective, accurate feedback is vital, but the multiplicity of the disability experience should be celebrated, not silenced or condemned. So, the feedback consultants give ought to be critical and applicable yet avoid ableist language. Our Centers must be spaces where consultants and clients can engage in a dialogue that undoes societal oppression instead of reinforcing it. They should know how to elicit and uplift the uniqueness of communication and writing styles that every single body offers. To this end, I propose we adopt a feminist disability perspective for how we train consultants to give feedback.

What do I mean by a feminist disability perspective? Kim Q. Hall's *Feminist Disability Studies* posits disability as a methodological framework for doing ethical, feminist work, which, as we have seen, is the ultimate goal of a communication and writing center. A feminist disability studies perspective undoes the one-dimensional identity that society and university politics tend to ascribe to individuals with disabilities. Instead of categorizing the disability as defective or a hurdle to overcome, this perspective frames disability as epistemological, as a potential avenue for innovative methods of knowledge production and ways of interpreting the world. A feminist disability framework upholds the feminist work of communication and writing centers by giving consultants the tools to value the client as they are and listen to the client's own experiences, identities, and goals when it comes to their disability and academic identity, all in the short space of a consultation.

Why is this feminist perspective of equality important? Ward and Schwartzman investigate the phenomenon of trust as it relates to a successful Communication Center consultation. They argue that a consultant's interpersonal intelligence and ability to connect to the client as a person, not just as another appointment, is what allows for a meaningful, effective conversation to take place between the two parties. Comparatively, in *Writing Centers*, Thomas Newkirk delineates the importance of the "first five minutes" of any writing consultation. He says that the "opening minutes of the conference are critically important in giving the conference direction . . . The student's contributions in these opening minutes need to be used to give the conference a mutually agreeable, mutually understood direction" (327-328). In a society that already sees individuals with disabilities through countless screens of stigma and limitation, it is crucial they are able to sit down with a consultant who is aware and critical of these biases, and who consistently asks for the individual's insights on the direction the consultation needs to go, instead of relying on their own assumptions. There are several strategies that comprise conducting a successful feminist consultation with individuals who have disabilities. For the purposes of this research, I will focus on two: critical awareness of subject identity formation and rhetorical listening.

Subject Identity Formation

Rhetoric scholar Kenneth Burke, in his influential *Language as Symbolic Action*, coined the phrase “terministic screens” to theorize the epistemological way that we interact with, and assign value to, the objects and people around us. He argues that we place interpretive screens over them in an attempt to understand and categorize our relationship to them. For example, giving the term “disabled” to a body that cannot perform a certain normalized or expected task in society, such as walking, and assigning value to that body accordingly. However, Burke asserts these screens are completely discursive, and rely solely on the participation and propagation of the larger public. To echo Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization*, the abled/disabled binary is not a natural law; it is constructed based on the overarching value systems of a society. In writing and communication centers, consultants constantly use terministic screens of what “good” writing, speaking, etc. looks like in order to provide their client with feedback. Therefore, a critical understanding of how these screens are being employed, and how to recognize when a particular screen may be harmful, is vital.

Kim Q. Hall gives terministic screens a disability context. She writes in her book *Feminist Disability Studies* that disability is a pivotal, intersectional crossroads of race, gender, sociopolitics, and public/private spheres of identity and performance. However, as aforementioned with Foucault, disability is a constructed term. She says it is nonetheless crucial we recognize disability and its multifarious, intersectional forms in the narratives of oppression we encounter so that we do not wax complicit. This oppression includes relegating people with disabilities into a loop of the “overcoming narrative” where they must always be in the process of being “cured” or “fixed” or where disability is socially rationalized as always “burdensome” and the marker of “a diminished quality of life” (2-3).

To avoid this oppressive perspective, consultants should constantly interrogate the intellectual, rhetorical space of the Communication and Writing Center, as well as their own ideological and material subscriptions to potential biases. Furthering this notion of awareness concerning social constructions of disability, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson imagines a space of bodily difference where we scrutinize and “complicate our understandings of social justice, subject formation,

subjugated knowledges and collective action” (13). Garland-Thomson positions the ability/disability system as an outdated process society ascribes to in order to produce capitalistically agenced subjects by “differentiating and marking bodies” as abled and disabled (17). Garland-Thompson’s ideas of a more nuanced approach to bodies mirrors aforementioned center ideologies concerning non-judgmental student empowerment. Thus, consultants must not see their clients as a one-dimensional label of “disabled”, but should instead adopt a more intersectional approach that allows the client space to define themselves.

For instance, consultants develop the ability to swiftly read an individual client or a room full of clients and react accordingly. We need this Feminist Disability perspective and skill because hegemonic discourse is always waiting to sneak into our quick reads of people and situations, which is not the fault of the consultants, but rather a side effect of living in a patriarchal society. Communications scholar Dennis Mumby posits that

Communication/discourse is not simply the vehicle through which ideas, values, beliefs, etc., are disseminated in a culture, but is rather constitutive of a social actor's culture and meaning system...communication not only constitutes cultural meaning systems, but is also an intrinsic part of the means by which relations of domination are produced and reproduced. (293)

These dominating, marginalizing narratives accrue their power by the very fact that they are perceived as “intrinsic” and are therefore hard to detect. As an example, Emily Stones’s article “Exploring the Intersection of Ableism, Image-Building and Hegemonic Masculinity in the Political Communication Classroom” also explores how insidious patriarchal influences infiltrate academic learning environments. She explains, “an understanding of disability . . . requires an understanding of the socio-cultural context in which it is evoked . . . Disability scholars and activists have long argued that culture informs our opinions, definitions and actions toward persons with disabilities” (189). One example she uses is the “supercrip” narrative, which is “the portrayal of a . . . person who unexpectedly overcomes disability and becomes successful despite their disability” (189). In educational settings especially, individuals tend to place expectations of “supercrip” or overcoming narratives on students who have disabilities by juxtaposing them with the rigid academic norm and judging their abilities against it. By being aware of all these societal

constructs in the space of a consultation, consultants can better detect and silence their own biases and expectations for a client.

Communication constitutes a site of epistemological discourse in writing centers as well. Kenneth Bruffee explains the importance of collaborative writing sessions in Writing Centers by describing them as a “social context” of action: “Peer tutoring . . . makes students--both tutors and tutees--aware that writing is a social artifact . . . however displaced writing may seem in time and space from the rest of the writer’s community of readers and other writers . . . [it] continues to be an act of conversational exchange” (91). When a consultant sits down with a writer who has disabilities, they enter into a social conversation that engages with disability both individually and contextually. Thus, it is crucial they are aware of the social aspects of the writer’s conversational exchange by engaging in a respectful dialogue about their personally and socially constructed identity as a writer with disabilities.

Ultimately, Garland-Thomson argues that “a feminist disability [perspective] denaturalizes disability by unseating the dominant assumption that disability is something that is wrong with someone” (18). “Denaturalizing” disability means that we expose the societal stigmas and constructs that affect our understandings of it. This critical perspective on representational structures, terministic screens, and subject identity formation must be a cornerstone for our work in communication and writing center praxis. Without it, our commitment to individual student empowerment is in danger of falling under hegemonic influence. My subsequent case study will display this method in action.

Rhetorical Listening

Writing and Communication Centers are beginning to theorize the importance of listening as an active and reflexive strategy inside and outside of the consultation space, but much remains to be said concerning the full implications of listening’s rhetorical significance in the moment of a consultation. For example, in communication center scholarship, Cuny, Wilde, and Stevens, have coined the term “empathetic listening” as a practice that “requires listeners to refrain from judging the speaker and instead advocates placing themselves in the speaker’s position. Doing so allows the listener to [try to] understand

the speaker's point of view” (217-218). Of course, a consultant should not assume they can know what it is like to live with a disability they do not have, but empathetic listening does train the consultant to place importance on the client’s experiences and insights. In writing center scholarship, Romeo García emphasizes the value of consultant reflexivity and listening by positioning these acts as anti-racist and decolonizing strategies that expose and de-center hegemonic discourse in the Writing Center. I argue these perspectives, coupled with an intentionally explicit emphasis on listening as a feminist rhetorical act, can apply to anti-ableist consultant training in the Centers.

Feminist scholar Krista Ratcliffe defines rhetorical listening as “a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relations to any person, text, or culture” (17). This “stance of openness” is an important feminist intervention because it allows consultants and clients to collaboratively challenge the exclusionary, ableist discourses that would seek to undervalue and marginalize these students’ abilities. By adopting a rhetorically open stance, the consultant will be able to better listen to the client’s lived experiences with their identity, and gear the session towards a productive, growth-oriented dialogue. Rhetorical listening and openness help avoid a hierarchical, one-sided litany of dos and don’ts that emphasize the client’s failures instead of celebrating the strengths they bring to their work. For instance, in a communication center or writing center session, rhetorical listening can consist of the consultant asking specific, yet open-ended questions of the client and listening openly and purposefully to the responses. They can ask questions about the client’s identity as a communicator and writer, not regardless of their disability or as a consequence of their disability, but rather as a consubstantial facet of their disability, which I will detail later in the case study section.

By applying this strategy of rhetorical listening with the societal and academic implications of subject identity in mind, consultants can ask identity-oriented questions, such as What are your experiences, fears, and goals as a speaker/writer? Or What does written/oral success look like to you specifically? The consultant then listens, silently and strategically, keeping in mind that this person is not a disability that needs curing; they are human, and their existence deserves to be heard and validated. Thus, rhetorical listening can heighten consultants’ understanding of intersectional subject identities and an individual’s

experiences with these intersections, like disability and gender or disability and race. Ultimately, this feminist awareness trains consultants to better meet the needs of the diverse populations that come to the Centers seeking help.

By anticipating the help clients need in our feedback, we become complicit in oppressive, patriarchal discourse. Telling a blind client to fake eye contact or a client with cerebral palsy they do not have the posture of a “good speaker” does not let them be in control of their own growth and educational journey and also jeopardizes a consultant’s role as an effective collaborator. These two strategies, critical awareness of subjective identity formation (especially in an institutional context) and rhetorical listening, have the potential to reverse this situation. We may not employ them perfectly at first, but that does not mean we should not try; in fact, it means quite the opposite. To show these strategies in action, I will now discuss a case study in which I attempted to employ a feminist disability perspective.

Case Study: Jerry

At my university’s Communication Center, I have the privilege of working with a man who I will call Jerry. He has a passion for music that could classify him as an old soul, and his incredible catalogue of musical knowledge comes second only to his incredible desire to share it with you. To this end, he comes into our Center once a week to work on a music podcast where he practices his interviewing skills so he can interview local musicians about their craft. Jerry has been diagnosed with high-functioning autism and ADHD. He has been told he will struggle with interpersonal communication because of his disabilities, but he wants to show people that those with disabilities can do anything they are passionate about.

I have been having weekly recurring sessions with Jerry for almost a year, so I have had the opportunity to work with him collaboratively and see the evolution of these feminist strategies in action. For example, with a critical awareness of subject identity formation, I have to remain cognizant regarding the layers of identity Jerry embodies. For one example, Jerry’s autism gives him ticks that come out in the form of phrases he has needed to use repeatedly throughout his life. When I challenge him to do something new, he will repeat “I don’t know, this is

hard” over and over, and when he wants to tell me his thoughts or feelings about something, he says “Excuse me” repetitively until he can get his sentence out. These passive stem phrases reveal an internal regulator that he has cultivated over the years. These phrases also reveal an inherent doubt in his abilities and a need to regularly apologize for himself. When he enters into the power structure of a higher education space like our Communication Center, his ticks get worse. I coach him through these moments by asking him to explain why he feels something is hard or why he feels he needs to excuse himself. Together, we interrogate these stem phrases and come to a closer understanding of his anxieties and concerns as a speaker. This understanding has ultimately led to deeper conversations that have empowered him to lessen the use of these phrases and stop seeing himself and his disability as something he needs to apologize for.

In regard to rhetorical listening, Jerry and I have check-ins where we hold a coaching dialogue about his goals and progress as an interviewer. I also ask him to give himself feedback after each practice. I listen strategically and keep a running check of his developing perspectives on his growth as a speaker, making sure that he always has space to articulate his views on his skill development. This aspect of rhetorical listening ensures I never steamroll him or give him harmful or ableist feedback. For example, one main strategy Communication Center consultants are trained to use when tutoring clients is eye contact.

However, Jerry told me he has trouble making eye contact with his interviewee and simultaneously keeping up with his train of thought. Therefore, instead coaching him to fake his way around his disability by forcing or feigning eye contact, we collaborated on other strategies he can employ to let the person he is interviewing know that he is engaged with them. After listening rhetorically to his lived experiences interacting with others as someone with autism and ADHD, we came up with adaptive, affirming strategies he is comfortable enacting, such as smiling in their direction and using verbal cues like “Ah yes.” He is still communicating engagement, which was a goal of his as an interviewer, it just looks different.

Jerry also tells me his ADHD has a tendency to send his mind into various directions at a time. Thus, he had trouble initially with interrupting the interviewee when they were answering his questions. To

explore this occurrence, Jerry and I tallied the number of times he speaks on the whiteboard and the times his interviewee speaks on the same whiteboard. At the end of the interview, we discussed who had what amount of tallies, whether or not he thought this was a good balance for an interview, and things he can do that may help him interrupt less. For example, while the other person is speaking, we discussed tapping out the syllables of their speech on his arm so that he is focused more on what they are saying than what he is thinking.

We also discussed counting to three after the person stopped speaking to make sure they were finished with their thought before Jerry responded within his own. Ultimately, the various avenues Jerry's mind explored during the interviews was a tremendous strength for him as an interviewer. He was able to ask in-depth questions that the interviewees disclosed they had never thought about before or been asked before. By listening rhetorically to Jerry's experiences with his ADHD, we were able to celebrate his natural ability to think creatively and multifariously, instead of seeing it as a weakness. We also made this skill as effective as possible by collaboratively employing methods to time his responses. By avoiding giving Jerry feedback that invalidated him, we were able to explore the brilliant way his mind works to his ultimate advantage as a speaker and interviewer.

In the same way that rhetorical listening means embodying "a stance of openness," it also implies that whatever or whomever one is being open to possess inherent value and significance as is. Consultants should realize this inherent value in clients and strive to further diversify their feedback skill sets by being open to and critically aware of the client's nonnormative identities. Jerry's autism and ADHD do not mean he is a bad interviewer; on the contrary, it means he is an extraordinary one.

Conclusion and Future Implications

Learning how to communicate with those who are different from us is a daunting task, especially when one has to connect to, provide feedback for, and answer the questions of these clients all within the space of 30 minutes to an hour. This article has extended the work of feminist Center scholarship, and outlined a few ways consultants can champion the ethical feminist work of multiliteracy centers. Consultants can learn to be aware of the impact that institutional "isms," like ableism, have on

clients who embody diverse identities, and employ the rhetorical art of listening to better understand how these identities influence their clients as writers and speakers. These strategies allow the consultant and client to celebrate the client's identity and abilities, instead of perpetually pitting the client against an outdated set of institutional ideals to arbitrarily determine their ability and worth as a writer and speaker. Consultants must consistently reiterate to their clients with disabilities that what they write and speak matters.

This article does not mean to suggest that consultants should abandon the fundamentals of speaking and writing in their feedback, but rather they should seek to instill in clients a spirit of self-efficacy through the confidence that comes from being truly listened to in addition to learning the foundational tools of effective writing and speaking. Consultants and directors can also encourage programs where these writers have the opportunity to visit the center regularly to work on their goals. To reiterate Dolmage's assertions on disabled bodies in higher education:

Academic ableism is a difficult thing to consider . . . [It] means questioning . . . our own privilege . . . So let's pay attention to how ableism occurs, and when, and to whom, and to what effect, and let's pay attention to how we might resist and refuse ableism, and what else ableism is connected to in history, in theory, in practice, and through teaching and research and service. (39)

The strategies outlined in this article can and have been applied to various situations by my colleagues and me, but they are only a few methods for approaching and redefining the definition of client service in the center. Also, as I mentioned in the beginning, this article is skewed to communication centers based on the researcher's experiences. We have yet to exhaust the theory, research, and consultant training Center scholars and directors can produce in regards to serving diverse populations in our Centers.

As multiliteracy centers continue to face new challenges in navigating university politics and making sure we have the resources necessary to say afloat, we must never forget that we are first and foremost sites of student empowerment. We exist to provide students the necessary tools to achieve their aspirations. Further research and scholarship on working with clients with nonnormative abilities will only strengthen our capacity

to connect more meaningfully and authentically with those who come to us seeking guidance on their paths to becoming more confident speakers and writers.

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Establishing the Writing Center's Educational Role in the Academy by Stressing Peer Tutor Development

Bonnie Devet

In higher education, writing center directors often view the role of their centers differently from how faculty and administrators see it. Directors know their centers are actively engaged in achieving vital educational goals by helping clients access higher education, by encouraging marginalized voices to be heard, by providing individualized assistance for writing in any discipline. In short, centers foster literacy. In addition to the clients, centers also develop their peer consultants, helping them become critical thinkers and writers. Centers, then, are actively engaged in fostering vital educational objectives.

However, the academy, more often than not, sees centers playing a much narrower role as part of what is called “a managed university” (Mahala 34). Simply defined, it is a world where colleges and universities primarily focus on retaining students and increasing revenues (Griffin et al.). This approach to higher education has arisen over the last quarter century as schools have seen less funding and have experienced a rise in economic pressures (Mahala 3). To survive, higher education has “accepted overtly business-oriented models of management” (Mahala 3) in which it is vital to keep “customers,” serve them well, and have a useful product. In fact, a key tenet in the managed university is that it is “cheaper to retain students than to recruit new ones” (Mahala 7). A managed university also focuses on students’ needs and goals, especially since dissatisfied students may go elsewhere (Mahala 7), and a managed university emphasizes offering a “product” (aka graduated students) useful to the marketplace. Unfortunately, centers have been seen through this limited lens. With their “we’re-here-to-help” attitude, centers have

become places providing customer service to retain students. And, in the managed university, centers, supposedly offer a product, as well, “. . . since their special product, namely improved writing, has an increasing value relative to other academic skills and forms of knowledge in the job market” (Mahala 7). In short, on many campuses, faculty and administrators frequently see centers only as retention devices, as a form of customer service, and as preparing writers to be viable employees.

The managed university, with its enrollment management offices, marketing divisions, welcome centers, and recruiting offices (Mahala 6) is not going away. Nonetheless, in spite of the tunnel vision of “retain, serve, produce” so prevalent on many campuses, directors can stress the center’s educational role. A prime means to effect a sea change in the faculty’s and administration’s attitude toward centers is for directors to emphasize the valuable part centers play in helping the “forgotten clients” (Devet, “Forgotten”)—the consultants themselves. For them, centers are an educational locale where they learn as much (if not more) than their clients. Thus, one goal directors should emphasize to the rest of the academy is the centers’ peer tutor development. This paper presents a framework for showing faculty and administrators about this seminal work so that centers may be perceived as a fundamental force for fostering and developing all students.

Defining Peer Tutor Development

To help the academy see centers as places for developing peer consultants, directors should first make sure faculty and administrators understand what directors do.. Sadly, faculty and administrators may see the directors’ role as merely that of stewards, hiring student workers, making sure they are fluent with grammar and citation rules, and ensuring student workers show up on time. This view must change so administrators see directors not as supervisors but as educators.

Directors, in fact, carry out educational roles no different than those of faculty members. Like them, directors are authorities, experienced in their fields, who lead and foster others (their consultants) to produce flexible, adaptable citizens, open to new concepts. As Kenneth Bruffee stresses in his well-known “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’,” directors provide “a demanding academic environment and

make tutoring a genuine part of the [consultants'] own educational development" (97). Naturally, directors can point to their training classes (if they offer them) to show how they teach students to work in centers, and, as Dana Driscoll argues, such courses, if based on transfer of learning concepts, would "increase the importance, usefulness, and visibility of our work to broader audiences both within and outside academia, including within general education course work" (168). Because of scheduling problems, lack of funding, or local politics, not all schools (such as mine) can offer tutor courses as a prelude to working in centers. Instead, directors conduct intensive training before a new term starts, focusing on the centers' philosophy and goals, describing types of clients, explaining procedures to follow, and asking veteran consultants to role-play clients so the new workers gain experience. Whether offering a course or conducting intensive training before a new school year commences, directors—like faculty—are engaged in developing students.

This work of directors in fostering the growth of consultants should be called *peer tutor development*. To understand better this phrase, it is helpful to contrast it with *peer training*. Although it is common faculty and administrators think directors "train" consultants to work with students, directors need to stress that, in reality, they "develop" consultants. Let us examine, then, the key differences between *training* and *development*. *Training* refers to teaching consultants specific skills focusing on "current employee needs or [fill] competency gaps" ("Training"). In other words, what do consultants need to know to do the job? In *Human Resource Management*, Robert L. Mathis and John H. Jackson explain *training* means teaching workers to handle daily details (303), like tightening a screw on an assembly line or filing out forms. For centers, *training* means how to greet clients, fill out reports, and sit next to clients. These are repeatable duties, varying little from day to day. Most faculty and administrators view directors' training this way, where directors are simply giving consultants tactics for dealing with various types of clients or how to complete paperwork. Such a view, unfortunately, restricts what directors do for consultants and by extension what centers give clients seeking help with their writing.

Development embodies a different scope. It refers to preparing consultants for "future assignments and responsibilities" ("Training"). Because it is ongoing, *development* "emphasiz[es] conceptual,

theoretical knowledge” (Surbhi). When directors use the word *development*, they show that consultants learn to make judgments as well as to anticipate and solve problems (Devet, “Writing Center”). In short, “*Training*, . . . concentrates on the needs of the current job, while *development* helps workers prepare for any new ideas that the job requires” (Noe et al. 401, emphasis added). Directors *train* consultants to handle crying students, but they also *develop* them to understand all kinds of interpersonal relationships. To make visible to academic stakeholders the value of centers for consultants, directors should stress they are not just conducting *training* but they are *developing* their consultants. The phrase *peer tutor development* conveys this important objective of directors who are actively, deeply engaged in achieving educational goals.

Using the phrase *peer tutor development* does not mean directors should eschew the widely known phrase *peer (tutor) education* (Bruffee; Hall (“Problems”, “Theory”); Zimmerelli) for describing the centers’ good work. *Peer education* is an accurate phrase for describing what consultants do for clients where one student is assisting another and both are learning together (Module 1). *Peer education* also arises from several sound social theories about human behavior. Social Learning Theory, for instance, argues individuals can influence others when they are perceived as “models of human behavior” (“Module 1”; Bandura), a key point in peer education where consultants represent to their clients models of good student writers. Another foundation for peer education—The Theory of Reasoned Action—explains that those who are considered “important” to another can serve as role models (“Module 1”), a prime ingredient for peer education to work. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory also contributes to the theoretical foundation of peer education. This theory argues certain individuals in a group (like consultants) are agents for change by showing others in their group (the clients) how ideas are innovative (different ways to write, for instance) (LaMorte). Of course, there is also Paulo Freire’s well-known Theory of Participatory Education, which, famously, argues change occurs if one feels he/she has power to contribute to a conversation with another (like a peer talking to a consultant) (“Module 1”). As Freire’s theory indicates, central to peer education is that a dialogue between equals must exist so change arises; certainly this sense of equality is present in writing center consultations: “[W]hile students often cast their own teachers as sages on stages, consultants eschew this hierarchy, forming . . . a community of

cooperation with their clients” (Devet, “Redefining”). Thus, consultants are effective because peers “effect change among other members of the same group” (Module 1). Peer education does work.

Though directors should not drop *peer education*, they should realize this phrase best describes what transpires within consultations. If faculty and administrators are to understand better what centers do, directors should use *peer tutor development* in their discussions with the academy. Then, they more accurately convey they are actively, enthusiastically engaged in helping students (aka consultants) to grow as individuals, a prime goal of any university (“managed” or otherwise).

Creating a Framework to Demonstrate Peer Tutor Development to the Academy

Centers need a framework to describe what they achieve when claiming to foster peer tutor development. This framework consists of SLOs, mission statements/strategic plans, and demonstrating consultants’ growth.

Representing Peer Tutor Development through Core Concepts (SLOs)

A keen method for showing the nature of peer tutor development is to employ the wording the academy uses to describe itself. Administrators are constantly engaged in assessment, leading to accreditation or even re-accreditation. It is rare if a college or university is not undergoing some form of self-evaluation, such as for regional organizations (like SACS—the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or NEASC—New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission). With accreditation a fact of life for the academy, directors can relate their centers to these same institutional concerns. As Lori Baker argues when describing accreditation, “[D]irectors can benefit from aligning writing center work with these processes [of accreditation], because the work done with external audiences of accreditors in mind can also help increase support and visibility for writing centers at their local institutions” (2).

Aligning with one’s academy means using the same approach for accreditation as that of the institution: establishing core concepts or Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Based on Benjamin Bloom’s well-

known taxonomy of cognitive skills (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) (“Bloom’s”), SLOs are “specific statements about the *knowledge*, *attitudes*, and *values* that are expected of students after successfully completing the program/curriculum” (Maki, no emphasis added). As Jennifer Lowman, Coordinator of Student Persistence Research at the University of Nevada-Reno, states, “If you tell students what you expect them to learn and how it will benefit them, they are more likely to learn” (5).

SLOs not only reflect the centers’ status in the academy but represent the values central to peer tutor development. The SLO’s list of outcomes usually states what students will *value*, *know*, and *do* (Lowman 18). For centers, this approach means directors look for what consultants should *know* to carry out their work; what they should *do* to enact consultations daily; and, finally, what they should *value* as a result of their work. These principles of *know*, *do*, and *value*, then, help directors report their educational work to administrators and faculty, showing peer tutor development in action but using terminology both faculty and administrators understand.

At the CofC center, the core concepts for peer tutor development entail consultants’ *knowing* about the writing process, about theories for handling interpersonal relationships, about conducting research as critical thinkers and writers, and about referring students to the rest of the campus’ services. They should also be able to *do* (apply) different theories of writing, reflect on their training and daily work, identify issues arising in their tutoring, and refer students to other campus resources like counseling centers or substance abuse offices. Finally, on a conceptual level, consultants should *value* the different ways writers approach assignments, the importance of being flexible during consultations, the ability to conduct writing center scholarship, and the recognition of students’ different emotional needs. SLOs will vary from center to center. As a possible model, though, the ones for the CofC center are listed in the table on the next page.

Table 1: Core Principles for Consultants' Peer Development

KNOW	DO	VALUE
understanding the writing process	reading, writing, and applying theories of writing to consultations	appreciating the different ways writers approach assignments; the individuality of the writing process; reacting as readers; the role of creativity in writing:
learning theories about being consultants (do's and don'ts)	reflecting on consultations, attending staff training, becoming certified, writing for publication, making presentations at conferences	being flexible for each consultation; being able to improvise
conducting research in order to publish or present at conferences	identifying issues/topics based on personal experience	contributing to writing center scholarship
being knowledgeable about the college's other services	Referring students to services, such as those of the counseling and substance abuse centers	recognizing students' varying emotional needs

Although crafting such a chart may seem reductive, directors and consultants who describe a center's *know*, *do*, and *value* are characterizing peer tutor development as more than merely how to sit next to clients or how to recognize a comma splice. The chart conveniently describes for administrators and faculty the center's work, that is, the "conceptual, theoretical knowledge" (Blazer 27) on which the center's goals rest. For instance, the chart's *know*, *value*, and *do* concepts support a key part of my college's Strategic Plan of having a "student-focused community that embraces mutual respect, collaboration and diversity for the welfare of the individual and the institution" (Board of Trustees, "Strategic" 5). As a director, I can point out the center's "student-focused" operation of using peer consultants to work with other students as described in the chart. This SLO, then, connects the center to the institution. As Mary Lou Odom explains in her "Director's Column: 'Local work: Identity and the Writing Center Director,'" "Illustrating the role and reach of the Writing Center within its institution automatically situates its identity in a local context that audiences both understand and value" (28). These core concepts, reflecting peer tutor development, demonstrate consultants are learning skills that line up with the academy itself (Driscoll 169).

Using Mission Statements and Strategic Plans

To frame the work of centers for the managed university, directors should also write what almost every school has: a mission statement. At my college, the center resides under the umbrella of a learning commons comprised of accounting, math, science, speaking, and writing labs. The mission statement in our learning commons stresses, among other concerns, that all of its facets "provide comprehensive academic support programs for the [college's students] as they strive for excellence in learning . . ." ("About Us"). This part of the commons' mission describes, in general terms, the educational value of centers. It shows that even in a managed university, centers do more than just retain at-risk students; they support all students. The phrasing also echoes my institution's own mission statement: "This community [the college], founded on the principles of the liberal arts tradition, provides students the *opportunity to realize their intellectual and personal potential* and to become responsible, productive members of society" (Board of Trustees, "Mission," emphasis added). Thus, centers are more than locales to

rescue students and keep them around the academy. They provide an “opportunity” (a prime concept in the school’s mission) to grow, an important goal for all centers.

The commons’ mission statement has another vital feature. When it states the commons “promot[es] student leadership and development through peer education experiences” (“About Us”), it again picks up on the school’s wording, even as it demonstrates centers provide more than a managed university expects. A central component of the school’s Strategic Plan is the college should “provide students a highly personalized education based on a liberal arts and sciences core and enhanced by opportunities for *experiential learning*” (Board of Trustees, “Strategic” 10, emphasis added). The words *experiential learning* fit with the commons’ statement so the commons and the school are both advocating students engage in leadership opportunities or hands-on work. To achieve this part of the Strategic Plan, the center encourages consultants to make conference presentations or to conduct staff training sessions, thus validating the center’s role in peer tutor development and enhancing the center’s educational role in a managed university, whose stakeholders often do not see the center functioning in such a broad way.

An institution’s strategic plan furnishes other ways to demonstrate a center’s importance. My school’s plan stresses the goal of “pursu[ing] and shar[ing] knowledge through study, inquiry, and creation in order to empower the individual and enrich society” (Board of Trustees, “Strategic” 5). As advocated by such scholars as Lauren Fitzgerald and Melissa Ianetta, consultants should conduct research, write up the results, and publish findings, as often found in the *Writing Center Journal* or the *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*. “[S]haring of knowledge,” as the Strategic Plan states, also occurs within centers. During staff meetings, consultants report on writing center scholarship, such as that all-too-well-known essay “The Idea of a Writing Center” (North) or other vital articles from Writing Center Studies. Doing so illustrates how the center, like other parts of the academy, produces knowledge that can be shared with other scholars, again stressing the center’s educational role. My school also encourages faculty to engage with the local area to share ideas. To enact this outreach, I have taken consultants to other colleges’ centers where they have made presentations about their work to fellow consultants. Such exchanging of ideas meshes with the school’s goals. When my center’s

training focuses on working with different student populations, such as those described in Mandy Suhr-Sytsma and Shan-Estelle Brown’s essay “Theory In/To Practice: Addressing the Everyday Language of Oppression in the Writing Center,” the consultants’ development fits with yet another strategic value of a “study-focused community that embraces mutual respect, collaboration, and diversity for the welfare of the individual and the community” (Board of Trustees, “Strategic,” 5). By creating an atmosphere where consultants learn from the field of Writing Center Studies, the center aligns itself with my institution’s Strategic Plan, attesting to the essential role the center plays in developing its consultants. Centers are more than mere “helpmates” in the managed university; they are “initiators of inquiry” (Isaacs and Knight 58).

Beyond the staffroom and its discussions, directors can do even more to relate their center’s goals to academy’s. A strong value espoused by my school is that faculty and students should conduct research together. The center achieves this goal when consultants tap into their experience to co-write articles with the director and other consultants. As one consultant at my center described the benefits,

Co-writing with [the director] is tantamount to a ship’s crew working alongside their captain. The captain possesses the knowledge and experience to direct and maintain an organized working environment, which ultimately allows the team to work efficiently and successfully. In essence, I learned what kind of organization is required when developing a project and co-writing an article that involves a diverse set of individuals. (Cinense)

It is true sometimes that such research is not always considered “hard core” like that produced by scientific studies. It is, supposedly, *only* the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL), in spite of the fact the research uses vital methodologies like case studies, ethnographic investigations, and surveys. Just the same, administrators should know the consultants conduct research, for such work “develops an ethos of scholarly inquiry and objectivity” (Ervin 51), key features of any academy. After the paper is published, directors should inform administrators, like department chairs, about the consultants’ publication. After all, chairs like to present news about their majors’

successful activities in annual reports, thus enhancing both the center and the departments in which consultants are majors.

Demonstrating to the Academy the Results of Peer Tutor Development

Determining the effect of any endeavor is difficult, but directors can demonstrate the results of peer tutor development through several key methods: transmission of knowledge among the consultants, the use of certification, and engagement in self-reflection.

It is a standard practice that experienced consultants help other, less experienced ones to grow (Boquet; Capossela; Devet, “Untapped”; Fitzgerald and Ianetta; Gillespie and Lerner; Klauza; Ryan and Zimmerelli). In my center, for instance, consultants who have undergone one or two years of peer tutor development have written questions new consultants answer by using the center’s handouts and books (Devet, “Treasure”). These questions are the same ones experienced consultants have heard repeatedly from their clients: “What is Chicago style?” or “What is passive voice?” or “I don’t know how to write a good title for my paper. Can you help me?” The experienced consultants also supply the answers so new consultants can check their responses. This treasure hunt is a sure way to demonstrate to administrators that peer tutor development has occurred, with experienced consultants transmitting their wisdom to new ones.

No discussion of peer development is complete without referring to certification, a process by which consultants meet nationally established standards of training in order to confirm their growth as consultants. Here, directors validate the center’s achievement, affirm the values of the academy, and uphold the center’s educational status because certification through national organizations, like the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), the National Peer Tutoring Association (NPTA), or the Association for the Tutoring Profession (ATP), impresses faculty and administrators with a center’s professional nature (Devet and Gaetke). Although CRLA, NPTA, and ATP do differ in their details, overall, they stress the standards by which directors train and develop consultants. Consider, for example, those listed by CRLA: “definition of tutoring and [a] tutor[’s] responsibilities; basic tutoring guidelines; techniques for successfully beginning and ending a tutoring session; some basic tutoring do’s and don’ts; role modeling; setting goals/planning for each

consultation; communication skills; active listening and paraphrasing; referral skills; study skills; critical thinking skills; and compliance with the ethics and philosophy of the tutor program as set by each lab” (“International”). Consultants meet these standards in order to demonstrate their growth.

Still, directors should be aware certification poses some drawbacks. The CofC center, certified through the CRLA since the late 1980’s, labors to produce the vast paperwork needed to track each consultant’s progress towards certification. Then, too, the CRLA’s origins as a way to validate remedial reading programs may not mesh with a center’s desire to dispel the developmental image still often associated with centers (Devet, “The Good,” 334). However, even with some possible disadvantages, certification helps to demonstrate a center that fosters consultants’ development so it is, indeed, a “center” for education.

Another means to determine peer tutor development is the use of self-reflection, a well-known means to develop consultants (Bell; Hall, “Theory”; Mattison; Okawa et al.; Smith; Yancey). Although self-reflection takes many forms, my center asks departing consultants to write a one-page “Advice to the Future” essay that provides new consultants with two or three survival tips. These essays, collected for over twenty years, sit in a notebook for all to read, offering golden words of advice, such as “This job is bi-directional: we assist students and help them to become confident writers while, at the same time, we become more confident in our own abilities” (Wallace), or “The clients have all of the answers to the questions they ask; they just need a sounding board to confirm their ideas. . . . This method has transferred to my own writing process. I ask myself these same questions and [have] gain[ed] confidence in my own writing” (Bacon). Directors can show these advice pieces to faculty so they understand consultants have made their consultations a part of themselves as workers and as writers—a sure sign the center is, indeed, fostering development of the peer tutors and supporting the college’s Strategic Plan “to pursue and share knowledge through study, inquiry, and creation in order to empower the individual and enrich society” (Board of Trustees, “Strategic” 5).

In addition, directors can demonstrate peer tutor development by having face-to-face meetings between consultants and faculty. This technique helps faculty see first-hand the center is achieving the institution’s goal of

producing literate, articulate consultants. When meeting a center's staff, faculty can ask consultants questions about their work with clients, while consultants, in turn, can seek information from faculty about their teaching of writing, thus encouraging an atmosphere of professionals talking to fellow professionals. After visiting with consultants, faculty carry back to their departments how consultants are helpful and knowledgeable. Here is how a Communication professor describes his recent meeting with my consultants:

Day after day, semester after semester, and year after year, [the] lab's peer consultants continue to make a positive difference in the learning outcomes of students representing a wide range of academic disciplines. . . . Based upon conversations with my advisees and students, past and present, as well as faculty colleagues in and outside the Department of Communication, I know that my sentiments are shared by a great many others on campus. (Westerfelhaus)

Listening to how consultants discuss their work with clients, faculty learn peer consultants are knowledgeable, committed workers who implement the school's goals.

Conclusion

It may be argued directors will have little impact on administrative decisions or may even be expressing values antithetical to those of the managed university when directors show how their centers develop consultants. It is not necessarily the case. Essentially, directors must educate faculty and administrators about the *full* value of centers. With everything is "out on the table," the academy can grasp the complete scope of centers far beyond the managed university's view of them just as places for retaining students, providing customer service, and producing workers for the marketplace.

It might also be argued that when directors present their centers' values in the same terms faculty and administrators use to define academic outcomes, directors are sacrificing their principles. I would argue, however, that directors and their centers are experts at upholding their core values even as they "appropriate dominant institutional rhetorics and contradictory institutional goals and turn them to serve the less

powerful” (Mahala 5). A prime example is found in how centers handle faculty’s assignments. Sometimes the prompts limit students’ options, thus hampering the center’s role of helping students discover their writing processes and develop their own voices. Centers deal with this problem by consultants’ trying to find “openings where [students’] own needs and interests can be engaged” (Mahala 9) even while satisfying the faculty’s requirements. Centers also have to adjust to administrators’ visions. Stanford University’s center, for example, effected a compromise when it and administrators conceived differently the role of a Peer Tutor Coordinator (PTC). The director wanted the PTC to be used only in the center, but administrators thought the position should serve the entire university, exclusively. To accommodate both views, the PTC position became an intermediary, “translat[ing] the values and ideas” between the tutoring staff and the administration (Bleakney et al. 52). When visions are not identical, centers are skillful at making adjustments, without compromising their substance... a tough position to be in, but one where most centers find themselves. So, describing peer tutor development with the terminology faculty and administrators are accustomed to employing is not “selling out.” Just the opposite. It is an effective way for centers to establish their educational value.

It is also true directors already carry out a Herculean number of labors, yet directors must also undertake another vital mission: showing centers, as ambassadors of writing, are venues for education as exemplified by centers’ peer tutor development. Fostering the consultants’ growth—as revealed in SLOs, mission statements, strategic plans, and demonstrations of the consultants’ development—emphasizes the center’s critical work of creating a cadre of consultants who are intelligent, articulate, and mature. Thus, through peer tutor development directors show the managed university that centers are not mere “adjuncts to courses” but “central parts of the academic enterprise” (Isaacs and Knight 58).

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Consultant Insight

Keeping a Clear Head: Enhancing Graduate Student Wellness through Meditation and Journaling in the Writing Center

Janine Morris, Veronica Diaz, and Noemi Nunez

Graduate school can be incredibly stressful, especially in our first or second years when we are often still learning our role within the institution, managing courses, and balancing our time. As we move through our degrees and overcome these early obstacles, we are then left facing challenges related to dissertation writing and finding jobs post-completion. Those of us working as writing center consultants may face additional stressors due to the emotionally supportive and validating roles we play for clients, along with the pressures of being seen as writing authorities (Grouling and Buck; Praxis Blog). To help alleviate some of that stress in the writing center, we argue for implementing self-care strategies between sessions.

Situated at Nova Southeastern University (NSU), a private, non-for-profit research university in south Florida, our Writing and Communication Center (WCC) expanded in 2018 from a college-wide one for first-year composition students to one that accommodates all NSU undergraduate and graduate students. Along with a staff of approximately 36 undergraduate writing consultants, we have 7 graduate student coordinators, 17 graduate writing consultants, and 7 professional consultants. Sessions begin at the top of every hour and last 45 minutes. The final 15 minutes of the hour are meant for professional development and reflection, allowing consultants time to regroup and prepare for their next sessions. We focus our mindfulness practices during these 15 minutes because this is the time when consultants can recharge—avoiding bringing stress or emotions from one session to the next. From personal experience, we believe that when used between sessions,

journaling and mindfulness meditation can help alleviate consultant stress and promote well-being.

Graduate Student Writers & the Emotional Impact of Stress

Coming to graduate school is an adjustment all its own, especially when balancing faculty expectations and initiation into new discourse communities (Micciche and Carr). The lack of support for graduate student writers does little to help (Hedengren; Whitcomb). Because graduate students might not find appropriate writing support within their own disciplines, if available, some turn to the support offered by writing centers, which can help them navigate the “gap between preparation and expected performance” (Mannon). While graduate student consultants often require the same kinds of support as students outside writing centers, they bear the responsibility of assisting other students. As we’ve witnessed ourselves, the emotional impact of balancing multiple roles can feel overwhelming, and that stress affects productivity and has negative physical and emotional consequences (Krypel and Henderson-King; Mercer et al.; Radcliffe et al.). The emotional impact of stress can also be shared between people, particularly because emotions act as “performative[s] that produces effects” (Micciche 1). The emotions that we experience dwell, potentially affecting those around us. For example, oftentimes when we have writing sessions with clients in the thick of writing their dissertations, their stress and frustration are difficult to ignore. As consultants, we tend to internalize these negative feelings, contributing to our own ever-growing stress. Because writing center consultants are in the business of “listening compassionately to writers’ concerns” (Praxis Blog), we may be susceptible to the emotional impact of our peers’ stress.

Recently, scholars have pushed for increased attention to mindfulness and self-awareness as mechanisms for coping with stress, exploring things like self-kindness (Krypel & Henderson-King; Neely et al.), mindfulness training (Leland), exercising (APA), and listening to relaxing music (Sandstrom and Russo). In what follows, we offer specific journaling and meditation activities that can easily be implemented during the 15-minute windows between sessions.

Journaling

Journaling is a way to “record personal thoughts, daily experiences, and evolving insights . . . often evok[ing] conversations with the self” (Hiemstra 19). There is much scholarship on journaling as an effective coping mechanism for students dealing with anxiety and stress, and the effects of different modes of journaling have been studied extensively (Greiman and Covington; Hiemstra; Mercer et al.; Ullrich and Lutgendorf).

Whether or not journaling effectively alleviates stress depends heavily on the level of critical reflection one puts into the practice. Magin LaSov Gregg elaborates on this notion by emphasizing the importance of “contemplation” and “discernment” in writing (3), both privately and in writing center interactions, noting that “while contemplation cultivates a writer’s openness and receptivity, discernment fosters a filtering of emotions in order to reach a decision” (3). Other scholars point to the importance of reflection and “expressive writing” when dealing with lingering stress from personal trauma (Lepore et al.; Radcliffe et al.; Ullrich and Lutgendorf). Not only does journaling hone skills such as “problem solving” and “critical thinking[/]reflection,” it has also been shown to foster “stress reduction and [other] health benefits” (Hiemstra 24). When practiced consistently and thoughtfully, journaling can help writers work through a variety of challenging situations.

No matter how busy our days in the center get, we must continuously remind ourselves to build in moments of solace. At NSU’s WCC, the 15 minutes between sessions allow us a chance to decompress. Journaling invites us to reflect on sessions, and work through whatever lingering feelings we may have. Because the 15-minute window can also be spent with our fellow consultants, we sometimes engage in group free writes, as well as find inspiration in our peers’ journaling methods. In those 15-minute breaks (or less!), stressed out consultants could:

- Expressively/reflectively write down or illustrate what is weighing on their mind, alone or with a group of peers.
- Jot down or strike through a handful of tasks. Bullet journals, like those in Rachel Wilkerson Miller’s *Dot Journaling – A Practical*

Guide, allow writers to create personalized planners, to-do lists, and diaries.¹

- Browse through and have a go at some creative prompts—be they written or visual—as seen in Chronicle Books’ *642 Things to Write About* and its visual counterpart, *642 Things to Draw*.²
- Color in a pattern from a book, or one found online for free.³

What it comes down to is finding what works best individually, as trying to fit into a mold that worked for one person may aggravate students even further. With access to several options that can be done in just minutes, though, one is bound to stick. The various forms of journaling offer consultants the ability to partake in the habit along a spectrum of engagement, allowing each of them to alleviate stressors at their own pace. When journaling, one can release tension through creative expression, while resituating their between-session experiences in writing centers.

Meditation

Mindfulness, as defined by Jeanette Cohen and Lisa Miller, “is understood as sets of skills that can be developed with practice . . . as a way of being or relating to present-moment experience” (2760). Of the many ways that a person can use mindful practices to de-stress, meditation is one that focuses on removing negative thoughts and self-doubt, and brings one’s mind to a grounded point of view. Researchers have found that meditation can improve sleep and help lower stress levels and blood pressure (Grossman et al.). Implementing mindfulness meditation into their day can help minimize the mental stress that comes with balancing consultants’ many responsibilities. In Sarah Johnson’s “Mindful Tutors, Embodied Writers,” she argues that our working memory is already limited, and in a consultant’s best efforts to have a

¹ When people make plans to complete tasks, it mitigates the anxiety that manifests when said tasks are left incomplete (LaSov Gregg; cf. Masicampo and Baumeister).

² For example, “A person is standing on a soapbox in the park, yelling at passersby. What’s going on?” (Chronicle Books).

³ Building on the “tactile, interactive nature” of recently popularized adult coloring books, coloring is an activity akin to prompted drawing (Blackburn and Chamley 1).

productive session, they increase their cognitive load. It is easy, then, for a consultant to feel overwhelmed and clutter their minds with frantic thoughts. The goal of mindfulness meditation is to be in the moment, redirect thoughts, and reflect on them in productive ways. With a better understanding of meditation, graduate student writing consultants can practice releasing unnecessary stress by becoming more aware of their present moment, thus decreasing their cognitive load. When asking consultants to adopt a mindfulness practice in their writing center, Elizabeth Mack and Katie Hupp found that it helped them increase patience and diminish overreactions, stay focused, and listen more attentively.

Being willing to reflect on one's thoughts without judgment is an important component of mindfulness meditation. Because mindfulness fosters self-awareness, graduate consultants can benefit from mindfulness meditation because it allows them to be in the moment and maintain an open attitude, especially between sessions. Mindfulness meditation can take place as quickly as a few deep breaths, or as long as time allows.

The following strategies can be done in just a few minutes, and can make a difference for consultants between sessions:

- Practice deep breathing using the 4-7-8 breathing technique. With this method, the individual inhales through their nose for 4 seconds, holds their breath for 7 seconds, and then slowly exhales through their nose for 8 seconds. This can be done for however long needed, and can reduce stress and anxiety (Gotter and Legg).
- Notice five things with their five senses to gain a greater awareness of the surrounding environment. For example, for one minute, a person uses their sense of sight to focus on a particular object and its appearance. For another minute, their focus then shifts to their sense of hearing, noticing the sounds around them and assessing how they are affecting them. This type of activity can allow an individual to take their mind off their current thoughts, while focusing on something in the moment (Waters).
- Conduct a body scan. This exercise is meant for an individual to be in tune not only with their mental state, but with the way their mental stress affects their physical state as well. By taking deep

breaths, acknowledging any tension from head to toes, and removing any negative thoughts, the body scan works toward taming anxiety and reducing stress. (Mack and Hupp).⁴

Mindfulness meditation can help students filter and reorganize multiple thoughts, which can be a strategy for noticing their feelings and responding efficiently to stressful or difficult situations.

Conclusion

As current and former graduate students, we are often bombarded with stress from both academic obligations and our personal lives. The effects of these stressors can “stick” and affect our writing center work. Stress not only compromises our quality of work, but negatively impacts our health, both in the short- and long-term (Blackburn and Chamley; Krypel and Henderson-King; Mercer et al.; Radcliffe et al.; Ullrich & Lutgendorf). It is important, then, for writing center consultants to take both their mental and physical health into consideration and find coping methods that best suit their needs. Among other habits, journaling and meditation gives consultants the opportunity to squeeze stress-management into their hectic schedules. The activities delineated above can each be done in 15 minutes or less, so students can rest easy knowing that doing them won’t upset the delicate balance they’ve established.

⁴ Some notable apps like Headspace, Calm, and The Mindfulness App are accessible options for individuals to use to check in with themselves and assess their emotions.

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Back to the Center

Creativity, Collaboration, Community: The Transylvania University Writing Center

Jordan Long and Katherine Tucker

Founded in the early 1980s by longstanding professor Martha Gehringer, the Transylvania University Writing Center has recently moved to a collaborative space in the Academic Center for Excellence located in the university library. Current Writing Center initiatives, such as the Writing Lab program and growing social media presence, have allowed the TUWC to gain enough momentum to win a variety of awards. The center was the winner of the 2018 Martinson Award from the Small Liberal Arts College Writing Program Administration organization and the winner of two Christine Cozzens Research grants from the Southeastern Writing Centers Association for course-embedded peer tutoring pilot program. Similarly, staffer Jordan Long received the Southeastern Writing Center Association Undergraduate Tutor of the Year award for 2018. TUWC has also been represented via research in peer-reviewed journals such as *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* and *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*.



Figure 1. Four students working collaboratively. (Photo courtesy of Scott Whiddon.)

Center Insight

Transylvania University offers students the rare opportunity to study at a liberal arts school located in the heart of a major city. Founded in 1780 as the oldest college west of the Allegheny Mountains, Transylvania's rich history and urban setting allow students to live at the intersection of culture, history, and growth. The interdisciplinary nature of the liberal arts curriculum is the heart of the academic experience at the university, as students immerse themselves not just in their major, but in the four disciplines of humanities, fine arts, social sciences, and natural sciences as well. Writing is heavily integrated within this interdisciplinary curriculum, both as a tool of communication and as an analytical framework for the larger world.

The Transylvania University Writing Center furthers the liberal arts mission of the college by fostering a collaborative environment designed to create better writers, not better papers. In such a writing intensive collegiate environment, the writing center aims to improve the confidence and abilities of students across campus in order to help them not just with their papers, but with their holistic writing process as they prepare to move on to the job market and graduate school. To that end, the writing center offers a wide breadth of services, including one on one consulting sessions, class workshops, repeated writing lab sessions, course embedded tutoring, and pre-health workshops.

FALL 2017

Sessions for Semester: 488 (Does not include in-class workshops or course-embedded peer support)

Number of Consultants: 13

Center Hours: 9AM-5PM M-F; 8-10PM T, TH, Sun

Consultants are recruited through a dual nomination and application process. Faculty members and veteran staffers nominate potential staffers, and nominated students then fill out an application. The combined input of staffers and faculty results in a diverse, talented set of new consultants. Staffers are recruited from various disciplines across campus and offer a wide knowledge base; the recently graduated class of

staffers are pursuing opportunities in fields such as law, medicine, education, digital media, public policy, conflict management, and programming.



Figure 2. Consultant working with student. (Courtesy of Transylvania U./Stephen Russell.)

Training and Professional Development

The Transylvania University Writing Center's success is dependent upon the training and dedication put in by the staffers themselves. Each staffer completes a director-led practicum course during which they spend a semester exploring topics in writing center discourse, the strengths and weaknesses that a wide range of writers bring to the table, and expectations of writing both within Transylvania's community and the larger culture of writing. Similarly, each staffer must shadow and lead sessions of their own, with the encouragement of seasoned staffers, to begin the transition from trainee to consultant. With a holistic focus in all areas of education, such as theory, application, and professional development, the practicum course prepares staffers for work both inside and outside of the TUWC.

As a part of the continuing professional development for staffers, the Writing Center hosts guest speakers and a yearly pedagogy workshop in collaboration with the University's Writing Advisory Committee. In 2018, the writing center had the privilege to welcome Dr. Danielle DeVoss from Michigan State University for a lecture on the use and implementation of multimodal work. TUWC has also hosted Stacia

Watkins, Tiane Donahue, Bruce Horner, Rebecca Nowacek, and others. The speaker series sponsored by the writing center provide a space for students to engage in dialogue about writing theory and pedagogy, as well as integrate the writing center with the larger campus community.

Growth, Goals & Multimodality

The Transylvania University Writing Center curates a space that serves as a resource to faculty and students alike, focusing on the evolving needs of the campus community. Data collected during this past academic year show that over 66 percent of all available consultation hours were scheduled for individual appointments. This is a dramatic increase from the previous two years where only 33 percent of available hours were used: TUWC doubled its amount of one-to-one peer consultations in such a brief timespan. The vision of the TUWC is to have consistent and sustainable growth, both as a staff and within the institution. Our new location receives more student traffic and has allowed for greater visibility for the Center as a whole. With a more central location, the TUWC has seen an increase in individual appointments. Similarly, the space has shifted from being strictly reserved for Writing Center activities to a more inclusive setting for the academic and social arenas of Transylvania's campus. Now more than ever, events such as poetry readings and student newspaper workshops are hosted in the Writing Center, organizations use the space for regular meetings, and students choose to gather for group study sessions.



Figure 3. Consultant and student reading together. (Courtesy of Scott Whiddon.)

The move to the library has also begun to bridge the gap between the TUWC and the rise of digital literacies throughout campus, and has served as the first step toward the program's goal of integrating multimodality and technology in the writing process. The TUWC aims to mirror the rising use and prevalence of digital technologies on Transylvania's campus due to the Transylvania Digital Liberal Arts Initiative, which has become crucial to the liberal arts curriculum across all disciplines. Given that the move prompted the upgrade of technological equipment and the library has a vast collection of accessible digital tools, the inclusion of digital literacy into the WC pedagogy was seamless. With recent rebranding initiatives, a new staff, research proposals in digital rhetoric, and a variety of student composed promotional materials, the TUWC is working towards rethinking staffer professional development to incorporate a strong multimodal component.

Support for Students

The campus impact of the Transylvania University Writing Center is reflected in the rising number of one-to-one peer appointments, ESL tutoring sessions, in-class workshops, and the most recent pilot programs. During this past academic year, there were 488 one-on-one appointments in the fall, with 197 of those being first year students. The Writing Center is historically a complimentary resource to Transylvania's first year writing program, which is reflected not only in the amount of individual appointments made with consultants and first-year students, but also in the fact that, in 2017, 50 percent of all First Year Research Seminar sections requested and hosted in-class workshops.

Such positive responses to in-class workshops led to the creation of the writing center's pilot course-embedded tutoring programs. TUWC's first course-embedded pilot focused on three courses outside of First Year Seminar offerings, collaborating with faculty members in English, Sociology, and Exercise Science. The second and third pilots -- in conjunction with SWCA-affiliated writing centers at Nova Southeastern, Elon University, and Eastern Kentucky University -- focused on first-year programming and writing center campus branding. Each of these pilots led to presentations at SWCA conferences and built stronger campus ties to the writing center, as 97 percent of students

involved in course-embedded tutoring stated that they were likely to come back outside of their class.



Figure 4. TUWC brochure (Courtest of Jordan Long).

Furthering this campus outreach, the Pre-Health Workshop series extends the success of classroom-based workshops and embedded tutoring to the professional realm. Through a series of four sessions, the workshops offer students who plan to pursue health career paths the opportunity to brainstorm, draft, and refine a personal statement. These workshops, in partnership with the Office of Career Development and the Library, teach students not only how to draft a personal statement for graduate school, but provide a completed product for the pre- health committee.

The Path Forward: Room for Improvement

In addition to making more frequent visits to the writing center, Transylvania students are truly seeing results from the time that they spend in the space. Of the students that completed the feedback survey sent out after their individual appointments, 89 percent of respondents asserted that sessions were “excellent,” while 98 percent of respondents noted that they planned on returning for further sessions and would highly recommend our services to their fellow peers.

Such success depends on the writing center responding to the ever-evolving needs of the student body without compromising the staffers' ability to cultivate relationships with patrons. However, in the attempt to both move pedagogy forward and cement strong relationships, the staffers often feel overstretched and overworked. To address this concern, an expanded cohort of 22 staffers will begin in the fall of 2018, and an internal grant will provide funding for courses- embedded tutoring for this coming academic year. This workload challenge, in conjunction with the difficulty in maintaining the wide breadth of services offered, has precipitated the opportunity to re-evaluate the identity and purpose of the writing center.

In the coming year, the new team of staffers seeks to improve services by clarifying the goals and practices of TUWC to campus community members, by developing stronger ties to campus writing stakeholders, and by being more proactive in communicating our vision via our new website ([embed link](#)) and active social media presence ([embed link](#)). With these goals in mind, the TUWC strives to cultivate the human relationships at the core of a liberal arts education. As one staffer articulated, “the writing center provides this really useful academic resource, but, in a way, it is kind of like a support system too. People are always here just to see how you are doing and are always willing to collaborate with you in whatever way that might be.”



Figure 5. Four students writing on laptops and talking. (Courtesy of Scott Whiddon.)

Book Review

Denny, Harry, Robert Mundy, Liliana M. Naydan, Richard Sévère, and Anna Sicari, Eds. *Out in the Center: Public Controversies and Private Struggles*. UP Colorado, 2018.

ISBN: 978-1-60732-782-0

Pages: 267

Price: \$34.95

Emily Harbin

This is an ambitious book. Eighteen essays address race, ethnicity, multilingualism, gender, sexuality, faith, class, learning differences, and the intersections of these identities. In the introduction, the editors call for readers to “completely rethink the way we understand writing center work in order to best serve the individuals who enter our spaces” (9). They envision a future in which writing centers are spaces of social activism. The book is positioned at the nexus of several trends in writing center scholarship – working for social justice, respecting linguistic diversity, and reimagining the work of writing centers. It is deeply influenced by Harry Denny’s *Facing the Center*, especially his theoretical framework connecting personal narrative, identity movements, rhetorical studies, and writing centers. While directors will not find much practical advice here, it is a rich resource for tutor training and self-reflection.

The title works on multiple levels, extending the metaphor of “coming out” beyond its association with the LGBTQ+ community.¹ Many of the contributors describe a moment of hesitation before disclosing a facet of their intersectional identities, whether this takes the form of switching into a shared language during a writing conference, revealing their faith or class origin, or simply admitting to moments of uncertainty and fear. The collection also works to collapse the binary between the personal

¹ For an extended explanation of what Writing Centers can learn from queer theory, see Harry Denny’s “Queering the Writing Center.” *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2010, pp. 95-124. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43442335>.

and political, implying that we are always simultaneously a unique person and a product of the ideology and politics that shaped us. Each of the book's six sections is followed by a review that provides context, elevates the content of the essays, and offers helpful theoretical underpinning. Readers can easily choose any point of entry based on their interests. Overall, I found the sections on faith and class to be particularly innovative and welcome, the sections on race and gender and sexuality to be strong and thought-provoking, and the sections on multilingualism and (dis)ability to be good, but underdeveloped.

The book begins with several fine essays about race. The standout essay is "Black Male Bodies in the Center," in which Richard Sévère fills a gap in writing center scholarship by discussing the ways black male bodies are coded by society and perceived in writing centers.² He deftly weaves together race theory, experiences of tutors, and engagement with writing center scholarship. The description of strategies black males use to perform a non-threatening identity was especially eye-opening. Talisha Haltiwanger Morrison, Allia Abdulla-Matta, and Alexandria Lockett all explore the alienation of black females in the predominately-white spaces of academia. Morrison's narrative of a problematic conference with a male, Asian, international student working on a proposal for an app for Black women with natural hair is a great conversation starter. Abdulla-Matta describes the mistrust she faces as a black female academic and how she brings lessons from the intersectional foregrounding she did in a team-taught composition class into the writing center. Lockett combats the perception of surveillance by capturing the tutor's experience in narrative form and promoting appropriate touch as a way to foster connection. Finally, Rochell Isaac relates the problems she encountered with disengaged students as a writing center tutor and reflects on transformative theories of education that she seeks to bring into her composition pedagogy.

Although I had hoped for more essays in this section, the two pieces in "Part II: Multilingualism," relate well to each other. Both Nancy Alvarez

² For another example of a male African-American's experience working in the writing center and teaching writing, see Jason B. Esters, "On the Edge: Black Maleness, Degrees of Racism, and Community on the Boundaries of the Writing Center" in *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*. Edited by Karen Rowan and Laura Greenfield, Utah State University Press, 2011, pp. 290-99.

and Tammy Conard-Salvo describe tutoring in two different languages and raise concerns about the assumptions about good writing promoted by a monolingualistic tutoring staff. Alvarez's piece defends the language rights of multilingual students and brings attention to the problems of linguistic colonization and assimilation. Conard-Salvo's tone is more personal, disclosing and analyzing her identity as mixed-race Korean-American and reflecting on her experiences as both a tutor and administrator.

"Part III: Gender and Sexuality" contains several compelling essays linked by reflections on privilege, surveillance, and the performance of identity. Anna Sicari combines a narrative of feeling policed by a female writing center director with a broader analysis of the state of the field. She argues that because writing center scholarship often focuses on personal experience and collaboration, it is feminized by the academy and regarded as of secondary importance. She then argues for subverting this position by using the feminist pedagogies of collaboration, mentorship, and acceptance in the writing center. Harry Denny engages the reader by sharing his experience of having a complaint filed against him by a gay male coworker. According to Denny, this spurred an awakening to how his actions could signify in unintended ways. He argues that writing centers cannot be completely safe spaces because society itself is unsafe. However, Denny sees crisis as opportunity; mass shootings, such as the attack at the Orlando Pulse nightclub, are "deeply pedagogical" (120). Like Sicari, Denny is influenced by Glenn and Ratcliffe (2011) and recommends rhetorical listening as a powerful strategy for promoting openness and change. Other actions Denny endorses include examining our prejudices about English Language Learners and creating an anti-racist, social justice mission statement. Robert Mundy rounds out this section describing a conference with a male student writing a personal statement for graduate school and his realization of the way they both had constructed an "I got it" persona of masculine authority. Mundy concludes with a call for reflection and empathy for men struggling to construct and perform their masculine selves.

The fourth section on religion is original and much needed, although I would have liked to see a wider range of religious experiences represented. Sami Korgan and Ella Leviyeva, both former tutors at St. John's University, discuss their choices to "come out" or not as Christian

and Jewish, respectively, at a Catholic faith-based institution. Korgan raises the question of whether loving, liberal spaces may still be excluding Republicans and conservative Christians. Leviyeva discusses the concept of passing and describes how she strategically chooses to reveal her identity to students of similar backgrounds, feeling most at home with other international students. Finally, Hadi Banat's essay is a rich exploration of both her own intersectional identity as a Muslim Palestinian in Lebanon and her experiences tutoring in different writing centers in Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. One notable section narrates an exchange with a male student in the United Arab Emirates, where homosexuality is highly discouraged, who came out to Banat as both gay and on drugs.

The fifth section on class is gripping and essential. The authors explore the pressure to stay "in the closet," hiding a working-class background or financial struggles. Elizabeth Weaver and Liliana Naydan expose the dilemma of contingent academics. Sometimes earning so little as to qualify for food stamps, yet with the appearance of a kind of social capital, the adjunct or contingent faculty worker is in academic and social limbo. Both Weaver and Naydan point out that women may be pushed into these careers for the "flexibility" they offer for working mothers, yet as Weaver points out, they will not make enough to pay for daycare (184). Beth Towle uses her description of her mother's labor cleaning "Other People's Houses" as a metaphor for academic labor as an outsider. Towle insightfully notes "the assumption made by academics and public alike is that to be working class is to want always to not be working class, that a person should be embarrassed by their low socioeconomic status in order to be motivated to move to a higher class" (198). Anna Rita Napoleone was influenced by Donna LeCourt's discussion of performing working-class identity (2006) and has collaborated with her to compare their choices to alter (or not) performative signifiers of class identity, such as accent and dress (LeCourt and Napoleone 2011). In this essay, Napoleone argues that the structures of academia are complicit in enforcing class prejudices, encouraging white professionals to hide their class and linguistic differences and to impose classed literacies on students.

The final section on learning differences was the most underdeveloped, with a single essay written by Tim Zmudka describing his learning differences (childhood speech and language impairments and adult

ADHD) and explaining how these differences have affected his tutoring and writing. While this is a good essay for tutor training, I had hoped for considerably more engagement in the book with what it means to be and/or tutor a neuroatypical person. Other than this essay and a brief nod to students with other learning differences in the review of this section, this book does not adequately address neurodiversity, which seems strange given the ambitious, inclusive mission of the book.

The authors conclude with a call for those who work in writing centers to be deeply self-reflective about their own identities and practices. They advocate for a serious and sustained effort to mentor diverse young scholars and to recruit people from underrepresented populations as directors. They also urge scholars concerned about the marginalization of the field to move beyond talking about the problem and to work to create “a climate of change and hope” (242). This progress forward, they suggest, will come through pursuing transformative teaching processes and deeply engaging with scholarship.

The goals of this book are too high; no single volume could cover all the diversity that exists or completely transform writing center work. However, ambitious goals sometimes move the needle further toward change. As a reader, I did feel somewhat transformed, more reflective, and more educated about embodied experiences not my own. Several of the essays are excellent material for tutor training or continuing education activities. For directors at Southern institutions, our students’ intersectional identities may have a different mixture than the majority of those described in the book. Only one contributor, Alexandria Lockett, is currently working at a Southern school, Spelman College. However, if inclusivity and diversity are truly our goals, we have to find ways to welcome all students into our centers, even those for whom the words “identity politics” have negative connotations. In fact, I would argue that those of us working in Red States have the most frequent opportunities for deep listening and connection across political divides. I only wish that the authors had given some concrete advice about *how* this kind of important pedagogical work could be integrated into a timed writing consultation.

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Contributors

Lauren Beard is a recent MA graduate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and is completing her doctoral studies at Penn State University with a concentration in rhetoric and composition. She has served as a multi-literacy center consultant in writing, speaking, and digital composition for almost five years. Her scholarly interests are influenced by feminist disability studies, including disability and multi literacy in higher education as well as feminist pedagogy in the composition course.

Bonnie Devet is a professor of English and Director of the Writing Lab at the College of Charleston. She has published widely in *College Composition and Communication*, *Composition Forum*, *Writing Center Journal*, *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship, Praxis*, and the *Journal of Teaching Academic Writing* (European Association of Teachers of Academic Writing).

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Emily Harbin is an Assistant Professor of English and Director of the Writing Center at Converse College in Spartanburg, SC, where she teaches various levels of composition, classes in British literature, literary criticism, and, most recently, a class on literary dystopias. Her research interests have been diverse, ranging from popular culture, to late-Victorian New Women novels, to her most recent quantitative study measuring burnout in Writing Center professionals. She is the 2019-2020 South Carolina State Representative to SWCA.

Jordan Long served in the Transylvania University Writing Center from 2016 to 2018 and graduated with a major in Writing, Rhetoric, and Communications, along with minors in both Religion and Digital Arts and Media. She is currently pursuing a Master's of Arts in Writing, Rhetoric, and Media from Clemson University.

Janine Morris is an assistant professor in the Department of Writing and Communication at Nova Southeastern University, where she is also a faculty coordinator at the Writing and Communication Center. Her current research focuses on the affective dimensions of writing center work. Her work has appeared in various edited collections, *College English*, *CEA Critic*, *Pedagogy*, *Computers and Composition*, and *Composition Studies*.

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Call for Submissions

***SDC* Fall 2019—SWCA Conference Retrospective**

We are pleased to invite submissions from attendees to the 2019 SWCA Conference in Myrtle Beach, SC. In addition to transcripts of the keynote and plenary addresses, this issue will feature scholarly articles that grew from sessions at the conference. If you gave a presentation or sat on a panel in Myrtle Beach—or even if you were just inspired by a session or sessions you attended at the conference—you are strongly encouraged to “write up” your work and send it in for editorial and peer review.

Articles can be theoretical or practical in focus (or a combination thereof) and should incorporate outside sources in MLA format according to the guidelines available on the *SDC* website at the link below:

<https://southeasternwritingcenter.wildapricot.org/SDC-Submission-Guidelines>

Please note: The Fall 2019 will also include book reviews, a Back to the Center piece, and a Consultant Insight article. Submission for these types of manuscripts do not have to be connected to the 2019 SWCA Conference.

Deadline for submissions: 15 September 2019.

***SDC* Spring 2020**

To encourage a wide variety of scholarly activity, the Spring 2020 issue will not have a specific thematic focus. Please consider submitting your work on the tutoring or teaching of academic writing, wc administration, wc assessment, tutor training, or any other topic related to the focus of the journal that you feel would be of interest to readers.

Deadline for submissions: 15 December 2020.

For more information on submission guidelines, please visit the link above. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the editors at southerndiscoursejournal@gmail.com.



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