

WJCS

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

PLEASANT AND TRAKAS | KLEINFELD, LEE, AND PREBEL
ANDERSON | STROUP

Table of Contents

- 1 **Editor's Note**
Muriel Harris
- 3 **Two Approaches to Writing Center Assessment**
Scott E. Pleasant and Deno P. Trakas
- 11 **Whose Voices Are Heard? A Demographic Comparison of Authors Published *WLN* 2005-2017 and Writers Interested in Publishing**
Elizabeth Kleinfeld, Sohui Lee, and Julie Prebel
- 18 **The Writing Center-Classroom Interface: How One Student's Challenges Shaped my Writing Center Orientations**
Salena Anderson
- 26 **Tutors' Column: "Mansplaining in the Writing Center: Gender Dynamics and the Ongoing Struggle with Authority"**
Rachel Stroup
- 30 **Announcements**
- 32 **Conference Calendar**

Editor's Note

Muriel Harris

The articles in this issue of *WLN* focus on writing center concerns that remain endlessly open for discussion and reflection as we continue to seek answers, debate solutions, and come up with new approaches. The first article, by Scott Pleasant and Deno Trakas, considers whether direct assessments should be done qualitatively or quantitatively, so to take a closer look, they compared their centers' different assessment methods. Their article reports on these assessments and discusses how the data led to improvements in their centers. Another current topic, diversity in the writing center, is discussed by Elizabeth Kleinfeld, Sohui Lee, and Julia Prebel with specific regard to diversity in writing center scholarship. They report on two surveys, one of writing center workers interested in publishing and another of those who have published in *WLN*. After studying twelve volumes of articles in *WLN*, they note the homogeneity of authors in terms of the institutions they work at, their positions, and their race.



Yet another recurring question is how to introduce the writing center to students in the most effective way. Salena Anderson's answer, after a close reading of one international student's journals detailing his difficulties in using the center, was to revise the way her writing center is introduced. In the Tutors' Column article, Rachel Stroup dives into an issue in the minds of many directors and tutors—how to respond to students who “mansplain” to their female-presenting tutors—and offers workable solutions for tutors to employ.

If you are interested in responding to any of these articles, please share your thoughts (in 350 words or less) with other *WLN* readers. Please send your response to the *WLN* website (wlnjournal.org/submit.php, using “other” as the category) by April 15, 2021. Also on the *WLN* website, in the Resources section, you'll now find a new, open-access Digital Edited Collection (the third in the series), *Wellness and Care in Writing Center Work*, edited by Genie Nicole

Gaiimo. And our blog, "Connecting Writing Centers across Borders," keeps you updated on CFP's and conference announcements, as well as offering a wealth of interesting posts about writing centers around the globe.

STAY TUNED FOR THE *WLN* BLOG'S "SLOW AGENCY" PODCASTS

The editors of *WLN*'s blog, *Connecting Writing Centers across Borders*, are excited to announce that they are adding a new feature to the blog: the "Slow Agency" podcast! The goal of our podcast is to open up time and space in this productivity-saturated culture to slow down and dialogue with leading thinkers and practitioners in Writing Studies worldwide. Rather than trying to distill our conversations into neat sound-bites or twenty-minute clips, we are choosing to embrace the longform interview so that we have time to really listen, process, think, and dialogue about ideas and issues that either directly or tangentially impact writing center praxis.

This season, we interview North American scholars on a wide range of issues including standard language ideologies and anti-racist practices, emotional labor in WPA work, writing center care-work, writing as a way of being and a way into well-being. Our inaugural episode features *WLN*'s journal editors whose wisdom and hard work make this journal and the blog possible.

Next season, stay tuned for interviews with scholars and practitioners from around the world!

GET INVOLVED WITH *WLN*

Interested in serving as a reviewer? Contact Karen Gabrielle Johnson (KGJohnson@ship.edu), Ted Roggenbuck (troggenb@bloomu.edu), Lee Ann Glowzinski (lglowzinski@wheeling.edu), and Julia Bleakney (jbleakney@elon.edu).

Interested in contributing news, announcements, or accounts of work in your writing center to the Blog (photos welcomed)? Contact the Blog Editors (writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com).

Interested in guest editing a special issue on a topic of your choice? Contact Muriel Harris (harrism@purdue.edu).

Interested in writing an article or Tutors' Column to submit to *WLN*? Check the guidelines on the website: (wlnjournal.org/submit.php).

Two Approaches to Writing Center Assessment

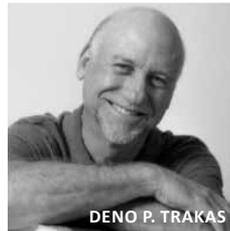
Scott E. Pleasant
Coastal Carolina University

Deno P. Trakas
Wofford College

How should we assess the work of our centers? Calls for replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD) research have led to an increased focus on quantitative assessment methods. In a 2001 review of writing center assessment literature, Casey Jones lamented that she had “not unearthed a single ‘hard’ empirical study of writing center instructional efficacy published since the late-1980s” (10). Richard Haswell’s highly influential 2005 article decrying what he saw as a longstanding “war on scholarship” by the NCTE and CCCC introduced the term RAD into the working vocabulary of many writing center professionals. In 2012, William Macaulay provided three guiding questions for writing center researchers to follow when choosing what to assess, the first of which was “Can it be measured or counted?” (52). The quantitative methods promoted by these researchers can certainly produce valuable empirical data that is useful for identifying a center’s strengths and weaknesses, and quantitative measures can be particularly effective when a center director requests more funding or resources.



SCOTT E. PLEASANT



DENO P. TRAKAS

As some researchers have pointed out, though, this emphasis on RAD research should not be seen as a rejection of qualitative measures. In *Researching the Writing Center: Towards an Evidence-Based Practice*, Rebecca Day Babcock and Terese Thonus “argue for RAD research, qualitative and quantitative scholarship that engages empirical evidence as mediating theory and practice” (3). Neal Lerner, known as an advocate of quantitative research, feels that “qualitative and quantitative need not be mutually exclusive (or hostile camps)” (“Of Numbers” 112). Isabelle Thompson, an early proponent of rigorous assessment methods, feels that while “quantitative measures can provide ‘big picture’ views of writing center effectiveness, qualitative measures can allow us to focus on cases” (50).

We agree with those who see value in both qualitative and

quantitative methods. In this article, we compare our two approaches to assessment—one qualitative and one quantitative—and conclude that both can demonstrate the effectiveness of a writing center and provide important insights for tutor training. Further, we would argue that the qualitative/quantitative distinction is not as important as whether an assessment offers direct or indirect evidence.¹ Direct assessments can evaluate student writing in an attempt to determine the effectiveness of writing center tutoring while indirect assessments can involve measurements such as satisfaction surveys or the number of visits a center receives. Based on our positive experiences, we recommend that writing center researchers focus primarily on direct assessment measures, whether qualitative or quantitative.

DENO'S ASSESSMENTS (QUALITATIVE/DIRECT)

With a small writing center (eight or nine student tutors, 400-600 tutorials each semester) and a small budget, I prefer qualitative procedures that are small and non-numerical. My approach to assessment duplicates what I do in my office. If one of my students brings me a rough draft and we have a constructive discussion before the student produces a revised version, I can make a direct comparison of the two, from which I can discern the effect of my advice as well as the student's willingness and ability to use that advice. In evaluating the work of our tutors, I can do the same if I have access to draft versions of student papers and revised versions completed after students visit the writing center.

We follow an IRB-approved process that includes four steps. First, the tutor asks the student for permission to use a paper for research and asks them to sign a consent form. Second, during the tutoring session, the tutor encourages the student to write down everything they discuss, and at the end of the tutorial, the tutor photocopies the student's marked-up paper and gives it to me. Third, the tutor asks the student to email me a copy of their revised paper. Fourth, to close the loop, I conduct workshops with my tutors, during which we compare drafts and revised versions.

In our workshop sessions, we read a revised draft and mark it as if we were grading it. We comment on the usual large-level concerns—thesis/focus, argument and evidence, organization, etc.—and mark the sentence-level errors. Then I hand out copies of the first draft and we line it up beside the revision. On the revision, we check with a green pen all the corrections and changes we see and note whether or not these changes were among the tutor's suggestions in the notes mentioned above. Then we mark in red any areas for concern that were not marked or addressed by the tutor or corrected by the writer. The papers under review have

neither the names of the student writers nor the tutors, but usually the tutor who worked with that student speaks up and offers an explanation.

After we mark the papers, we discuss them. I praise the tutors for giving what I see as effective feedback and then address what I consider to be problematic responses. I try to let my tutors lead the discussions as much as possible. Often, we zero in right away on the key issues. For example, one paper we looked at showed careful, helpful sentence-level revisions, but the paper was vague and there was no evidence that the tutor had made comments to that effect. Another paper showed that the tutor focused exclusively on larger elements while the paper was marred by obtrusive sentence-level errors, from comma splices to imprecise wording. The discussions are informative and revealing even if we do not always reach consensus on the key issues. Before we move on, I usually give my own assessment, which might go something like this: if the paper were written for my class, I would be glad the tutor addressed A, B, and C, especially A, but I do not care much about D, and I wish they had addressed E. Sometimes my tutors see things that I miss, and sometimes they make me rethink how I evaluate. Sometimes they ask me what grade I would give the paper, but I prefer not to answer that question.

This assessment/evaluation process can be more difficult than it sounds. Sometimes the tutors forget to ask the students to sign the consent form, or they forget to copy the paper after the tutorial, or—more often—the student signs the form, allowing us to copy and use the draft, but forgets to send the revised version and won't respond to a follow-up email from me. A more complicated problem, though, is that my tutors would rather not engage in the assessment process. Usually they're busy, and collecting the artifacts adds an extra task to their work. Furthermore, they're somewhat resistant to direct evaluations of their tutoring if we meet one-to-one after the group discussion. Most of them are perfectionists to some degree, so they hate to make mistakes, especially ones I can see. Even though I tell them there is no one correct way to revise a paper, most of them do not like for me to question their work.

However, with a little persistence, I can collect twenty papers in a semester, which means that each tutor only needs to collect a few papers each semester, and it is enough to give me a direct, qualitative assessment of the work in my writing center. My tutors and I learn how we can be more effective: we see what we don't see, which helps us to see better; we evaluate and revise our own standards of good writing as we compare them to those of our peers; we share ways to articulate our suggestions for producing

good writing; and by observing the results of our work, we validate it and/or motivate ourselves to do better.

One of my colleagues has pointed out that this exercise is useful primarily in assessing those tutorials that begin with a rough draft, and I agree, but going forward, I plan to encourage my tutors to do this: if a student comes in with no paper but leaves the session with a page or two of notes or an outline, we will copy that. We should then be able to compare those preliminary efforts with the final paper and see the results of collaborative brainstorming.

SCOTT'S ASSESSMENTS (QUANTITATIVE/DIRECT)

The assessment approach I use for my center owes much to the theoretical work of Neal Lerner—especially in his article “Counting Beans and Making Beans Count”—and to two empirical studies conducted by Luke Niiler, in which he collected quantitative ratings of pre- and post-intervention versions of papers and conducted statistical analysis on that data. Deno does not take a quantitative approach, but he examines the papers he collects in much the same way I do. That is, he considers both the overall (holistic) differences between pre- and post-intervention papers and the differences in specific traits such as thesis, organization, development, and sentence-level issues.

Our assessments reveal what our tutors are working on with students and help us make informed judgments about how effective their advice and guidance is. I have chosen a quantitative method in part because my writing center serves a larger population than Deno's does, in part because I have been lucky enough to qualify for university funding for these studies, and in part because one of my goals in evaluating the work of my writing center is to generate numerical data for yearly assessment reports. The tradeoff is that my approach provides less opportunity for the kind of individualized tutor training and evaluation that Deno's method lends itself to.

In my IRB-approved study, I work with first-year composition (FYC) faculty who volunteer to participate in an assessment of writing center tutoring. I visit their classes and explain the study to students before asking them to sign informed consent forms. These students agree to contribute both the draft and final versions of their semester-ending research papers. In half of these FYC class sections (the “intervention group”) the students are told they are required to visit the writing center for assistance after completing their drafts. The other half (the “non-intervention group”) are not told to visit the writing center. (Students in the “non-intervention” sections are allowed to visit the center. Their papers are simply removed from the study if they do so.)

I also work with a professor from the English Department to train graduate students in a composition pedagogy course to become raters in the study. These students learn to use a nine-point scale to rate papers holistically and a five-point scale to rate papers on six traits (thesis, organization, development, style, surface features, and formatting/citations). At the end of the semester, I hire several of these students to serve as raters. After a norming session in the morning, they rate all of the submissions for the study (two different raters for each paper). To protect student privacy and prevent bias in ratings, all identifying information is removed from the papers, including whether each paper is a draft or final version and whether each paper is in the intervention or non-intervention group. I have conducted multiple iterations of this study, the most recent of which produced these results as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Holistic Ratings of Intervention and Non-Intervention Groups

HOLISTIC RATINGS (9-point scale)	Draft Versions	Final Versions	Difference
Intervention Group (n=17)	3.12	4.97	+1.85
Non-Intervention Group (n=27)	4.17	4.22	+0.05

As Table 1 shows, the intervention group improved by nearly two points on a nine-point scale while the non-intervention group made little improvement. Interestingly, the intervention group’s mean holistic draft rating was much lower than the same rating for the non-intervention group. While I do not have a satisfying explanation, it is important to note that the intervention group started with a mean draft rating that was more than one full point below the non-intervention group but ended with a mean final version rating that was three quarters of a point higher than the non-intervention group. Thus, the intervention group not only made more improvement than the non-intervention group but ended with better final versions. The trait-based ratings in this study follow the same pattern as the holistic ratings, with the intervention group improving more than the non-intervention group on all traits.

The data in both tables suggest that writing center tutoring helps students improve their drafts not only holistically but also on specific traits. I cannot claim statistical significance for these results because I have not performed formal statistical tests on them. When I have funding for another study, I plan to aggregate the data and do this kind of testing. However, the raw data above do allow me to identify positive trends and areas of concern for tutor-

training purposes. For example, the relatively low scores in the Formatting/Citations trait in the intervention group’s final papers motivated me to develop new training materials for tutors and new handouts and audio-visual presentations for tutors and students to use when working on MLA and APA formatting issues.

Table 2. Trait Ratings of Intervention and Non-Intervention Groups

TRAIT RATINGS (5-point scale)	Non-Intervention Drafts	Non-Intervention Final Versions	Intervention Drafts	Intervention Final Versions
Thesis	2.81	2.76	2.44	3.21
Organization	2.80	2.78	2.53	3.12
Development	2.74	2.74	2.21	3.06
Style	2.87	2.91	2.85	3.09
Surface	3.15	3.17	2.68	3.35
Formatting/ Citations	2.69	2.80	2.03	2.82
TRAIT AVG.	2.84	2.74 (no diff.)	2.46	3.11 (+.65 pts.)

The good news is that this kind of quantitative data does seem to lead to ongoing improvement of our services and it allows us to assess our centers in ways that are relevant to our centers. In a previous iteration of this study, the intervention group made less than one-tenth of a point of average improvement from draft to final on the Development trait (from a draft average of 2.86 points to a final average of 2.95). After discussing strategies for helping students in this writing skill in subsequent training sessions, the most recent results show nearly a full point of improvement in development.

While I cannot definitively link any of the improvements seen in these assessment studies to writing center tutoring, I can reasonably argue that writing center tutoring is one of several possible causes. It is difficult to imagine a study that could demonstrate definitively that writing center intervention is the sole cause of a student’s improvement, but what we have determined is that our students tend to improve their drafts after visiting the writing center. Even more importantly, these assessments have provided an opportunity for our tutors to consider and re-evaluate their practice.

FINAL ANALYSIS

The approaches we take have much in common despite being on different ends of the qualitative/quantitative spectrum. Through these assessments, we seek to determine whether the tutoring in our centers yields positive results. For both of us, the tentative answer is yes, and we base that answer on direct evidence. Also, we are both interested in determining the specific writing traits

our tutors tend to work on. Deno noticed, for example, that some tutors devote too much attention to lower-order concerns like sentence structure when there are higher-order concerns like thesis development in the paper, while Scott's most recent assessment suggested that tutors needed a refresher training in documentation and citation strategies. Perhaps most importantly, we both use the data we gather for ongoing tutor training and development. The difference is that Deno looks at features of individual papers during tutor-training sessions while Scott reviews trends from the full set of data.

What we have learned from our contrasting approaches to assessment is that direct qualitative and quantitative measures are, as Lerner says, not actually in conflict. Quantitative methods are sometimes thought of as the best way to generate meaningful data through research that might be called "scientific." Carl Sagan once wrote that "If you know a thing only qualitatively, you know it no more than vaguely. If you know it quantitatively ... you are beginning to know it deeply" (21). However, we would quibble with Sagan on this point, at least in the case of writing center assessment. We feel that qualitative and quantitative methods can yield useful results when researchers focus on direct rather than indirect measures.

NOTE

1. Direct assessments provide evidence of student learning or growth by evaluating actual student work while indirect assessments focus on data about perceptions of student learning (for example, Likert-scale surveys asking students to rate the effectiveness of a tutoring session).



WORKS CITED

Babcock, Rebecca Day, and Thonus, Terese. *Researching the Writing Center: Towards an Evidence-Based Practice*. Peter Lang, 2018.

Haswell, Richard H. "NCTE/CCCC's Recent War on Scholarship." *Written Communication*, vol. 22, no. 2, Apr. 2005, pp. 198–223.

Jones, Casey. "The Relationship between Writing Centers and Improvement in Writing Ability: An Assessment of the Literature." *Education*, vol. 122, no. 1, Fall 2001, pp. 3-20.

Lerner, Neal. "Counting Beans and Making Beans Count." *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1997, pp. 1-4.

---. "Of Numbers and Stories: Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment Research in the Writing Center." *Building Writing Center Assessments that Matter*, edited by Ellen Schendel and William Macauley, Colorado UP, 2012, pp. 106-13.

Niiler, Luke. "The Numbers Speak: A Pre-Test of Writing Center Outcomes Using Statistical Analysis." *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 27, no. 7, 2003, pp. 8-9.

---. "The Numbers Speak Again: A Continued Statistical Analysis of Writing Center Outcomes." *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2005, pp. 13-15.

- Sagan, Carl. *Billions and Billions: Thoughts on Life and Death on the Brink of the Millennium*. Ballantine, 1997.
- Macaulay, William J. "Getting from Values to Assessable Outcomes." *Building Writing Center Assessments that Matter*, edited by Ellen Schendel and William Macauley, Colorado UP, 2012, pp. 25-56.
- Thompson, Isabelle. "Writing Center Assessment: Why and a Little How." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1, Jan. 2006, pp. 33–61.

CALLING ALL TUTORS!

The WLN blog, *Connecting Writing Centers across Borders*, invites creative, academic, or hybrid pieces for their Tutor Voices page! Consider submitting a blog piece (1000 words) that takes a specific angle on an issue within writing center praxis and/or a 30-second video or photo with brief description about what's keeping you resilient during these challenging times. For more detailed guidelines, visit our submission guidelines page: www.wlnjournal.org/blog/submission-guidelines/. If you're not yet subscribed to the blog or our newsletter, we'd love you to join us. To do so, visit: www.wlnjournal.org/blog/subscribe-to-blog-newsletter/. Questions? Email us at writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com.

Whose Voices Are Heard? A Demographic Comparison of Authors Published in *WLN* 2005-2017 and Writers Interested in Publishing

Elizabeth Kleinfeld, Metropolitan State University of Denver

Sohui Lee, California State University Channel Islands

Julie Prebel, Occidental College

The 2006 IWCA Diversity Initiative recognized that “Writing Centers are inherently multicultural and multilingual sites that welcome and accommodate diversity,” noting the “diverse population of tutors and administrators” working in our centers. The IWCA initiative also acknowledged that, despite valuing diversity in writing center practice, there remains a “homogenous composition of [our professional] membership,” calling for a plan to increase the participation of people from “historically excluded and marginalized communities” and for more scholarship addressing “diversity matters.”

Several studies focusing on the lack of diversity in our professional field emerged following the IWCA Diversity Initiative, including a survey of writing center directors and administrators conducted eleven years later in 2017 by Sarah Banschbach Valles, Rebecca Day Babcock, and Karen Keaton Jackson. Citing the “relative lack of demographic scholarship on writing center directors,” they surveyed writing center directors at over 1,458 U.S. writing centers. With data that challenges the claim in the IWCA Diversity Initiative about the diversity of writing center administrators, Valles et al. conclude that “writing center directors are not as diverse as we believed them to be” and call for changes to the infrastructure of writing center work to enhance heterogeneity in our field.



In this study, we build on the work of Valles et al. by examining the lack of diversity, in terms of ethnicity or racial identity and institution or position type, among authors in published writing center scholarship. This study arises out of the need to understand through research the nature of homogeneity in writing center scholarship. We focused specifically on authors of research articles published in *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* because *WLN* is the oldest peer-reviewed writing center journal and reflects broad interests in writing center practice and research. In focusing on *WLN* from 2005 to 2017, we believed we might get a clearer picture of those who publish in the writing center field. After identifying the *WLN* authors in this time period, we designed and administered a survey to gather demographic information about those authors. Our findings corroborate those of Valles et al., as we conclude that, like writing center administration, writing center scholarship is homogenous, dominated by white tenure-track or tenured faculty at four-year institutions.

We acknowledge, too, recent scholarship that points to concerns we highlight about the lack of diversity in publishing in writing center journals. For example, in his study of authorship and citation patterns in *The Writing Center Journal (WCJ)* from 1980-2009, which yielded a data set of 241 articles containing 4,095 citations, Neal Lerner concludes that there is a lack of diversity in the authorship represented in *WCJ*, despite enhanced work on diversifying writing centers (69-70). Citing the study of 14 writing center professionals conducted by Anne Ellen Geller and Harry Denny, Lerner notes a “reluctance” of writing center professionals to “pursue scholarship” (70), which he concludes may account for the homogeneous “inward gaze” of the field (67).

As Associate Editors of *WLN*, we found ourselves interested in exploring the connection, or disconnection as Lerner identified, between those who have published and those who might be interested in publishing. In addition, we wanted to gauge interest in topics for a webinar series we were creating to support those who want to be publishing in writing center studies. So, we conducted an interest survey—with similar demographic questions as our *WLN* published author survey—through the WCenter listerv in 2018. In conducting these two surveys, we aimed to look at whether there are demographic trends or patterns, such as faculty or staff status or disability status, ethnic, or racial background, in order to better understand the obstacles that might inhibit the publication of writing center scholarship.

METHODS

To gather information about the demographics of authors published

in *WLN*, we surveyed authors of *WLN* articles published during a twelve-year period from 2005-2017.¹ The survey asked respondents about institution type, their position, level of education, gender, age, race and ethnicity, disability status, and language. We omitted questions about sexual orientation and religion in order to keep the survey short and reduce undue burden on participants, particularly authors of multiple articles, whom we asked to complete the survey once for each article. This gave us a sense of who is publishing in *WLN*. We compared the results of our survey to the results of the survey of writing center directors done by Valles et al. to get a picture of the differences between writing center directors as a group and the subsection who are publishing in *WLN*. Finally, to get a sense of any significant gaps between who is publishing in *WLN* and who wants to be publishing in *WLN*, we compared the results of our survey of published authors to our survey of those interested in publishing. We discuss below the limitations of this comparison group.

We used Google searches, queries on writing center listservs, and emails to writing center directors to find authors and then sent an email inviting them to take our survey. Of 259 authors of 313 *WLN* articles, we found email addresses for 197. Of those email addresses, 20 were invalid. We received 134 responses, representing 51.7% of all authors identified.

Our method for distributing the interest survey was a bit different because we did not have a predetermined pool of self-identified interested people. We simply distributed the survey link on the WCenter listserv and the listservs for writing centers in Europe and Asia to determine who might be the audience for our webinars.² The interest survey asked about obstacles to publishing and collected demographic information, such as race, gender, disability status, and educational level. We received 198 responses.

Before we discuss our findings, we want to acknowledge some limitations to our methods. First, we had problems finding email addresses for authors who were tutors when they published. Many of them were undergraduate or graduate students who left academia or changed their names after publishing in *WLN*. This means that authors who were students when they published may be under-represented in our data. Further complicating our results is that participants might have composed the article over a span of time during which their role, age, institutional affiliation, and other factors may have changed. Because of the often-idiosyncratic nature of writing center leadership positions, our survey answer options for the question about position did not fit 20.7% of respondents' positions, which led to a very large number of "other" responses.

In addition, the question about disability status did not offer a “no disability” option, so it is possible that people who wanted to choose that option went with “prefer not to answer” instead.

The most significant limitations have to do with our comparison of the survey of published authors to the survey of people interested in webinars on publishing. The author survey covers a twelve-year span, while the interest survey provides a snapshot of a moment in 2018. Because both surveys were anonymous, it is possible that there is overlap between who took the surveys, meaning some people may be counted twice. Finally, it is difficult to measure what it means to “want to be publishing.” In retrospect, it might have been helpful if we also asked if writing center administrators were rewarded or incentivized by their institution to publish, as this might help explain the distribution range in institutional representation. While we acknowledge these limitations, we also see compelling reasons to look at the differences between the results of the two surveys. Several clear, overwhelming patterns, which we discuss below, show up in the data and give us a preliminary sense, which will be researched further in a follow-up study, of trends in the gaps between who publishes and who wants to publish in a particular journal in writing center studies.

DATA FINDINGS

In the following discussions and tables, we focus on data by type of institution, position, and race and ethnicity. Because authors of multiple articles took the survey once for each article they wrote, some respondents’ answers are represented multiple times in the discussion of institution and position, but the number of authors of multiple articles is relatively low. In addition, respondents could choose all the options that applied to their situations, so some percentages add up to more than 100%.

1. TYPE OF INSTITUTION

Comprehensive institutions offering graduate programs are the most heavily represented among authors who published in *WLN* during the period we studied (see Table 1). Our interest survey also showed heavy representation from people affiliated with this type of institution. While almost 11% of respondents to our interest survey are affiliated with community colleges, there is only one community college author published. Tribal colleges are unrepresented in the data, with no *WLN* authors being affiliated with tribal colleges and no one affiliated with a tribal college responding to our interest survey. It is worth noting that many tribal colleges are two-year or community colleges, so the underrepresentation of community colleges and tribal colleges among *WLN* authors is a double whammy.³

Table 1. Types of Institutions Represented by Published Authors & Interested Writers

TYPE OF INSTITUTION	Published Author Survey (n=134)	Interest Survey (n=198)
Comprehensive Institution w/ Graduate Programs	66.4% (93)	56.1% (111)
Community Colleges	.7% (1)	10.6% (21)
Small Liberal Arts Colleges	20% (28)	16.7% (33)
Other	7.9% (11)	13.2% (26)
No Answer	5% (7)	0

2. INSTITUTIONAL POSITION

Along with data on the type of institution represented, we also examined the institutional position held by respondents (see Table 2). The interest survey did not include the categories of “independent scholar” or “tutor,” which were available in the published author survey. Respondents who checked “other” were then prompted to describe their position. Those who chose “other” in both surveys identified positions that were more nuanced than we initially anticipated such as retiree, intern, full-time writing center staff, dean, and volunteer.

There were three positions that appeared most in the “other” category worth mentioning because of the percentage of respondents who identified them. In the interest survey, the largest group who selected “other” also identified themselves as “graduate tutors” (6.6%), and that percentage is close to the 7.4% of respondents in the published author survey who selected “tutors.” It was also striking to see that 4.5% of respondents who selected “other” in the interest survey also identified themselves as professional tutors or coaches. We had no respondents in the published author survey who identified themselves in this category. By contrast, the biggest “other” position category in the published author survey is tenured or tenure-track faculty (4.4%) who are not directors or administrators of writing centers. In the interest survey, only 1% of responses were from this group of faculty.

Overall, our findings show a wider range of positions among the respondents to our interest survey versus the published author survey. For example, the published author survey shows that more than double the percentage of respondents were in full-time tenured or tenure-track positions than were respondents for the interest survey. Also, the interest survey indicates a wider distribution of writers who occupy part- and full-time non-tenure track positions, whereas non-tenure track faculty comprise a much lower percentage of published authors. Overall, this data suggests a higher rate of publication for respondents in more secure positions

or positions with publication expectations at their institution.

Table 2. Institutional Role Represented by Published Authors & Interested Writers

ROLE	Published Author Survey (n=135)	Interest Survey (n=198)
Full-time writing center director (w/o required teaching)	8.1% (11)	23.7% (47)
Full-time non-tenure writing center director (w/ required teaching)	14.1% (19)	15.2% (30)
Full-time tenure-track writing center director (w/ required teaching)	43.7% (59)	14.6% (29)
Part-time, non-tenure track writing center director	2.2% (3)	9.6% (19)
Independent Scholar	2.2% (3)	0% (0)
Tutor	7.4% (10)	0% (0)
Other	20.7% (28)	31.3% (62)

3. RACE AND ETHNICITY

Finally, we compared our published author survey and our interest survey through the lens of race and ethnic identity. Of the 134 authors who responded to our published author survey, 111 responded to the specific question of race and ethnic identity (see Table 3). Of 198 respondents to the interest survey, 187 responded to this particular question. Of those who answered this question in the published author survey, an overwhelming majority self-identified as white. In addition, 100% of authors who published multiple articles in *WLN* self-identified as white. By comparison, our interest survey suggests that there is a higher percentage of people of color who want to be published than the percentage who have been published.

Table 3. Response to Race and Ethnic Identity Question

ROLE	Published Author Survey (n=111)	Interest Survey (n=187)
American Indian or Alaskan Native	.9% (1)	1% (2)
Asian	2.7% (3)	5% (10)
Black or African-American	.9% (1)	3% (6)
Hispanic or Latinx	0% (0)	5% (9)
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0% (0)	0% (0)
White	90.1% (100)	77% (144)
Other	0% (0)	4% (8)
Prefer not to answer	5.4% (6)	7% (13)

CONCLUSION

Our findings point to homogeneity of *WLN* authors in terms of

institution type, position, and race. Because of this homogeneity, we conclude that the lack of diversity in our field is affecting both professional membership and writing center scholarship. While it is beyond the scope of this article to solve the diversity problem in writing center studies, we advocate moving beyond individual actions to broader structural change that is needed for institutionalized diversity to become reality.

Our surveys are merely a starting point for more research on diversity in writing center publications. We intend, for example, to extend the research presented here as we develop a comprehensive survey that considers more closely the specific obstacles prospective *WLN* authors face in developing work for publication. If scholarly conversations about writing centers are to authentically represent the concerns and perspectives of the diverse players in the writing center community, we will need to find ways to surmount the recurring barriers to publication as well as to actively create opportunities for underrepresented practitioners and scholars at each step of the publication pipeline.

NOTES

1. We focused only on authors of research-based articles. Because research-based articles are more likely to be cited than Tutors' Columns or book reviews, we felt they were more significant in terms of shaping scholarly conversations.

2. *WLN* Webinars can be found at: <https://wlnjournal.org/resources.php>. In addition, the two surveys we conducted can be found at bit.ly/2N7uEH9.

3. The lack of representation in community colleges or in tribal colleges may be complicated and due to a variety of issues: some institutions or positions do not incentivize writing center administrators to publish; some may lack funds to have writing centers. Nonetheless, the near-total absence of representation of indigenous voices in both surveys is troubling and suggests more research is needed to explore their absence in writing center studies.



WORKS CITED

"CCCC Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure Track Faculty." *Conference on College Composition and Communication*, April 2016, cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/working-conditions-ntt.

Geller, Anne E., and Harry Denny. "Of Ladybugs, Low Status, and Loving the Job: Writing Center Professionals Navigating Their Careers." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 33, no.1, 2013, 96-129.

"IWCA Diversity Initiative." International Writing Center Association, November 20, 2006, writingcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/iwca_diversity_initiative1.pdf.

Lerner, Neal. "The Unpromising Present of Writing Center Studies: Author and Citation Patterns in *The Writing Center Journal, 1980-2009*." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2014, pp. 67-102.

Valles, Sarah Banschbach, et al. "Writing Center Administrators and Diversity: A Survey." *The Peer Review*, vol. 1, no.1, Spring 2017, thepeerreview-iwca.org/issues/issue-1/writing-center-administrators-and-diversity-a-survey/.

The Writing Center-Classroom Interface: How One Student's Challenges Shaped my Writing Center Orientations

Salena Anderson
Valparaiso University



INTRODUCTION

Writing center professionals are uniquely privileged to know some student writers over many years. Having built a relationship with a group of international students in their first-year second language writing course, I later noticed, in my role as writing center director, one of my former students returning to the center over time. However, I also noticed his peers absent from the center. This experience made me question the methods I use to introduce our diverse community of campus writers to the writing center.

Noting the scholarly underrepresentation of writing center “practice on the periphery” (4), Rebecca Jackson and Jackie Grutsch McKinney call for “a richly-textured and nuanced vision of writing centers and writing center work” (4). My present case study illustrates the impact of an undertheorized periphery, focusing on the writing center-classroom interface. Specifically, this research considers how one student’s early struggles with writing center use and later engagement impacted my understanding of writing center orientations. After exploring current research on students’ introduction to a writing center, I present some student challenges in using the center. Drawing on these challenges (and my own), this study offers recommendations to writing center directors, tutors, and instructors for smoothing students’ transitions from the classroom to the writing center.

Student data for this IRB-approved research are drawn primarily from fourteen weekly journals from a first-year second language writing course at Valparaiso University, a small comprehensive institution. This research presents the case study of a focal student, Abdullah, a first-year, multilingual international student from Saudi Arabia, whose first language is Arabic.¹ I selected Abdullah as a focal student as he made more frequent (attempted) use of the writing center during his first semester, maintaining this level of use across his undergraduate career. Though these journals informed

my teaching, they also provided new insight when I approached them later as writing center director, attempting to understand Abdullah's continued writing center engagement and the relative absence of most of his peers. While this case study focuses on students' ability to overcome challenges in early writing center use, it is part of a larger research project, including a focus group from Abdullah's class, two additional interviews with Abdullah, and writing center appointment records from 2014-2019, when these students graduated. Students were aware throughout of my research regarding their writing process, including their writing center use.

Perhaps as a result of increased center usage, Abdullah reported more challenges in accessing the center, including difficulties using our scheduling software, understanding the schedule, and finding time for appointments. Abdullah's first-semester journals present a picture of the challenges even highly motivated writers may face in writing center use when confronting common issues, such as family responsibilities, commuting, and linguistic or cultural differences. Though any student may experience issues with learning to use the writing center, first-year international students may be impacted in unique ways. For instance, Senel Poyrazli and Kamini Maraj Grahame note that "[c]ompared to their domestic counterparts, international students tend to experience greater adjustment difficulties and more distress during their initial transition into the university and report greater academic and career needs" (29). Simultaneously, however, international students are—as Cody J. Perry, et al. argue—"[o]ne group of students that may benefit the most from student services" (3), though statistically, they "had considerably less awareness of available services than domestic students" (8-9). Abdullah's story of transition to university life and writing center use is similar to many students' while also being uniquely his own—as a first-year student, an international student, a non-native speaker of English, a commuter, and a student with family responsibilities. This essay explores how Abdullah's story impacted my own as a writing center director.

Convinced of the value of writing center visits, in Fall 2014, I required my ten students in English 101 (Introductory Reading and Writing for Non-Native English Speakers), all of whom were international, to visit the center once. At this point, writing center class visits were not promoted for second language writing courses. I provided the students a brief in-class introduction, showing the writing center web page with location and schedule, and indicating that anyone could visit to discuss their writing. I now recognize the limitations of this introduction.

Had I explored writing center literature, I would have found discussion of possible advantages and limitations of required visits, though little on writing center introductions. For instance, Barbara Lynn Gordon highlights positive student responses to required visits, while acknowledging possible overcrowding. Barbara Bell and Robert Stutts discuss negative student and tutor responses to frequent required visits, reporting student satisfaction and plans for continued center use after less frequent requirements with flexible scheduling. However, beyond the literature on required visits, I would have encountered limited guidance on best practices for introducing students to the center. Holly Ryan and Danielle Kane argue, “[w]hile classroom visits are a mainstay of writing center practice, virtually no scholarship has examined their effectiveness” (146). Even in 2019, Bruce Bowles, Jr. notes scant writing center scholarship on marketing, reflecting on his own marketing strategies, including class visits.

This limited previous research supports interactive class visits or orientations. For instance, Ryan and Kane show that interactive class demonstrations increased students’ awareness of the writing center as a resource for supporting argumentative writing, though they inadvertently caused students to reach false conclusions, e.g., writing centers guarantee higher grades. To promote writing center use, Valarie Pexton endorses flexible writing center workshops for first-year students accompanied by class visits, suggesting that first-year students “aren’t used to finding resources on their own and don’t always follow up on the information they *do* get” (1). As Ryan and Kane suggest in their endorsement of more interactive writing center orientations, our introductions must go beyond “information” and extend into facilitated student exploration of recommended practices and perspectives.

These introductions may be supported by “scaffolding,” which David Wood, et al. define as “‘controlling’ those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting [the learner] to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within [the learner’s] range of competence” (90). John Nordlof applies the concept of scaffolding to writing center tutorials, but scaffolding may also apply to work we do outside the center to introduce writers to strategies for writing center use as students are simultaneously learning to write as they learn to navigate the writing center and their own writing process. Madison Sewell, presenting impressions of her first writing center experience as a student, encourages scaffolding of required visits, including both class discussion of the center and writing center orientations (29-30). In this study, I consider additional scaffolding

that would have benefited Abdullah and his peers in their writing center introduction, such as more practice with scheduling and differentiation between writing center use and plagiarism.

SCHEDULING

Abdullah reported several issues with scheduling appointments, though he persisted and worked to become proactive. In mid-September, Abdullah notes the following on his first attempted writing center visit: "(I) tried to visit the writing center but that did not work [since] I decided to visit the writing center at Monday morning and I was not know that it does not open early." Additional scaffolding prior to Abdullah's attempted visit would have benefited him. For instance, to make writing center orientations or class visits more interactive, rather than just showing the writing center schedule, in my classes I now ensure that the writing center tutor or I take time in class for students to open the schedule themselves and book an appointment. This activity has helped to break down the initial scheduling barrier.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Like many students, Abdullah had personal and familial responsibilities that made it difficult to balance schoolwork and family roles. Over the semester, Abdullah developed a strategy for managing work-life balance on his own: scheduling his writing center appointments even before he began writing. I now promote this strategy for all students when introducing them to the center.

Early in the semester, Abdullah notes the challenge of balancing familial and academic roles, which impacted his intended writing center use:

These two weeks were so heavy on me. I got many assignments and midterms. Also, my nephew just came to The United states, so I spent last weekend with him. He needed someone to pick him up from the airport. In addition, he can't speak English very well so I looked [looked] up for him to find an appropriate apartment. However, I did not find good time to meet with the writing center.

Another constraint Abdullah experienced was the need for transportation, which he also sees as having a negative impact on his ability to use the writing center and to focus on his studies, writing in late October:

I did not upload the second draft with the instructions [from] the writing center because [I] was supposed to do it this morning but my note [notebook] [is] in my friends' car, so I could not do it. [...] One of my baggiest [biggest] mistakes [was] that I spend the whole time looking for a car and I could not found the car that I want. [...] I stopped my search, because I find out that I waste my time while I need my homework which are more Important.

Though this discussion of Abdullah's search for a car may seem extraneous to his writing, Abdullah took the opportunity in his journal to confide how these seemingly external events were impacting his writing process. When Poyrazli and Grahame (29) note the "adjustment difficulties" faced by some international students in their transition to college, they discuss many of the same issues Abdullah identifies, including transportation, housing, and familial obligations. It can be challenging to orient to a new culture. Importantly, Abdullah continued to attempt to make writing center appointments and to integrate consultant feedback into his drafts, despite the constraints and challenges he experienced.

A couple of weeks later in a mid-November journal, Abdullah writes of having learned a new strategy for seeking writing center feedback: "Something that I learned from my previews [previous] paper is to set early appointment to the writing center. Before I start writing my paper I should set up an appointment because later on I might not be able to set an appointment." Besides seeking a consultation early in his writing process, Abdullah has also learned to plan a writing center consultation even before he begins writing, alleviating scheduling difficulties and ensuring timely feedback.

In response to stories like Abdullah's, we now explicitly discuss this strategy during class visits, explaining how a scheduled appointment might help with motivation. Referencing Muriel Harris' idea of rhetorical frames for presenting the center's work, I often frame the tutor as a "jogging buddy." I then ask students about their likelihood of skipping a morning jog if they are tired or if the weather is bleak, to which many confess that they would. I follow up by asking the likelihood that they would skip if they know their jogging buddy is waiting for them. Typically, most students appreciatively nod with this analogy, often voicing a new perspective on the value of planning a time to work(out) with someone else. These plans can help students manage issues of work-life balance, carving out more time for their writing and for the writing center, as seen in Abdullah's use of this strategy.

THE WRITING CENTER AND ACADEMIC HONESTY

Though questions of scheduling are undoubtedly addressed in most class visits, one issue that may be addressed less frequently relates to academic honesty. For Abdullah, this lack of direct treatment caused concern. Explicitly stating that writing center use does not breach academic honesty may help to welcome some students who are worried about accidental academic misconduct. As our institution has an honor code, instructors must specify authorized aid (permitted resources) and unauthorized aid (involving academic misconduct). While I had explicitly listed the writing center as

authorized aid for papers, since journals were short and ungraded, I had not thought to list journals as writing they could bring to the center. This unfortunate oversight resulted in the following misunderstanding, reflected in one of Abdullah's mid-October journals: "Sometimes I wish I could visit them [the writing center] for the regular journal, but I am afraid that I will violate the honor code. Does my visit to the writing center for journals considered violate code?" Most writing centers invite students to visit with any writing, but an explicit class discussion and clearer syllabus language, e.g., highlighting the center as a university-sponsored, free resource for all students and all writing, could have prevented Abdullah's misunderstanding. As an instructor, I now list the writing center explicitly in each area on authorized aid in my syllabi; and as a director, I proactively discuss the writing center as authorized aid, encouraging students to address any questions or doubts with their professors.

CONCLUSION

Abdullah's journals were invaluable to me first as an instructor and later as a writing center director. They helped me craft a guide for class visits, including a list of questions to discuss with students, such as why the writing center is authorized aid; strategies to introduce, such as scheduling appointments before writing; and activities to complete, such as actively making appointments together as a class. Our class visit guide, refined by student feedback over the years, helps to remind us of questions students might not ask during a particular visit, while also prompting additional student questions. Gathering first-hand accounts of writing center use may be helpful not only in responding to international student needs in writing center orientations but also in responding to the needs of other student populations, such as commuter students, students with families, and students from other under-represented groups in your community. The practice of attending to individual student needs is central to writing center tutorials, and this same principle must guide our work in class visits and other writing center introductions. By attending to individual needs, over time, we serve the larger campus community, in part because student needs may overlap and in part because we cultivate our own responsiveness.

Lori Salem compares writing center users and non-users, highlighting the importance of addressing why some students do not use the center. Salem considers lack of engagement with writing assignments, the availability of other resources, and embarrassment as factors influencing writing center use (162). Referencing Abdullah's narratives, we might also add time constraints and other personal or institutional barriers to this list.

When I consider the obstacles Abdullah encountered during his first semester, he had every reason to be one of the non-users. However, he sought writing center feedback throughout his first semester and his undergraduate career, before graduating in May 2019. Though I encouraged him to engage with the writing center, Abdullah used the center regularly not because of a particularly well-scaffolded introduction but ultimately because of his strong motivation to succeed. Unfortunately, most of Abdullah's peers did not demonstrate this same persistence, and even Abdullah reported struggles with writing center use.

Without careful attention even—and perhaps especially—to questions and expressions of personal struggle, we may find ourselves relying too much on the motivation and persistence of determined students. To better understand students' challenges and triumphs in using the writing center, we must endeavor to listen to their stories and earn the trust that supports their candor. Asking students to journal their writing center experiences is just one way to listen, but there are many ways from focus groups to interviews to surveys. In listening, as we better anticipate our students' needs, we can share our "practice on the periphery" and our related writing center research, helping to explore best practices in these areas and helping one another to kindle and support motivation in all writers.

NOTE

1. Abdullah is a pseudonym.



WORKS CITED

- Bell, Barbara, and Robert Stutts. "The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions: The Effects of Mandatory Writing Center Visits on Student and Tutor Attitudes." *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1997, pp. 5-8.
- Bowles Jr., Bruce. "Coffee's for Closers!: The Pressures of Marketing a New Writing Center." *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, vol. 43, no. 7-8, 2019, pp. 10-18.
- Gordon, Barbara Lynn. "Requiring First-Year Writing Classes to Visit the Writing Center: Bad Attitudes or Positive Results?" *Teaching English in the Two Year College*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2008, pp. 154-63.
- Harris, Muriel. "Making Our Institutional Discourse Sticky: Suggestions for Effective Rhetoric." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2010, pp. 47-71.
- Jackson, Rebecca, and Jackie Grutsch McKinney. "Beyond Tutoring: Mapping the Invisible Landscape of Writing Center Work." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-11.
- Nordlof, John. "Vygotsky, Scaffolding, and the Role of Theory in Writing Center Work." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2014, pp. 45-64.
- Perry, Cody J., et al. "Knowledge, Use, and Perceived Value of University Student Services." *Journal of International Students*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2020, pp. 1-16.

- Pexton, Valerie. "Sometimes It's Okay to Meddle: Or, How to Encourage First-Year Students to Visit the Writing Center." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-3.
- Poyrazli, Senel, and Kamini Maraj Grahame. "Barriers to Adjustment: Needs of International Students within a Semi-urban Campus Community." *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2007, pp. 28-45.
- Ryan, Holly, and Danielle Kane. "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Writing Center Classroom Visits: An Evidence-Based Approach." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2015, pp. 145-72.
- Salem, Lori. "Decisions... Decisions: Who Chooses to Use the Writing Center?" *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2016, pp. 147-71.
- Sewell, Madison. "The First Step: Students' Initial Encounters with the Writing Center." *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, vol. 40, no. 9-10, 2016, pp. 27-31.
- Wood, David, et al. "The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1976, pp. 89-100.

Tutors' Column: "Mansplaining in the Writing Center: Gender Dynamics and the Ongoing Struggle with Authority"

Rachel Stroup
Ohio University



"No, no, no," the student said, "You just don't understand what I'm saying here."

I swallowed a frustrated sigh. Sitting up straighter in his chair, posturing as if he wanted to look down on me, he took the measure of explaining his topic in great detail. Instead of acknowledging any errors in his sentences, the student I was working with re-explained the topic of his paper. But I had trouble understanding his sentence due to grammatical and syntactical errors, while he took my confusion to mean that I did not understand the subject matter of his sentence. Every attempt at nondirectively asking him "what does this sentence mean?" or "what are you trying to say here?" was met with a digression on the topic of his whole paper—which was not what I was asking.

This guy, I thought, is just assuming that I don't know anything. He was rejecting my advice and assuming the position of educating me—even though I was the one he came to for help with his writing. Finally, I ended up (somewhat aggressively) telling him, "No, I understand all of the points you're trying to make. I know what you're trying to say. The problem is that your sentences are written in a way that makes them difficult to read, and your argument is getting lost in these grammar issues."

This type of consultation in which I had to assert expertise has happened countless times in my three years of tutoring, and I don't believe I'm alone. Power dynamics can be the root of many conflicts in writing center consultations—a topic central to the study of writing centers. For tutors, there is a subconscious tension in asserting proficiency and in the discomfort from the negotiated posture of authority each of us may assume. Students enter with an air of defensiveness and ownership about their work in a way that makes it challenging for tutors to perform their role. This topic is not new in writing center discourse, as the tension

surrounding power and authority has been discussed by Candace Spigelman and Stephen J. Corbett, among others. Peter Carino in 2003 identified that writing centers “have long been uncomfortable with power and authority,” yet at the same time, “writing centers can ill afford to pretend power and authority do not exist, given the important responsibility they have for helping students achieve their own authority as writers in a power-laden environment such as the university” (113, 126-7). Much of this discussion surrounding authority occurs within the directive/nondirective debate—a debate that, I would argue, carries more layers beyond the implications of pedagogical theory and application. One of these layers is gender.

At my writing center at The Ohio State University at Mansfield, most of the tutors are women. Since many writing centers have more female than male tutors, it is worth considering how the conversations around power and gender in the writing center can come together in order to contribute to both the specialized pedagogy of tutor training and the vexed negotiation of authority present within writing center discourse. Applying a feminist lens can help us to gauge the attitudes surrounding the writing center as a feminized space and provide insight for tutors on how gender impacts the dynamics of consultations.

To align these conversations about the writing center within the modern feminist discourse, let us consider the contemporary topic of “mansplaining.” A concept first discussed by Rebecca Solnit before it evolved into a trendy term, mansplaining refers to the condescending tendency of men to assume intellectual superiority in their interactions with women. In her popular 2008 LA Times article, “Men Who Explain Things,” Solnit articulates the paradigm of men who take this stance:

Men explain things to me, and to other women, whether or not they know what they’re talking about. . . . It’s the presumption that makes it hard, at times, for any woman in any field; that keeps women from speaking up and from being heard when they dare. . . . It trains us in self-doubt and self-limitation just as it exercises men’s unsupported overconfidence.

A prevalent presumption that women are “empty [vessels] to be filled with [men’s] wisdom and knowledge” certainly complicates any woman’s ascent into the professional world, as this only adds to the obstacles she may face (Solnit). But in an academic sphere—one of undeniable authority in an information-based society—women’s dominance turns this dynamic on its head because in the writing center, it is often women who are tasked with explaining things to students (including men).

So, how can tutors like us contend with the complications that arise in the writing center due to power and gender? Within our conversations on authority in the writing center, we must consider the different dynamics at play—whether it be race, age, or gender.¹ Resisting gendered conflicts is difficult, as such power imbalances permeate the institution, but addressing how these conflicts impact writing consultations, through ongoing conversation and cognizance of this issue, is the first step to considering the deeper layers of such conflicts. To remediate some of these conflicts, we, as tutors, should stay grounded in our role to perform the job required of us, and in doing so, we may be able to deflect some tutorial conflict. For even if we cannot individually solve such large structural issues, we can uphold our expertise in a way that reestablishes the purpose of the consultation. For example, in instances when male students may attempt to “mansplain” to female tutors in an attempt to leverage expertise, female tutors may benefit from a more directive approach by circling back to the agenda set at the beginning of the consultation. By gently reminding the student of the purpose of the consultation and confirming that both tutor and student understand each other throughout, the tutor may avoid a battle of who-knows-more-than-who by reverting the discussion back to the original plan. Another strategy for mitigating the conflict of mansplaining is for tutors to reiterate and paraphrase the writer’s argument back to them in order to communicate a mutual understanding about the subject matter and to ensure both tutor and student are on the same page going forward. This might have been a good strategy for me; in the case of the male student who seemingly assumed that I was incapable of understanding his topic, it would have been a better move to more clearly demonstrate both my knowledge on writing and my ability to understand his paper with a kind reminder of the purpose of his visit. While dealing with such conflicts is not easy, handling and solving the issues that arise from establishing expertise and that involve our identity-based differences demands a patience and open-mindedness that comes from keeping the central task at hand. Doing what we can to mitigate these conflicts requires continual consideration of how the perceived differences of tutor and student affect the negotiation of power in the writing center.

NOTE

1. Addressing large institutional concerns of gendered discrimination in the writing center and the university writ large is no easy task; scholars have tried to navigate this issue in terms of the “feminization” of the writing center. While Michelle Miley attempts to repackage this “feminized” label of the writing center with the language of empowerment with the concept of “feminist mothering,” our understanding of these power dynamics remains fixed in a gender binary. Thomas Spitzer-Hanks questions if “universities begin to see writing centers as useful tools

for retention and recruitment and manage to somehow fully imbricate them in neo-liberal ways of being and learning in the corporate university, have writing centers then been ‘masculinized?’”



WORKS CITED

- Carino, Peter. "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring." *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, edited by Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood, 4th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011, pp. 113, 112-27.
- Corbett, Steven J. "Bringing the Noise: Peer Power and Authority, On Location." *On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring*, edited by Candice Spigelman and Laurie Grobman. Utah State UP, 2005, pp. 101-11.
- Miley, Michelle. "Feminist Mothering: A Theory/Practice for Writing Center Administration." *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, vol. 41, no. 1-2, 2016, pp. 17-24.
- Spitzer-Hanks, Thomas. "On 'feminized space' in the Writing Center." *Axis: The Blog, Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*,]April 2016. www.praxisuwc.com/praxis-blog/2016/4/13/on-feminized-space-in-the-writing-center. Accessed March 2018.
- Solnit, Rebecca. "Men Who Explain Things." *LA Times*, 13 April 2008, articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/13/opinion/op-solnit13.
- Spigelman, Candace. "Reconstructing Authority: Negotiating Power in Democratic Learning Sites." *On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring*, edited by Candice Spigelman and Laurie Grobman. Utah UP, 2005, pp. 185-204.

Announcements

New Digital Edited Collection on the WLN Website

Wellness and Care in Writing Center Work, an open-access collection edited by Genie Giaimo, features a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary set of pedagogical and scholarly chapters on wellness that engage with current research in writing center studies, as well as in other fields such as psychology, education, critical race studies, queer studies, feminist studies, and sociology. Emerging voices demand the need for more systemic and anti-racist wellness and care programs and practices—for writing center workers and writers alike—and provide guidance for writing center practitioners to implement and assess different kinds of wellness programs in their writing centers. <https://ship.pressbooks.pub/writingcentersandwellness/>

Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association

March 26, 2021

Virtual Conference

“Access & Equity: Writing Centers in Times of Disruption”

Keynote: Allison Hitt

Conference website: mawca.org/MAWCA-2021-VIRTUAL-SPRING-CONFERENCE. To register: mawca.org/event-4082037. Conference Chairs: Kerri Rinaldi and Erica O’Mahony

Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association

March 5-6, 2021

Virtual Tutor-Con

“Creating—Who We Are, What We Seek, and How We Help”

For more information, please contact Maureen McBride, 775-682-7845, mmcbride@unr.edu; conference website: www.tutorcon2021.com.

Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association

April 19-23, 2021

Virtual Conference

For more information, please contact conference tri-chairs: Brooklyn Walter: brooklyn.walter@wsu.edu; Erik Echols: eechols@uw.edu; Kim Sharp: ksharp@shoreline.edu; conference website: brooklynwalter.wixsite.com/pnwca2021.

WLN Online Webinar - Mentorship & Publication: Mentoring Relationships and Strategies

Hosted by Elizabeth Kleinfeld, Sohui Lee, and Julie Prebel, this webinar explores the importance of mentorship in writing center work. We will provide an overview of theories and practices in mentoring, strategies for building intentional and effective mentorship in writing center work, and the role of mentorship in professional development and scholarly publications.

When: Friday, May 7th @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. PST

The webinar is free, but **registration is required** at: tinyurl.com/wlnweb5-reg

Conference Calendar

March 5-6, 2021: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, virtual conference

Contact: Maureen McBride, 775-682-7845, mmcbride@unr.edu; conference website: www.tutorcon2021.com.

March 5-7, 2021: South Central Writing Centers Association, virtual conference

Contact: Jennifer Marciniak: marcinij@southwestern.edu; and Cole Bennett: cole.bennett@acu.edu; conference website: scwca.net/scwca-conference-2021.

March 12-19, 2021: Secondary School Writing Centers Association, virtual conference

Contact: sswca.board@gmail.com; conference website: sswca.org/conference/sswca-2021-virtual-from-crisis-to-creation.

March 26, 2021: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, virtual conference

Contact: conference website: mawca.org/MAWCA-2021-VIRTUAL-SPRING-CONFERENCE



WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship

WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship, published bi-monthly, from September to June, is a peer-reviewed publication of the International Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779. All Rights and Title reserved unless permission is granted by WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER LLC. Material can not be reproduced in any form without express written permission. However, up to 50 copies of an article may be reproduced under fair use policy for educational, non-commercial use in classes or course packets. Proper acknowledgment of title, author, and publication date should be included.

Editor: **Muriel Harris** (harrism@purdue.edu)
Blog Editor: **Anna Sophia Habib** (ahabib@gmu.edu)

Managed and Produced by

TWENTY SIX DESIGN LLC under agreement with
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER LLC
52 Riley Road #380, Celebration, FL 34747
(866) 556-1743
www.wlnjournal.org
support@wlnjournal.org

Subscriptions, Archives, Resources, and Manuscript Submissions:

Visit www.wlnjournal.org for subscription information, free archive access, resources, and manuscript submission guidelines.



A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER LLC.
52 Riley Road #380
Celebration, FL 34747

PRSR STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
ORLANDO, FL
PERMIT 3172



WLNjournal