

# Chapter 8. My Writing Center Side Hustle

Anonymous

Since moving from a full-time contingent writing center director job to a tenure-track WPA job several years ago, I've maintained what I like to think of as a writing center side hustle. I use this term ironically because my particular side hustle doesn't result in any compensation—at least not in the form of course releases or money. The job description for my current tenure-line WPA job says nothing about writing centers, and we don't even have a writing center at my institution. We have a learning commons model, and through our learning center, we offer tutoring in different disciplines. Writing is among them. It's just one of many. Moreover, since I've been here, our learning commons has been a one-woman show. As a result, because of my background in writing center administration and research, I've supported a few different women who have ventured to coordinate our learning commons. I've taught a three-credit writing center tutor education course in the semester that we opted to offer it. I've also conducted tutor education at a start-of-semester orientation for new consultants who were paid to attend. I've even developed plans for consultant meetings and have run or helped run them weekly or every other week. I do all of this in addition to my official job. I do all of this because I love it. And in a way, I do all of this for free.

If my own upper-level administrators at my institution wanted to, and I imagine they would, they could justify what's happening by saying that it makes sense for me to do this work because of my status as the WPA. Writing programs and writing centers are partners within many institutions, however complicated that partnership is. (I'm thinking here of the exploration of this partnership and of the exploration of writing center directors as WPAs of a certain kind in Melissa Iannetta et al.'s "Polylog: Are Writing Center Directors Writing Program Administrators?" (2006).) Besides, as our upper-level administrators would say, our learning center has a full-time coordinator, albeit one who might identify as a side hustler, too, because despite her dedication to her work, she readily admits that she lacks expertise in the specific subject areas that her tutors tutor in. That coordinator is responsible for scheduling consultants, being present in the center, and doing other work in and for the center. From an upper-level administrative standpoint, this center really isn't my responsibility. It's my choice to get involved with it, and my supervisors, of course, support my choice.

I, too, could justify my side hustle at this center. I could say that my writing center work gives me what Pierre Bourdieu (1986) calls cultural and social capital. It gives me compensation of a non-monetary variety. I publish extensively on writing centers, and to do so with any street cred, I need to keep one hand in

writing centers, especially given that I got my MA and my Ph.D. in literary studies with some rhetorical theory in the mix. Because of this focus in my education, I realize that I've actually been side-hustling in writing centers for quite some time. As a Ph.D. student in literary studies, I got my first administrative writing center side hustle. I got a job as a graduate student assistant director of a writing center. I then got another side hustle at a writing center at a small college near my Research-I university as I took a final semester to complete my dissertation, which was on literature. I then got yet another side hustle. My first full-time job out of grad school involved directing a writing center, and in taking that job, I felt imposter syndrome doubly so: because I'm a woman and because I didn't fully feel like a writing center scholar. I was and am still living a professional life at the margins—a life in which I am an imposter everywhere, no matter what I do.

I wonder, though, whom my approach to my profession serves. I don't know that my writing center side hustle serves the coordinator of our learning commons, who desperately needs a more robust official structure within her center so that she can do her job well and so her center can realize its mission. I don't know that it serves students at our institution who might feel the reality of scarcity in our center or who might not even make their way through the door because of the very scarcity I'm mentioning. I don't know that it serves me, even though I feel equipped to continue publishing on writing center work because of the everyday writing-centered work I do. My current side hustle invigorates my imposter syndrome in that it reifies my sense of myself as a kind of outsider looking in. Finally, I don't know that it serves the discipline of writing center studies, which, in my view, needs to reckon with the variety of disciplinary backgrounds that writing center professionals bring with them to writing center and writing studies work instead of only celebrating the elite writing studies Ph.D.-bearers among us.

We side hustlers are here, and we have every right to be here, or at least that's what I'm now trying to tell myself. We're also quite good at the work we do in writing centers, and we're quite capable of producing excellent writing center research. Nonetheless, I fear that the effect of hustling will forever haunt me in my working life as it may haunt writing center studies as a relatively new field, a side hustler itself in the world of writing studies, which is a side hustler in that broad category that we used to just call English. Because I'm neither here nor there as a scholar and practitioner, because of my unpaid writing center labor, and probably also because I'm a woman, I know that regardless of how I look to the outside observer or come to look as a result of writing this piece, I will, in all likelihood, keep feeling like a hustler. I'll keep feeling like I'm at the periphery and not quite in the center, even though I've spent decades investing myself in writing center work.

## References

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