

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E W T T E R

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Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing

March/April, 2013

— FROM THE EDITOR —

This issue of *WLN* includes articles focusing on new challenges and opportunities for writing centers as we move along with the ever-changing landscape of writing instruction. Sohui Lee and Chris Golde survey boot camps for dissertation writers and describe their own model for those who are considering adding this service. Then, Kim Ballard reviews an important new book on assessment in writing centers, written by Ellen Schendel and William Macauley, Jr. Given that many writing centers are being asked to assess their work, this book comes at a particularly critical time to help guide directors through assessment. Ballard's review offers an overview of the book's contents as well as her response to its usefulness.

As distance learning expands as a medium through which to tutor writers, Sarah Summers explores Skype and Google Docs as platforms to use. For our column by and for tutors, Ari Cuperfain reflects on how and when a tutor might use information gained in one tutorial for another tutorial with a different writer. For tutors interested in writing for the Tutors' Column, do consider writing responses to essays you read in these columns, in addition to contributing your own essays on insights and experiences relevant to other tutors.

If you have announcements that you want to be included in the May/June issue, please send them soon. By the time you are reading this, I'll be working on that issue. And for all who are traveling to CCCC in Las Vegas and/or to regional conferences, safe travels!

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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COMPLETING THE DISSERTATION AND BEYOND: WRITING CENTERS AND DISSERTATION BOOT CAMPS

◆ Sohui Lee and Chris Golde
Stanford University
Stanford, CA

Graduate school lore is full of stories of students who get stuck in the "ABD" or "All But Dissertation" stage. According to the Council of Graduate Schools, which collected data drawn from its Ph.D. Completion Project, 44% of Ph.D. candidates in the broad fields including engineering, social sciences, and humanities do not complete the dissertation by their tenth year (Council). In an effort to encourage timely degree completion, administrators of graduate schools generated a range of programs and services to help graduate students succeed academically. One new and successful program focusing especially on writing is the Dissertation Boot Camp (Mastroieni and Cheung). The idea for the Dissertation Boot Camp (DBC) originated in the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate Student Center and was quickly spread by graduate school administrators. Consequently, many DBCs are run under the auspices of a graduate school or graduate student council rather than by writing centers.¹ Perhaps because of this, DBCs are designed primarily to serve productivity goals—getting students to write as much as possible to finish the dissertation. Like fitness boot camps, the premise is that new habits can be formed quickly by virtue of repeated practice.

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Manuscripts: Before sending in submissions, please consult the guidelines on the *WLN* website. Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format (including Works Cited). Please send files to the *WLN* website.

By focusing exclusively on getting students to write prolifically, these productivity-oriented DBCs miss the opportunity to promote graduate students' on-going development as writers. Writing a dissertation is an intensive developmental experience for most graduate students, and the DBC can provide an important venue for supporting their continuing growth. In this article, we argue that DBCs benefit immensely from actively integrating a writing process approach that balances the practical needs of graduate student writers with the broader mission to help students understand how they write and how writing develops in a community. Although most DBCs address best practices in writing to some degree, concepts and practices of writing tend not to be significant features of the program. For instance, some DBCs provide no feedback sessions on writing and others offer only "on call" sessions. However, the Hume Writing Center at Stanford University, working closely with Stanford's Office of the Vice Provost of Graduate Education, developed a DBC program that aims not only to help students make considerable writing progress, but also to think about writing beyond the dissertation. In discussing the history and goals of DBCs and the program at Stanford, we hope to encourage other university writing centers, who may offer such boot camps, a model that ensures writing beyond "productivity."

TALE OF TWO MODELS

The concept of the DBC isn't entirely new. In a 2004 *Chronicle* article, Scott Smallwood described their Scholar's Retreat, a week-long "camp" run by University of Colorado at Denver since 1997. For \$1675 per session, the writing retreat helps students "focus exclusively on their dissertations" (Smallwood). An effective and low-cost alternative to programs like Scholar's Retreat, DBCs emerged in 2005 to become a popular means of supporting graduate student writers by providing writing space, dedicated writing time, and motivation in a community setting.² Drawing from six interviews with directors or program managers conducted in 2009, we found that the operational cost of a DBC ranges from \$800 to \$3000 per session. They are typically either fully or partially funded by graduate student governments or the central graduate school/graduate dean (local terminology varies). For instance, MIT's boot camp is sponsored completely by their Graduate Student Council while Stanford University's boot camp is funded by the Vice Provost for Graduate Education. All DBCs have the shared objective of facilitating writing productivity in order to help graduate students obtain their degrees. However, based on our study of DBCs, there appear to be two basic models, whose range of writing assistance and boot camp services reflect differing programmatic objectives and assumptions about graduate student writing.

While most DBCs provide "interruption-free" writing in dedicated spaces, the productivity-driven or "Just Write" DBC model presumes that students will write productively, if they are given space, food, and monitored time. "Just Write" DBCs sometimes include presentations on writer's block and "stand-by" tutors, but extended writing support is not offered. Two examples we provide here are Yale's and MIT's DBCs. Managed by the Graduate School Writing Center with the assistance of Academic Writing Fellows, Yale University's two-day DBC was organized by its then newly minted Graduate Writing Center, which accommodated 20 students for an "interruption-free, stress-free, no-excuses-just-do-it weekend" ("Procrastination"). Students attended the boot camp to just write. Unlike Yale, the MIT DBC in 2009 was organized and managed by the co-chairs of the Academic, Research, and Careers Committee of the Graduate Student Council. MIT's Writing Center supported the DBC by providing general "writing tips and writing center services talks" to boot camp participants. Consultations were available on an "on call" basis for a brief period of time to discuss "small pieces of text" (Aiello). Like Yale's, the MIT DBC writing support focused on providing dedicated writing space.

An alternative model to the "Just Write" DBC is the "Writing Process" DBC. "Writing Process" DBCs also introduce students to the benefits of structured writing time, quiet space, and productivity logs. In addition, "Writing Process" DBCs work under the assumption that students' writing productivity and motivation are significantly enhanced by consistent and on-going conversations about writing. For instance, the Grand Valley State University's Fred Meijer Center for Writing provides a productive writing retreat for graduate students, faculty, and staff by encouraging dialogues on writing (Schendel).

Similarly, at the Hume Writing Center, we reinforce the writing process through opening and closing workshops, scheduled follow-up discussions, individualized one-hour tutorials, daily writing logs, and multiple check-in points. While we do not require tutorials, in some “Writing Process” DBCs, like the University of Pennsylvania’s, tutorials are “mandatory” (Mastroieni and Cheung). The “Writing Process” DBC emphasizes more conversations on writing by including longer individual tutorials that last an hour. For most graduate students, DBC tutorials represent their first experience with professional writing tutors. Moreover, it is through these one-to-one tutorials that graduate students may engage in substantial conversations about writing and come to realize that successful writing calls for more than a place to write. As Paula Gillespie notes about Ph.D. writers, students “can struggle mightily to write clearly,” not only because they have “huge amounts of data” to process, but also because they are asked to write with “disciplinary knowledge” while mastering a new genre—the dissertation (4). To be more productive, students need to learn how to help themselves as writers.

From the launch of our DBC program in Summer 2008 through 2011, Stanford’s Hume Writing Center hosted 17 DBC sessions. In an effort to assess the broader impact of the Stanford DBC, we administered a survey in the fall of 2010 to 126 former participants who were at least six months post-DBC. Half of those surveyed (64) responded. We asked about how DBC influenced students’ degree completion and their self-perception of their writing skills. Responses showed that the DBC helped students make significant progress on their doctoral dissertation; one-third said that it accelerated their time to degree by one or more academic quarters. Moreover, a majority of respondents strongly agreed that the DBC had a lasting impact on their writing habits and skills. Many believed that, in addition to writing a great deal, they significantly improved how they reflected on their own writing strategies and skills. A typical response came from a mechanical engineering student who noted of his tutorial experience: “It was also an eye-opener to realize that maybe 90% of my work and research findings will NOT be in my final dissertation. . . . I now know what is important for me to be productive as a writer, and what affordances are essential for me to write, and to write well—and then to polish and refine my writing. . . . I believe that my two experiences in DBC have helped me grow as a writer—so that was time well spent.” The survey responses suggest that students desire not only a space to finish the dissertation but also a place to discuss their writing.

“Dissertation boot camps benefit immensely from actively integrating a writing process approach.”

Briefly, Stanford’s DBC has the following features:

- During the fiscal year, we offer seven DBCs: four traditional DBCs held during the day and three DBC “after dark” sessions held in the evening. Traditional DBCs last for two weeks (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; with four additional hours of optional writing). DBC “after dark” lasts three weeks (Tuesday to Thursday, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.).
- DBC is held in the Hume Writing Center during periods when undergraduate students are not using the space. Boot camp participants determine to what extent e-mail, phone calls, or conversations are permitted.
- DBC enrollment is limited to 21 students, one being a peer monitor; new boot campers have priority over repeaters.
- Students pay a refundable deposit of \$100, which is returned if they show up on time every day.
- A student monitor is paid a \$500 stipend to monitor attendance, make coffee, lead a stretch break at 11 a.m., serve as liaison with Hume Writing Center staff, and help facilitate workshops and discussions.
- DBC costs \$2,500 per session, which includes food, the student monitor, consultants, and office supplies. This does not include Hume Writing Center administrative costs.

We have two goals for our DBC, which we seek to achieve through various components of the program: more writing and writing process awareness. We help students write more by setting up a con-

sistent writing regimen within a group setting that is supervised by the boot camp monitor, a graduate student who has previously participated in the DBC. While students are initially drawn to the promise of productivity, a key feature of Stanford's program is the one-hour tutorial with a boot camp writing consultant, who promotes awareness of the writing process. Boot camp consultants are either advanced graduate students or members of the teaching faculty in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric, holding Ph.D.s in writing and rhetoric or a related field. Consultants work individually with participants for one-hour sessions on a range of writing issues including arranging and planning formal aspects of their chapters, writing to a non-specialist audience, and applying revision strategies. These consultants also act as dissertation coaches, helping graduate students to plan their writing schedule, set goals, stay motivated, and find resources to stay on course. We strongly advise students to speak with a consultant and encourage them to arrange more visits outside the boot camp program.

Thus, in addition to providing writing assistance on academic conventions and offering coaching on scheduling and overcoming writers block, tutorials during the DBC serve a larger pedagogical purpose: writing consultations help graduate writers understand that their writing is, as Kenneth A. Bruffee notes, "an act of conversational exchange" (91). Tutorial conversation further clarifies the structures and strategies of the academic discourse in which the student is engaged—helping to expand their understanding of writing and the relationship between the writer and reader. Moreover, tutorial conversations reinforce a theme repeated throughout the DBC that writing is a product of social exchange with other fellow writers, advisors, and writing consultants. Boot camp participants discuss these ideas both in large group sessions and in personal tutorials. The best evidence we have of their understanding of these writing concepts is that a significant portion of Stanford participants become regular writing center visitors, making an average of 3.5 appointments in the quarter following their initial boot camp experience. Ultimately, "Writing Process" boot camps provide students with productive writing practices that can continue after boot camp: to actively seek feedback on writing, to write with other writers in writing groups, or to start their own DBC.

DISSERTATION BOOT CAMP FOR WRITING HABITS AND WRITING STRATEGIES

Most campuses that operate productivity-driven "Just Write" DBCs report great success. These DBCs are filled to capacity and report that graduate students make significant progress in their dissertation writing. Why then should those running "Just Write" Boot camps insist on providing "Writing Process" Boot Camps? DBCs should offer more because the primary mission of most writing centers is to cultivate writing awareness with a focus on long-term writing success. DBCs can help graduate students reflect on their own writing even as they rush to finish their theses. We have three recommendations for writing centers that want to run "Writing Process" boot camps. First, writing centers should offer one-to-one writing consultations for an extended period of time (thirty minutes to one hour). Although this may not be possible for writing centers that lack graduate or professional tutors, writing centers that do have these resources can promote the tutorials by explaining the range of writing topics, feedback, and planning help that are available.

Our second recommendation is that DBCs emphasize the idea that most academic writing is collaborative and community-based. As Barbara Kamler and Pat Thomson noted in their study of graduate writing pedagogies, graduate student writers mistakenly assume that academic writing should be done alone. Moreover, other studies have shown that writing with a community of other writers improves the learning of writing conventions and style, "demystifies" the process of writing, and provides crucial social motivation and support to finish the writing task (Moore 334). Some writing centers serving graduate students already offer support in creating graduate student writing groups based on the idea that writing is "socially situated" (Gradin, Pauley-Gose, Stewart). Finally, writing centers can encourage graduate student writers to think of their dissertations as products of collaboration in many forms: through conversations with advisors and writing consultants and feedback given by writing groups, peers at conferences, reviewers in journals, and book editors.

Third, although we promote writing process practice, it is important to maintain writing productivity goals, and to keep these goals front and center when describing a DBC to graduate schools. Students participate in DBCs to make measureable progress, and faculty members and graduate school administrators support DBCs for the same reason. At Stanford, we are embracing the slogan “The Dissertation Accelerator” because it puts a positive productivity spin on participating in DBC.

As a university resource addressing writing across the curriculum, across disciplines, and across educational boundaries, writing centers crucially support the development of academic literacy (Parks and Goldblatt). Although an increasing number of writing centers serve graduate students and some universities have independent Graduate Writing Centers, graduate education may represent one critical corner where the remedial myth of writing centers still endures. As Gradin, Pauley-Gose, and Stewart notes, “writing process theory” advocated by most writing centers “hasn’t spilled over into disciplines outside the humanities or English departments.” In the eyes of these faculty, Barbara Kamler observes, writing centers are still seen to “operate from a remedial or crucial model of intervention separate from graduate schools” (141). It is not uncommon to hear stories told by graduate students of engineering advisors who question (or disapprove of) their participation in DBCs. This view of writing centers should encourage us to work harder to seek and embrace university collaborations with graduate programs and organizations whenever possible—without losing our own directive. “Writing Process” boot camps present one opportunity where writing centers can act less as “managers” of boot camps (as is common with “Just Write” boot camps) and more as educational leaders who advance knowledge in writing. ♦

Endnotes

1 The following institutions currently have DBC programs run by a graduate school, graduate student center, or a graduate student council: University of Pennsylvania, MIT, Princeton, University of Kentucky, Marquette University, University of Utah, University of Missouri, Lehigh University, Columbia University, University of Utah, Loyola University Chicago, Florida State University, and University of South Florida.

2 The idea of providing quiet writing space for writers was explored earlier for faculty. In “The Faculty Writing Place: A Room of Our Own,” Peter Elbow and Mary Deane Sorcinelli (at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst), for example, describe a month-long writing retreat that “provide[s] a quiet, comfortable working space for faculty, free of the distractions of office and home” (18).



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Writing Center Director Alma College

Alma College invites applications for a full-time, continuing position in English, with responsibilities split between teaching Rhetoric and Composition courses (2 per semester) and directing our Writing Center. The starting date is August 1, 2013.

Applicants should have substantial experience teaching Rhetoric and Composition and administering writing centers. They also should demonstrate expertise in at least one of the following areas: ESL or faculty training and support for Writing Across the Curriculum programs. Specific responsibilities for this position will reflect the candidate's areas of training.

The position requires a Ph.D. in Composition with related administrative experience. The ideal candidate will have a commitment to liberal arts education at the undergraduate level in an environment emphasizing close faculty-student interaction.

Review of applications will start immediately and continue until the position is filled. Send letter of application and vita to Dana E. Aspinall (aspinall@alma.edu), Chair, English Department Search Committee, Alma College, 614 W. Superior, Alma, MI 48801. E-mail submissions are strongly encouraged. For more information about the College, visit <<http://www.alma.edu/jobs>>. EOE

IN NEED OF A WRITING CENTER ASSESSMENT CONSULTATION? BUY THIS BOOK.

Book Review

Schendel, Ellen, and William J. Macauley, Jr. *Building Writing Center Assessments That Matter*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2012. (\$26.95; 220 pp. paperback)

◆ Reviewed by Kim Ballard
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI

Writing centers, like so many educational programs at all levels throughout the world, have been living in the age of assessment for a number of years. In this review, I encourage those interested in or needing to learn about writing center assessment to reach for the new Utah State University Press book, *Building Writing Center Assessments that Matter (BWCATM)*, written by Ellen Schendel and William Macauley. Whether staff members have embraced assessment, ignored it, feared it, fought it, or been confused by it, we now have a source that adds much insight to current writing center assessment scholarship and promises to calm the emotional reactions that have long been a part of writing center assessment conversations. I also challenge those who think outcomes-based assessment of writing centers, at best, offers no valuable insights and, at worst, distorts writing center work, to read the book. A much needed, reader friendly resource, *BWCATM* will help readers of varying assessment opinions and knowledge levels 1) make sense of writing center assessment in general, 2) plan appropriate assessment for their own writing center/writing assistance program, 3) recognize why such assessment is so crucial, especially now, and 4) appreciate the powerful possibilities (locally and globally) inherent in writing center assessment. This book will fill in assessment theory, methods, and vision gaps for writing center staff and for instructors and students in tutor training, writing center administration, writing program administration, and other writing studies courses.

BWCATM is organized around eleven sections designed to help readers gain a breadth of assessment knowledge they can apply to their own situations. Schendel and Macauley co-wrote the introduction and a rich "Coda" and individually authored three chapters each. Macauley also wrote an extremely useful 101-entry annotated bibliography that briefly critiques what readers may gain from each source. In addition, three other scholars contribute to the book. Neal Lerner offers an "Interchapter" titled "Of Numbers and Stories: Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment Research in the Writing Center," which helps clarify the assessment possibilities of both qualitative and quantitative assessment approaches by considering the rhetorical context of differing assessment needs and readers. Brian Huot and Nicole Caswell co-wrote an afterword, "Translating Assessment," which empathizes with writing center staff who fear assessment, especially during economic downturns, and suggests that good assessment is a sure way to assuage concerns that university administrators do not value the writing center. For Huot and Caswell, assessment can give writing center professionals "a voice in the conversation where decisions are made from assessment evidence" (162). Thus, instead of fearing assessment reviews, writing center staff can use them to solidify institutional support and even argue for more resources. Among many ideas, the *BWCATM* introduction covers "The Relationship between Writing Centers and Assessment" and assures readers that the book can help them start thinking about and doing assessment from their current assessment knowledge and angst/enthusiasm levels. This section clarifies reasons writing center directors need to communicate through the language of assessment—the current "lingua franca of education" (xvii)—and begins to discuss how much writing center assessment and writing center tutoring have in common. Both begin with questions aimed at trying to surface "purpose, audience, and context" of a project (xix), and Schendel and Macauley also acknowledge that they attempt consultation moves in the book. By facilitating many assessment workshops at conferences and by talking assessment with many writing center, writing studies, assessment, and higher education colleagues,

Schendel and Macauley, as well as the authors of the other book sections, have discerned the questions and concerns of those desiring or assigned to do writing center assessment. Each book section, therefore, helps readers recognize key assessment questions and explore resolutions to them, just as a successful writing center consultation empowers writers to recognize and resolve writing questions. The optimistic, writing center approach of the book is captured in Schendel and Macauley's assessment principles: "good assessment . . . is an opportunity to ask questions that will help us do our work better or learn how others perceive our work; . . . is rhetorically sensitive; . . . is collaborative; . . . drives positive change; and . . . is an open invitation to greater relevance" (xx-xxi).

Chapter 1, "The Development of Scholarship about Writing Center Assessment" and the 22-page "Annotated Bibliography for Writing Center Assessment," both written by Macauley, help readers reconsider the notions that few writing center assessment sources exist, that existing sources are not very helpful, and that writing center assessment is a new idea. Macauley directs readers to specific writing center assessment scholarship (including Mary Lamb's 1981 survey of assessment practices in 120 writing centers) and references online International Writing Centers Association resources; podcasts at university websites; conference presentations; individual writing centers' online assessment reports; and such research assessments as The Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project (Kail, Gillespie, and Hughes). He also connects readers to writing assessment and higher education assessment scholarship. In addition, Macauley concludes that one reason so few writing center assessment sources seem to exist is that most of the sources are or are about local assessment efforts (including different centers' online assessment reports). Routine searches for assessment sources may not surface many of the materials Macauley mentions, and individuals need help understanding how other centers' local assessments can serve their contexts. Throughout the book, but especially in this chapter and the annotated bibliography, readers learn to navigate such aspects of writing center assessment terrain. Macauley's careful examination of sources also reveals long-lived reasons writing center members have struggled with assessment, including a lack of sophisticated insights about the stories numbers can tell, a lack of insight about whether one assessment practice trumps others, and a strong belief that qualitative stories capture writing center values and work better than quantitative ones. In short, epistemological discomfort with assessment explains why some writing center members may reject the potentials and methods of assessment. Aware of missed opportunities such an intellectual blindspot can allow, the authors cast writing center assessment in powerful and empowering ways as they help readers understand the potentials and how-to's of assessments done well.

In chapter 2, "Getting From Values to Assessable Outcomes," and chapter 3, "Connecting Writing Center Assessment to Your Institution's Mission," Macauley continues to help writing center members gain confidence in their own assessments. He covers such questions as "Where does writing center assessment start?" (31) and "Who should be involved in writing center assessment?" (35) by reviewing the good advice and limitations of general assessment scholarship and by showing how writing assessment scholarship can assist writing center assessment. Macauley also takes readers through the three steps of "A Process for Devising Assessable Writing Center Outcomes," by sharing his story of discovering such steps when developing his own writing center assessment. Those steps include "Identify What Your Center Values" (39), "Identify Indicators of those Values" (42), and "Identify Assessable Outcomes" (51). Chapter 2 ends with "Polishing Goals and Objectives Takes Time and Saves Time," while chapter 3 discusses ways to connect writing center values to institutional values. Macauley firmly believes that writing center staffs should never sell out their key values; however, much insight can be gained from a consideration of what those values are, of how others in one's institution value assessment, and of the educational and institutional values codified in institutional texts. In chapter 3 readers benefit from Macauley's extensive research into institutional mission and vision statements by learning differences between those two statements, reviewing statement excerpts from institutions of various sizes, and learning ways of "Mining Institutional Statements for Assessment Ideas" (62), "Mining Institutional Statements for Assessment Priorities" (66), and "Mining Institutional Statements for Assessment Language" (75). Once again, Macauley backs up his advice with

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Director of the Writing Center St. Mary's College

Saint Mary's College announces a half-time, 9-month position as Director of the College's Writing Center, beginning in August, 2013. The Writing Center forms part of Saint Mary's Academic Resource Center. The Director reports to the Dean of Faculty and performs the following duties: hires, trains, and supervises approximately 10 student tutors each year; gives presentations to classes on Writing Center services and specific writing issues; tutors non-native speakers and those with learning disabilities; manages the Writing Center website and office; and serves on the Writing Proficiency Program Steering Committee, which oversees the College-wide Writing Program.

Qualified applicants should have an M.A. or M.F.A. in a writing-related field, possess excellent communication and interpersonal skills, have knowledge of and experience with writing center practice and theory (including WAC/WID principles), and demonstrate an ability to work closely with a range of campus constituencies. Preference will be given to those candidates with background in writing center administration at the collegiate level and a history of successfully training and managing student tutors. Applicants should submit a focused letter of interest, CV, three letters of reference, and an unofficial graduate transcript (or photocopy) to Professor Joseph Incandela, 68 Spes Unica Hall, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN 46556. Review of applications will begin on March 1 and continue until position is filled.

scholarship and details of his own experiences that model good assessment choices without suggesting individuals follow a standard template.

Just as Macauley's assessment experience and wisdom show in his chapters, Schendel's assessment curiosity and years of active assessment and writing center work, scholarship, and service (chairing or serving on various university assessment committees) show in her efforts to share key strategies for collaborating in writing center assessment efforts and for managing, reporting, and using assessment. In chapter 4, "Moving From Other's Values to Our Own: Adapting Assessable Outcomes from Professional Organizations and Other Programs on Your Campus" (84), Schendel acknowledges a key tension of writing center assessment is that our assessment reports (which she agrees should be based on the values of individual writing centers) are often reviewed by decision-making readers who may not understand or agree with what the writing center values. Consequently, writing center directors may feel they have only two options: (1) they can pander to these readers to ensure the center receives as much support as possible, or (2) they can detail writing center complexities and importance as we know them, which may risk losing our decision-maker readers' attention and consequential opportunities for support. Schendel responds to this assessment report writing tension much as a writing center consultant would respond to students who cynically claim they just want to write what their professors want to read or who stubbornly refuse to offer arguments their professors can accept for an assignment. Rather than an either/or approach that will satisfy neither the writing center assessment facilitators nor institutional administration readers and that will fail to tap the persuasive opportunity an effective assessment report offers, Schendel explores ways writing center assessment facilitators may connect their values with established organizations. After all, those organizations may have more clout with campus decision makers than a writing center whose director feels unable to base an assessment on the center's values. Thus Schendel speaks directly to the principle that good assessment is local while exploring how local assessments can be enhanced through connections with the established work of other professional resources. Specifically, she shares her experience of connecting her writing center's outcomes with the outcomes for first-year writing programs developed by the Council of Writing Program Administrator and with the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) outcomes developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. For Schendel, when writing centers collaborate with these organizations or others by "map[ing] the writing center's values onto larger conversations," staffs may be able to accomplish something most of us already work hard to do—"show the links between the writing center's and [the] institution's goals to educate and support students" (83).

Schendel suggests that connecting our values with others, when legitimate and possible, is one way "we can change the assessment dynamic from "us" versus "them" . . . to a coherent, collegial, inclusive "us" (85). Readers will value this chapter's nuanced explanation of ways to engage in the type of important administrative collaboration Schendel has found so useful and will gain a better understanding of this assessment turn by accompanying the author on her own assessment journey. Schendel lets readers see how the use of CWPA outcomes served her center, although she emphasizes that writing centers must develop our own outcomes, critique them, and puzzle through them. By connecting and communicating writing center values to institutional colleagues, writing center staff engage in powerful collaboration strategies like those we employ with student writers. We know these moves and should not be surprised by the richness of such strategies nor by their positive results.

Chapter 5, "Integrating Assessment Into Your Center's Other Work: Not Your Typical Methods Chapter," and chapter 6, "Writing It Up and Using It," explore invention, audience, and style advice that will help *BWCATM* readers resolve a plethora of writing center assessment questions. These chapters continue to showcase Schendel's comprehensive grasp on the art of assessment and indicate how assessment can help writing center staffs make choices about their resources. For example, these chapters include cautions against picking a methodology before clarifying values and questions and offer useful strategies for accomplishing assessment without letting it take over the work of the writing center. Schendel encourages individuals to keep

their assessment efforts simple: “start with the data you already have; build small, more focused assessments around larger assessment questions; build assessment processes and procedures into the already established processes of your center; and find ways to collaborate with others” (117). In this section, she draws on the work of other directors (Diane Boehm, Helen Raica-Klotz, Mary Ann Crawford, Sherry Wynn Perdue, and Jacob Blumner) as well as her own assessment experience to offer ways to rethink already collected data and provides lots of examples that demonstrate strategies for keeping assessment manageable. In chapter 5 readers learn about feedback loops, different data collection methods, ways to determine what to assess and what to not assess, ways to grow assessment, ways to involve staff members or tutoring class members in assessment, ways to and reasons for collaborating with others on campus, and, in an aptly named section, ways of “Putting the Pieces Together” (131).

Chapter 6, “Writing It Up and Using It,” again proves Schendel knows writing centers and specific needs readers will bring to *BWCATM*. In this chapter, she offers additional carefully considered advice and examples, focusing this time on the “schizophrenic task of communicating with an audience that we aren’t sure is really listening and yet holds quite a bit of power” (137). Among her suggestion lists and examples, Schendel encourages those who develop assessment reports to write persuasive texts that are, foremost, of use to themselves. Such reports, Schendel insists, should tell the writing center story the report writer wants to share, while responding to the needs of other audiences. This chapter includes questions one may ask of readers during brief meetings before writing the report and demonstrates how Schendel made use of those questions to improve her own reports. She also discusses using online assessment reporting systems (WEAVE and Chalk & Wire) and ways to maneuver in restrictive reporting templates, and she offers suggestions about what to do with different sections of a report (e.g., no need to editorialize in the goals, objectives or methods sections). Drawing on her experience reading assessment reports from other campus programs, Schendel also critiques one of her own reports, noting ways she could have strengthened it. In revisiting her report, Schendel prepares readers for additional realistic and helpful advice, offered under the title, “Starting Over Again: Using Your Assessment Report to Refresh Your Strategic Plan” (155), and in a wonderful “Coda,” co-written with Macauley, encourages readers about ways to deal with missteps they may make. The coda draws on insightful leadership, psychology, and organizational success literature to show readers the best ways to go about embracing and learning from mistakes and to encourage readers to balance their expertise with responsibility so that they can “get busy with moving our centers and our field ahead” (178).

Like the best of the books in the writing center field, *BWCATM* is grounded in the authors’ mission of collaboration. They have created a means by which they can collaborate with readers on the important work of writing center assessment, and they acknowledge such collaboration would not have been possible without the help of colleagues and others who let them kick around ideas. The book owes much to consultants who joined Schendel and Macauley in assessment activities, to scholars whose work Schendel and Macauley tap and extend, and to a skillful editor, one of the best friends the writing center field has—Michael Spooner—who was in turn helped by a gifted Utah State University Press staff. Throughout the book, Schendel and Macauley are openly pro-assessment, but they and the authors who contribute to this book are not dismissive of others’ fears of assessment and of what others may see as writing center assessment negatives. The book acknowledges and reframes fears, concerns, and objections with insights and information, while always encouraging readers to take ownership of their assessment ideas by challenging or expanding those ideas. Our field will be improved because so many readers now have easy access to key assessment ideas. This book will, as the authors hope, “free ourselves [writing center staffs] from many of the fears that have so hampered writing center assessment” (178) and from the fear that a distant authority will demand an assessment writing center staff cannot produce. *BWCATM* shows ways to move beyond the fears to smart, engaging, effective, and pro-active (if one wishes) assessment actions. It leaves me with one last book review thought: buy this book so you can begin using all it offers our field. ♦

REx Announcement

REx, the Research Exchange Index, is a searchable database of recent and ongoing, published and unpublished, local, national and international writing research.

Researchers: Index your research by reporting summary information about projects completed and ongoing, 2000-present. Reports complement other scholarly communication and should not infringe on publisher or IRB agreements.

Contribute by May 1, 2013, to be included in the first peer-reviewed online edition of REx (publisher TBD). Then use REx to:

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Questions: Contact Jenn Fishman, jennifer.fishman@marquette.edu or Joan Mullin, jmullin@ilstu.edu.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TUTORS

How do you use digital media in and for your writing center work? Are you Blogging? Using Skype?

We're looking for good personal experience essays about the issues and expectations, the problems and possibilities that social media and new technologies bring to tutor's writing center experience. Send us your essay of 1500 words or less.

Consult the "Submissions" section on the *WLN* website (<https://writinglabnewsletter.org/>) to find out more.



Canadian Writing Centres Association Conference: Correction

Please note that the date for the Canadian Writing Centres Association Conference listed in the January/February issue of *WLN* was not correct. The conference will be on May 31. And it is now listed correctly in the Conference Calendar, on p. 16. Apologies!

DELIVERING DISTANCE CONSULTATIONS WITH SKYPE AND GOOGLE DOCS

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As recent articles in *Writing Lab Newsletter* and elsewhere demonstrate, the writing center community has shown great interest in exploring the question of how to best use technology as a way to deliver tutorials to distance learners or expand the writing center's hours of operation. For example, in a 2010 "Geek in the Center" column in *WLN*, Jackie Grutsch McKinney provides a chart to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of many online conferencing options, including Adobe Connect, Elluminate Live, Skype, and Google Docs (13). In what follows, I briefly situate this conversation about distance tutoring within the rhetorical canon of delivery. Then, I describe my own experiences tutoring in a graduate writing center (GWC) at Penn State University as a way to add experiential examples to Grutsch McKinney's discussion of Skype and Google Documents (Google Docs). While graduate students' circumstances represent a greater need for distance consulting than is perhaps experienced by undergraduates, the techniques we developed and the lessons we learned are not particular to graduate writers. I hope this discussion shows what is possible with experimentation and provides a possible theoretical framework, through my discussion of delivery, for evaluating those experiments. Ultimately, using my experiences with Skype and Google Docs as a model, I argue that by focusing on how choices about delivering tutorials coincide with the values of a center, writing centers can critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of approaches to distance tutoring.

DELIVERY AND THE WRITING CENTER

Recently the rhetorical canon of delivery—originally developed by ancient orators to refer to the physical and embodied performance of speeches—has been revised by compositionists attempting to integrate rhetorical theory, composition, and new media studies. In her edited collection *Delivering College Composition: The Fifth Canon*, Kathleen Blake Yancey extends the applications of the canon of delivery to confront the rapid changes in people, spaces, and media faced by college composition. She argues that an articulation of delivery "helps us see that we are indeed at a critical moment in time, one that allows—perhaps even requires—that we take up a closer examination of composition and its delivery" (13). The changes Yancey describes easily can be extended to writing centers in terms of shifting student populations, institutional contexts, and approaches to technology. Moreover, composition scholarship on delivery often cites writing centers as examples of the importance of the physical space. As these writers recognize, where we deliver instruction—in this case, tutorials—matters because it influences the performance and reception of that instruction. Yancey, for example, uses writing centers as a clear example of the implications of physical delivery. She describes the comfortable, informal design of most writing centers and notes that the "site thus creates a different kind of learning than does the classroom; it's a place where peers tutor peers side by side . . . a place where another curriculum, in Steven North's terms, is offered" (11). In the same collection, Todd Taylor's "Design, Delivery, and Narcolepsy" also lauds writing centers as well-designed spaces, both physically and conceptually, for delivering and receiving writing instruction (137). The idea that writing centers circumvent traditional classroom structures (or strictures) to provide an alternative curriculum can be seen, then, as an alternative approach to delivery.

This attention to delivering tutorials should not be mistaken as a one-sided transmission from tutor to student. Instead, when we think about delivery in the ways encouraged by Yancey and others, we should consider the performances and contexts of tutorials—how can we deliver writing center tutorials in a way that displays our values and meets the needs of tutors and students? A current consideration of these issues of delivery in writing center scholarship centers on alternatives to face-to-face tutoring. The introduction of online tutorials and the desire to meet the needs of distance and non-traditional learners have reintroduced questions of physical delivery in writing center scholarship. For example, many scholars and tutors

express anxiety about the inability to replicate face-to-face tutorials in online environments. In her article “Preserving the Rhetorical Nature of Tutoring When Going Online,” Linda Eastmond Bell notes that even synchronous online tutoring tends to be more directive and less dialectic than its face-to-face counterpart (331). E-mail tutoring, she argues, is often reduced to editing because “there is no writer there to remind you that writing is about communicating ideas just as much as it is about the technical transmittance of ideas” (329). In other words, online tutoring presents a challenge of delivery—it becomes too easy to focus on the mere transmission of the tutorial and forget its performative aspects. Thus, if we think of delivery not just as a one-sided transmission but as an engaged performance between two parties, the canon of delivery may help tutors examine ways to use new technologies to have meaningful exchanges with distance writers.

SKYPE AND GOOGLE DOCS IN THE GWC

During tutorials, which are called “consultations” in our GWC, advanced graduate students in Rhetoric and Composition, called “writing consultants,” collaborate with other graduate students from all disciplines at any stage of their projects. The majority of these consultations take place face-to-face. However, because many graduate students commute from nearby areas, have family obligations, or leave campus to complete research, there is also demand for online appointments. For example, during my year as a GWC consultant, I had requests for appointments from graduate students who were completing fieldwork in China, consulting at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and staying at home with a newborn baby. To meet this demand, the co-coordinator of the GWC and I developed an online consultation system during the 2009-2010 academic year that combines Skype and Google Docs.¹

When my co-coordinator and I started to experiment with Skype and Google Docs, we wanted to replicate the meaningful exchanges we experienced during face-to-face appointments. Frustrated by the way e-mail and phone appointments—the previously offered distance options—seemed to run counter to the process-based, collaborative mission of our writing center, we wanted to adopt a system that would best allow us to replicate a face-to-face consultation. We hoped that synchronous video tutoring combined with a shared document that can be viewed in real time would help us accomplish that goal. Within the first few weeks of the semester, we put information about our distance appointment options on our website and suggested Skype and Google Docs to students who e-mailed us requesting email or phone appointments. When students wanted an online appointment, they booked a fifty-minute slot through the regular online scheduling system, which also schedules face-to-face appointments.² We requested on our website that students then e-mail the consultant to let him/her know it would be a Skype tutorial. The consultant then e-mailed the graduate student with the GWC’s Skype name and instructed the student to “call” the tutor when s/he was ready to begin the appointment. The consultant also suggested that the student create a Google Doc of the paper to be shared with the consultant, although e-mailing a document was also an option if the student did not have Google Mail (Gmail).³ During an appointment, the writer can see and hear the consultant because the GWC’s computer is equipped with a webcam. In most cases, the writer also has a webcam, which allows the consultant to see the writer as well.⁴ The appointment then proceeds much like a face-to-face consultation. The consultant and graduate student discuss the writing, often beginning by reading aloud, and when the writer makes changes to the paper in Google Docs, the consultant can see and respond to the changes in real time.

We experienced three clear benefits to using a combination of Skype and Google Docs to deliver online consultations. First, it allows consultants to replicate face-to-face appointments when both parties have access to a webcam (which many students have built into their laptops). In fact, my co-coordinator and I often remark that our relationships with students whom we work with via Skype are not significantly different from our relationships with students who visit the GWC in person. Second, both Skype and Google Docs are free programs when both parties have a (free) Skype account. The GWC, like many writing centers, has a limited budget, so free software was an important requirement when considering how to deliver tutorials. Third, the programs are familiar to both the consultants and the graduate students. Many of our clients are international students who already use Skype to communicate with friends and family overseas. We also have

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Tweet WLN? “Like” WLN?

If your writing center and/or tutors have Twitter accounts and/or Facebook pages, we invite you to “follow,” “tweet,” “like,” and/or “post” on our Twitter account and Facebook wall. We invite you to post news of your writing center, photos, online resources, conference notices, other news you wish to share, and links other writing center folk would be interested in.



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Writing Lab Newsletter



International Writing Center Blog



“Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders” is a blog intended for those of you in writing centers around the world to share blog entries, photos, questions, resources, and comments about topics relevant to your work. There is a link on the WLN home page, or connect directly to it at <<https://www.writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/>>.

yet to encounter a client who does not already use Gmail and Google Docs. Even if a client were new to Skype, the software is easy to download, and making a “call” on Skype merely requires students to add the GWC to a contact list and press a green phone icon. These last two benefits—free and familiar—make Skype and Google Docs what Daniel Anderson calls “low-bridge technologies,” or free applications that require only entry-level skills. Anderson argues that the “entry-level nature of low-bridge technologies ameliorates difficulties that can shut down flow, but the challenge of composing with unfamiliar forms opens pathways to creativity and motivation” (44). Thus, low-bridge technologies like Skype and Google Docs are ideal for delivering online consultations because they do not disrupt the flow of the appointment and may also encourage consultant and writer creativity by facilitating conversation and collaboration in a digital environment.

In fact, Anderson’s suggestion that low-bridge technologies may encourage creativity marks an important—and perhaps beneficial—difference between face-to-face and online consultations in the GWC. When students come to the GWC in person, they most often bring a printed copy of their work—even if it’s a fifty-page dissertation chapter. They write revisions over the existing text, a text that often seems somewhat final and inflexible because of its immutable state as a printed document. In turn, the revisions we discuss can seem daunting. In contrast, over Google Docs, students seem more likely to see their writing as a work-in-progress. They are free to make changes in the moment and see how those changes affect their writing. Moreover, Google Docs keeps an easily-accessible and color-coded record of changes made to a document and allows users to revert to previous versions; therefore, students can make changes and experiment without fear of losing track of their original writing. This feature also serves as a visual record of the process of writing, something that can be reassuring to graduate writers who often think polished prose should come naturally to aspiring academics.

In my experience, more original writing and drafting happens during these Skype/Google Docs sessions than in many face-to-face sessions. One student I worked with regularly would often say, “What if I just . . .?” and his voice would trail off while he wrote for several minutes in Google Docs, and I watched the text change on the screen. These long periods of students writing happen less often when I meet with students face-to-face, perhaps because students still typically bring paper copies of their work to in-person appointments. I think also that in these moments the distance in distance consultations can be valuable. That is, writers can take advantage of the physical distance and slip into a more natural writing mode without feeling like the consultant is left waiting. The writer can simply ignore the Skype window for a while in a way that it’s difficult to do when the consultant is sitting a foot away.

The ability to watch the writer type, delete, and rephrase his ideas on the screen also gave me invaluable insight as a consultant. I could see which word choices he struggled with and which ideas he recast several times before moving on. When we discussed what he wrote, these observations allowed me to zero in on choices I had seen him consider and to tailor my questions to specific portions of his writing that had either come very easily or had been harder for him to draft. We could discuss the changes he made as well as his composing process—how, precisely, he made those changes in the moment. So, while Skype/Google Docs consultations can closely mimic the best aspects of face-to-face consulting, this alternative form of delivery also allows for new types of interactions and writing strategies that allow consultants and writers to acknowledge the flexibility of writing and the importance of experimentation as part of revision.

CALL ME, MAYBE?

Of course, Skype and Google Docs also have their limitations. In addition to glitches, such as Skype dropping audio or text being slow to appear in Google Docs, there are two challenges our GWC faced when we first implemented these programs. First, we were slow to integrate our Skype offerings into our GWC. For example, at first the online scheduling system that we used for all appointments did not reflect our ability to offer Skype and Google Docs appointments, particularly because we used those programs in an ad hoc manner. Thus, there was no way for students to indicate clearly at the time of scheduling that they wanted a Skype appointment; we had to depend on them to e-mail the consultant to request a Skype appointment instead of the default face-to-face appointment. Thus, there were miscommunications that resulted in a consultant waiting in person for a student who was, in turn, waiting on Skype. I also seemed to experience more no-shows or last minute cancelations via Skype, perhaps because the consultations seemed less formal or required less effort to cancel than face-to-face sessions. Finding ways to promote our distance consultation options also continues to be a challenge, as our typical means of outreach—e-mails, workshops, and primarily word of mouth—do not always reach the students who are away from campus and would most benefit from our services.

Second, Skype and Google Docs consultations seemed to increase the requests I received to review students' work via e-mail after consultations. At the end of a face-to-face consultation, the writer stops working on his or her piece and physically leaves the room. At the end of an online consultation, the writer often continues working and—presumably—both the writer and the consultant are still online. Writers seemed to find it easier to e-mail “just one more draft” after an online visit, perhaps because the mode of communication had been electronic all along. To manage this problem, I tried to be more intentional about discussing with writers how Skype and Google Docs fit in with the overall philosophy of the center. For example, when I declined these e-mail requests, I did so with an explanation of the GWC's goals to collaborate with writers. Students usually respected this rationale and often chose to schedule follow-up appointments for the next week. Above all, while Skype and Google Docs' association with other forms of online communication like e-mail at first posed a challenge, it also provided an opportunity to discuss the mission of the GWC and to talk to writers explicitly about what happens in a synchronous session that is not possible over e-mail.

CONCLUSION

As Grutsch McKinney notes in her column, “Twenty-first century writing centers will likely be marked by the plurality of approaches to support writing, not just how they use technology to replicate established ways” (12). While our GWC set out to replicate face-to-face consultations by using Skype and Google Docs, we soon found that it is, indeed, a new approach to collaboration with its own affordances and challenges. Experimenting with these technologies also forced us to think about delivery when we provide consultations. We needed to articulate that our GWC values mutual exchange, a friendly and informal atmosphere, and a focus on the process of writing in order to discover what technologies might best allow us to deliver those experiences to writers. And the more we attempt to combine our strengths of delivering writing consultations with new resources like Skype, blogs, social networking sites, and other digital environments, the more we will strengthen our ability to understand the unique affordances and constraints these environments offer composers and writing centers. ♦

Notes

1 This system of using Skype and Google Docs is still in place at Penn State's GWC. However, there is now a dedicated distance consultant, and the GWC is working toward integrating distance consulting more fully into its overall operation.

2 Students can begin scheduling appointments on Friday afternoons for the following week.

3 Because Penn State's GWC now has a dedicated distance consultant and separate scheduling system for Skype appointments, this formerly clunky process of requiring many e-mails has been somewhat streamlined.

4 Typically, the GWC only schedules one appointment at a time. As a result, there was no noise interference during Skype consultations. Centers with multiple appointments at once could use headphones or headsets with microphones to cut down on background noise.



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TUTOR'S COLUMN

CAN I HELP YOU WITH THAT?: DIRECTIVE TUTORING AND THE STATUS OF CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION IN THE WRITING CENTER

◆ Ari Cupefain
Yeshiva University
New York, NY

Two college students are talking about an upcoming essay for their Psychology class. The first discusses his initial research and general plans for the essay, eloquently articulating a fairly comprehensive outline. The second student is impressed with his friend's idea, so much so that he decides to write his essay about the very same thing. He quickly rushes to a nearby library computer, eager to reproduce the idea before he forgets the conversation. Sounds like plagiarism, right? And it is. In academia, a fundamental tenet of writing is for the writing to be the writer's own; this example is a textbook violation of any given institution's academic integrity policy. But suppose we insert an intermediary in this hypothetical situation, or more specifically, a writing center tutor. If a tutor had a session with one student, named Student A, and then a subsequent session with another student, Student B, from the same class, would the tutor be justified in applying information obtained from the session with Student A to the session with Student B?

The problem is not limited to the extreme case of merely regurgitating Student A's work, where the tutor simply dictates the earlier work as Student B transcribes what he is told. Such a practice is certainly unethical, completely antithetical to the role of writing center tutor and is not beneficial to the tutee. Instead, the question of applying information from a previous session to a future session extends to other, more subtle situations. I decided to discuss such a scenario in a tutor meeting about sensitive and ambiguous issues that tutors might encounter in the Writing Center. The situations were outlined in vignette form, and as a group we discussed how best to handle the scenario. The relevant vignette is as follows:

A writer comes into the Writing Center with an excellent Psychology paper where he cogently develops a novel view of the bystander effect, incorporating quotations that clearly support his assertion. You spend thirty minutes going over borderline grammar rules and sentence structure while admiring the masterpiece in front of you before finally telling the writer that there isn't much more to do. The next session, you have a student from the same class writing on the same topic. Although his essay is well written, you notice his thesis could be challenged by the previous writer's essay. You don't think you would have realized this contradiction without having first read the other essay, yet now that you have, you see a blatant contradiction in the new writer's paper.

Since the tutor only detects this mistake based on knowledge from the previous session with the first student, the question becomes whether she would be allowed to alert the writer to his mistake. This dilemma hinges on two fundamental questions. First, should a tutor ever alert the writer to an error in the subject matter of an essay? Is a directive approach ever warranted with regards to the content of the essay, or should the tutor's solitary focus be to guide the writer through the writing process? Second, what is the status of information gathered by a tutor from a previous session? Can this information be used in future tutoring sessions, or does such an action constitute a form of plagiarism? The first question addresses a familiar challenge. Many tutors experience the tension between guiding a writer and instructing a writer. This issue has been recognized and discussed extensively in writing center scholarship in an attempt to outline the tutor's "jurisdiction" in a session, namely to what extent she can direct a tutee's writing. The traditional writing center approach has been what Shamon and Burns call "a student-centered, non-directive method," (135) where tutors are taught to withdraw from the active writing process, and instead to apply a more inquisitive approach where they ask probing questions encouraging writers to arrive at their own ideas. While motivated by noble reasons—namely to banish any hint of plagiarism from the Writing Center—a strict adherence to the dogma of non-directive tutoring may detract from the tutor's ability to teach effectively during the session. Indeed, as Carrick notes, "when writing center practitioners enforce the strict policy of non-directive tutoring, we disingenuously withhold ways of composing that professional writers depend on" (66), and similarly, Boyd and Haibek relate in a previous Tutor's Column that writers will naturally be frustrated when a non-directive approach is employed where a directive approach would be more appropriate (14).

As Shamon and Burns explain, directive instruction is hardly foreign in disciplines outside of writing. They focus primarily on musical education, where expert musicians teach less experienced students in a directive manner. They advocate in favor of using this method in the writing

center to allow for greater instruction through modeling, or what the authors refer to as “rhetorical process”. This sentiment is reiterated by Carrick’s notion of “co-authorship” in the writing center, an idea akin to Shamoon and Burns’ concept of rhetorical process.

The question of applying information from previous writing center sessions to later sessions lacks extensive investigation in the literature, yet still presents an ethically gray area in the writing center. Our campus has a relatively small undergraduate population of approximately one thousand students. Because of this, we will often meet with multiple students who are taking the same course and working on the same assignment. While many of these essay topics are broad, and no two papers are alike, some address very similar topics, often dealing with subjects that tutors know little about. During our tutor meeting, we quickly noted the delicate nature of this situation. On the one hand, we have a responsibility as tutors to address any logical inconsistencies in the writer’s argument in order to augment the quality of her paper. Indeed, directive tutoring would suggest that we reveal any inconsistencies so that the writer can learn, in the same way that the master musician would correct the apprentice if she played out of key. On the other hand, however, we generally assume that the writer is the expert on the subject matter of her paper, and we are only the “masters” of the writing process, not the material. This is especially true for knowledge that we obtained from another student during a writing center session considering that the initial writer assumed confidentiality of the session. Balancing these two opposing motivations, we arrived at the following consensus, and summarized our response in our writing center’s blog:

As a group, we decided that there was an ethical issue with using a past writer’s paper to help a current writer. . . . That being said, it would be ethical to question the writer [about] what the author says later on to try and gauge whether he read the whole text and understood it correctly. It would also be a good idea to tell the writer [to] find more support for his claim, or discreetly suggest that he re-read the author’s argument.

This proposed solution seems viable when encountering a situation of drawing on information from past writing center sessions. But this analysis is not limited to the case of information learned from earlier sessions; the underlying principle can be applied in a more universal way. The tutor’s objective is to provide as much help as possible to the writer while remaining within the confines of academic integrity. This can be complicated, however, in ethically ambiguous situations where it is difficult to ascertain what falls within the framework of appropriate writing center pedagogy. A useful tactic in such situations is to assess whether the tutee would leave the session feeling as if she developed the essay on her own, or merely as if she was spoon-fed the material.

The tutor’s main focus should be for the writer to retain control of the paper. Even when employing a directive approach, the tutor should not make changes without prior or simultaneous collaboration with the writer. Rather, she should make suggestions where both tutor and writer act as vital contributors to the development of the essay and the writer has the ultimate decision. The tutor must ensure that any revision to the essay could not have transpired without the writer’s active involvement, and follow-up outside of the writing center should be encouraged. Although somewhat amorphous, these considerations can be used as a general, practical and quick methods that are applicable to a wide range of unintuitive writing center situations vis-à-vis academic integrity. ♦

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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

April 4, 2013: Iowa Writing Centers Consortium, in Fayette, IA

Contact: Caroline Ledebor: ledeboerc@uii.edu; Conference website: <www.uii.edu/TWCC>.

April 5-6, 2013: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in California, PA

Contact: Kurt Kearcher: kearcher@calu.edu; (724-938-4585); Conference website: <mawca2013.wix.com/calu>.

April 12-13, 2013: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Clarion, PA

Contact: Chris McCarrick: (814-393-2739); Conference website: <ecwca.org/annual-conference/>.

April 13, 2013: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Sacramento, CA

Contact: William Macauley: wmacaulayjr@unr.edu; Conference website: <www.scc.losrios.edu/Current_Students/Student_Services/Writing_Center/NCWCA2013.htm>.

April 13-14, 2013: Northeastern Writing Centers Association, in Durham, NH

Contact: Harry Denny: dennyh@stjohns.edu; (718-390-41580); Conference website: <northeastwca.org>.

May 31, 2013: Canadian Writing Centres Association, in Victoria, BC, Canada

Contact: <proposals@uvic.ca>; Conference website: <casdwacr.wordpress.com/2012/11/05/cwca-call-for-papers/>.

October 17-19, 2013: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Skokie, IL

Contact: Carol Martin: <chair@midwest-writingcenters.org> and Rachel Holtz: <treasurer@midwestwritingcenters.org>; MWCA website: <http://www.midwestwritingcenters.org/>.