

# THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E W T T E R

Volume 38, Number 1-2

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

Sept./Oct. 2013

## – FROM THE EDITOR –

As we plunge into the slightly chaotic flurry of a new academic year, the *Writing Lab Newsletter* begins Volume 38 with articles describing new software, a changing demographic among students, and a collaborative program that teaches information literacy. To train tutors using multimodal tutorials, Brad Hughes and Melissa Tedrowe offer their free software program for your use. It allows your experienced tutors to hone their skills by helping to develop the content and presentation.

As the number of non-native English speakers seeking tutorials continues to rise, John Hall provides much-needed statistics and discusses the impact of this population on writing center work. As Hall points out, the long-term impact of this growing population will affect both the identity and mission of writing centers, so it's necessary to think about resources writing centers will need. Another group who seek writing center assistance are students writing research papers. To help them acquire better information literacy skills, Carolyn White Gamtso and colleagues describe the cross-departmental partnership they developed. Their program brings together librarians, First Year Composition instructors, and writing tutors to help student writers become competent researchers. Finally, Bernardo Feitosa shares with other tutors his insights into recognizing and working with students dealing with cognitive overload as they write. Feitosa invites other tutors to contact him and continue this discussion.

So find a quiet corner, get a cup of your favorite beverage, and enjoy some interesting reading.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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## INTRODUCING CASE SCENARIO/ CRITICAL READER BUILDER: CREATING COMPUTER SIMULATIONS TO USE IN TUTOR EDUCATION

◆ Bradley Hughes  
*University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Madison, WI*  
and Melissa Tedrowe  
*University of Denver  
Denver, CO*

Most of us remember our first days as a writing center tutor—the eager wish to help another writer; the anxiety about whether we'll know exactly what kind of help to offer (or withhold) and when; the desperate hope that, if nothing else, we'll uphold the Hippocratic oath to “do no harm.” During tutor education we discussed articles about tutoring, watched tutoring videos, participated in role plays with peers, observed tutors and writers in the writing center, and discussed and wrote about those observations. These activities certainly prepared us for the important work we're about to take on, and yet when we embark on our first few weeks of sessions, when we sit side by side with real writers who come bearing real papers and problems and questions, we may find ourselves wishing our training offered something more—namely, a more realistic and immediate, yet ultimately forgiving, way to gain experience at tutoring before we're doing it for real.

## CASE SCENARIO/CRITICAL READER BUILDER (CS/CR)

For the past three years at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center, we have collaborated with talented colleagues from the Academic Technology

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

group from the Division of Information Technology. Together, we have been developing a web-based tool called CS/CR Builder (for Case Scenario and Critical Reader) that offers just that kind of immersive, risk-free tutoring experience. With CS/CR, you can easily create computer simulations in which tutors practice their craft—interacting with a writer around a piece of writing-in-progress (that's the "Case Scenario" part of the title). CS/CR also allows you, the designer, to create critical-reading activities (the "Critical Reader" half of the title) that give tutors practice analyzing texts like assignments (to figure out, for example, the central intellectual task in an assignment) or papers (to learn to see strengths and potential in drafts as well as to explore options for what to focus on within the tutorial).

From the start we imagined CS/CR as a complement and addition to, rather than a replacement for, existing methods for training tutors. As part of their homework before a staff meeting or tutor-education class, for example, new tutors, alone or in pairs, could work through a simulation, and then during the meeting or class discuss their experiences with the simulation and imagine alternative approaches. We have been committed to making CS/CR as user-friendly as possible; we want it to be something that writing center tutors and directors, however tech savvy they are, feel comfortable using. In that same spirit, we have been looking forward to sharing this tool, at no cost, with the wider writing center community. In what follows we'll tell you more about how CS/CR works, why you should try it, and how you, in the comfort of your very own writing center, can take it for a spin.

## HOW IT WORKS

### *For learners*

For new tutors, working through a CS/CR simulation is not unlike the "choose-your-own-adventure" books that many of us remember. As you'll discover, CS/CR is so flexible that simulations can take many forms, but here is one of the most common. People using a simulation (the learners) are cast in the role of a tutor (see Figure 1). Learners click through a series of screens that introduce a tutorial situation and then some kind of challenge; this challenge typically includes several dialogue turns with a student-writer, and possibly a pdf of a writing assignment or student draft. Throughout the simulation there are several decision points when the learners must decide what to focus on, what to ask next, how to respond to a writer, or how to help with a particular writing concern. The answers that learners select will elicit some kind of feedback, perhaps from a friendly mentor saying, "Great job, keep moving forward," or "Please rethink your answer," with an explanation of why a choice may not be the best. The student-writer in the simulation may offer feedback as well: "That was helpful," "I don't understand," or "Can you write that for me?" After each decision point, the learners move on, continuing to explore the tutoring adventure and making choices. In this process, they gain an initial sense of some—just some—of the complexities of real-life tutoring and have a chance to explore a few of the paths that real tutorials can take. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate typical questions or decision points for a learner working through a CS/CR simulation; the question in Figure 2 asks a new tutor to identify the central task in a writing assignment, and the question in Figure 3 asks a new tutor to identify strengths in a student-writer's draft.

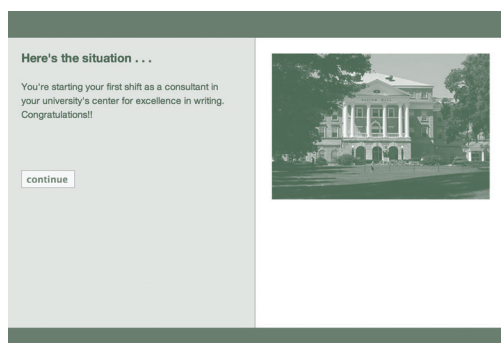


Fig 1. Immersing a learner in a tutoring situation.

### *For designers/authors*

One of the key things to remember about CS/CR Builder is that it's an authoring tool; this means that, much like PowerPoint or Word, the program puts you, the author or designer, in the driver's seat (that's the "Builder" part of the title). As you create a scenario using CS/CR, you'll make choices about the focus of the tutoring scenario, terminology, types of assignments, and typical challenges that correspond to your local writing center context; the pos-

**The paper assignment**

Here's the paper assignment. Please be sure to read it carefully, and then answer the question on the right. Remember - Don't be afraid to explore other potential answers.

---

**Introduction to Visual Culture**  
Paper One

Conduct a stylistic analysis of a visual image of your choosing and make an argument about how it works to inform or persuade the viewer. What message does the image convey? How does it get that message across? Your answers to these questions should go beyond the obvious, telling readers something they would not notice on first glance.

The image you write about may come from any media format: CD jackets, advertisements, event posters, political flyers, even food packaging all can

**A question about this assignment**

Of the four passages highlighted on this assignment, which passage is key to the central task of this writing assignment? Everything highlighted is important, but what does the student-writer have to be sure to do in her/his draft?

Fig. 2. Sample question about a writing assignment in a CS/CR simulation.

**The draft**

THE DRAFT

The advertisement is for Secret, a women's anti-perspirant. It is a full page, 8 1/2 by 11 ad. At a glance the first thing you see is a model in a summer business suit. She is wearing a red suit that looks more like a long sports coat. At about 5' 11" she is tall but not too tall that she seems out of

**A question about strengths in the draft**

What's working well in this draft? What do you see as strengths?

Check all that apply.

close, detailed observations about the ad

beginnings of some interesting analysis, especially about the representation of gender

excellent paragraphing

comprehensive look at lots of parts of the ad

Fig. 3. Sample question about a student's draft.

sibilities are limited only by your imagination. In this way, you—and by this we mean the writing center director, experienced tutor, and new tutor alike, all of whom can be CS/CR designers—can create wonderfully rich, immersive learning experiences

As with any new technology, there's a learning curve here, but we think you'll be pleasantly surprised how easy CS/CR is to use. As you create your first simulations, you'll need to learn some basic concepts about the program's functions and conceptual design, but these should feel relatively familiar. Essentially you'll be designing a series of screens and then creating links between those screens. It's easy to build in some simple branching so that as learners make different choices, they arrive at different destination screens. On any screen, it's easy to insert text (for explanations or background), images (photos or graphics in a jpeg format), audio (mp3), video (flv format), dialogue, links to a page on the web, a pdf (of, for example, a sample writing assignment or student draft), links to a YouTube video, and questions (multiple-choice, short answer, fill in the blank, select all that apply). Figure 4 shows the options available through the insert menu. When you're creating a simulation, you save it as a CSB project file. You can then preview what it will look like for a learner and, when you're satisfied with your simulation, make it available for learners to use on the web (you will need access to a web server for this purpose). As mentioned above, it's not only directors or writing center professionals who can use CS/CR to create simulations. Writing center directors can invite their tutors to become CS/CR authors themselves as part of their ongoing tutor education. What better way for tutors to share and stretch what they know than by their collaborating in teams and engaging in an extended iterative process in order to create challenging, authentic simulations for other tutors to explore and work through?

## LEARNING THEORIES GUIDING OUR USE OF CS/CR

As we've developed CS/CR, we've been guided by several key theories explaining how people become successful practitioners within a particular community, principles we believe should influence how we design tutor education. One of these is situated learning, which involves just what its name implies: placing a learner in a specific role with particular goals. Situated learning describes exactly what CS/CR simulations offer new tutors: rather than reading or talking about tutoring, or watching someone else tutor, within a CS/CR simulation new tutors practice a form of tutoring in a limited, controlled environment. This experience allows tutors to develop schema for talking with writers and for addressing common challenges. In short, by giving new tutors a chance to "participate" in tutoring, simulations can accelerate new tutors' learning and their entrance into the community of tutoring practice (Wenger). The educational theorist James Gee labels this kind of learning—learning in order to perform a complex task—"situated cognition." As Gee explains, "Knowing is a matter of being able to participate centrally in practice, and learning is a matter of changing patterns of participation (with concomitant changes in identity)" ("New Literacy Studies" 181).

Although we've come to believe in the power of CS/CR to deliver meaningful situated learning experiences and we know that games and simulations have great teaching and learning potential (Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us*), we readily acknowledge that the experience of working through a computer simulation can never match the complexities of real-life tutoring—every experienced tutor knows that there's no single right choice in a conversation, and that tutorials never go according to

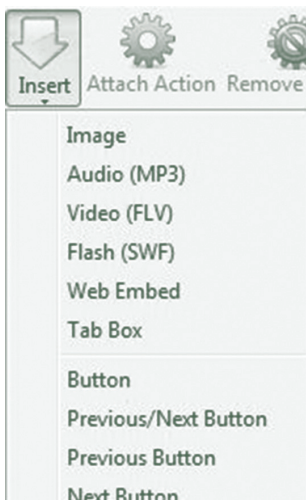


Fig. 4. Options for inserting multimedia when designing a simulation in CS/CR.

a script. William Ramsey makes this point in a way that resonates with every experienced tutor: “I’ve never found a protocol, template, or fixed heuristic schema that survives more than a minute of writing center work” (qtd. in Geller et al. 22). But we’re convinced that it’s OK that simulations are more limited. By limiting and simplifying possibilities, authors of simulations can focus a learner’s attention on a few key skills at a time, introducing more complexity over time. And research tells us that when it comes to learning, especially learning skills that depend on “deeper cognitive processing,” what matters is that the simulated experience remains faithful to the central intellectual task, that it has what’s called functional fidelity to the task someone is learning how to do, that it has “realistic cause-effect relationships”—not that it has the “look and feel” of the task, or physical fidelity (Romiszowski 476; see also definitions of fidelity in de Jong 219). Such functional fidelity is exactly what CS/CR can offer new tutors if simulations are carefully designed. By working through select situations, in a structure and at a pace that the designer controls, even when the choices and complexity are far more limited than they are in actual tutoring, new tutors gain skills and confidence they can use in real tutoring situations. Rather than being a liability, the inevitable reductiveness of a simulation—with its limited choices and pre-programmed paths, and with few of the myriad complexities of actual tutoring—may be just what learners need at certain stages of their education. Simulations help new tutors gain practice with tutorials and build foundational skills in reading assignments and drafts, interacting with student-writers, and working with writers on planning and revising.

We also know that, in order to succeed at a new, complex task, learners need regular feedback and modeling—a learning concept known as scaffolding (Schutt). So within CS/CR simulations we’ve designed so far, we incorporate frequent and varied forms of guidance. To provide this feedback, in some of our simulations we’ve chosen to include a mentor—in the form of an experienced tutor—who welcomes learners, offers advice, and gives feedback as new tutors make choices about working with student-writers. New tutors also get feedback from the student-writer through the writer’s comments, cooperation (or lack of cooperation), and facial expressions. And although we haven’t chosen to use it (so far), CS/CR has the capability to include scoring. As new tutors gain experience with simulations, we deliberately reduce the amount of scaffolding for their learning built into the simulations: there is less frequent or no assistance from the mentor, and all forms of feedback come less frequently.

### TRYING CS/CR FOR YOURSELF

To see sample simulations, please visit a website we’ve created for the writing center community—<[writing.wisc.edu/cscr](http://writing.wisc.edu/cscr)>. The first sample, “Working with a Writer,” revolves around an undergraduate student named Patrick who’s working on a five-page analysis of an advertisement for an introductory visual culture course. Although he’s glad to have something drafted, Patrick thinks his paper needs quite a bit of work; what will you, the new tutor, say? You’ll have choices, and help along the way. After you work through this simulation, we welcome your feedback. This sample is intentionally simple, designed primarily to illustrate some of the capabilities of CS/CR in a short simulation. Remember, if you’re not a fan of some of the details we’ve chosen in that particular simulation or if you have an idea for how to do it better, that’s actually a great reaction! That’s what CS/CR is all about—not using scenarios that others have created, but thinking critically and creatively about ways to use this authoring tool and then designing wonderful scenarios that work for you and your center. The second writing center sample there (“Challenging Conference Beginnings”) takes a very different approach, encouraging new tutors to expand their repertoire of options and explore their appropriateness in particular situations, rather than seeking one correct path. If you’d like to experiment with a free beta copy of CS/CR to use within your writing center or tutor-education course, please click on “Getting CS/CR” from our website. And be sure to explore the “Using CS/CR” and “Designing Simulations” sections. They offer step-by-step instructions and advice for getting started on designing a scenario or critical-reading activity, including detailed video demonstrations of how to author with the tool. ♦

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## THE IMPACT OF RISING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT USAGE OF WRITING CENTERS

◆ *John Hall*  
*Boston University*  
*Boston, MA*

Two years ago, the ESL Specialist in my writing center had an intriguing conversation with one of her regular clients. The client, a Korean graduate student, remarked that she and her international friends who used our College of Communication (COM) writing center sometimes referred to it as “the ESL Center.” Apparently, the Korean student and her friends had found us to be welcoming and helpful to many non-native-English-speaking (NNES) students.<sup>1</sup> But, the tutor and I wondered, did we want to be seen as “the ESL Center”? Even as the remark validated our desire to aid NNES students, we were troubled by her remark’s implication that some students may view our primary mission as assisting NNES students. Our writing center has always helped many international students, both at graduate and undergraduate levels, due to the heavy recruitment of students overseas. However, in recent years, the proportion of NNES clients in our center has risen dramatically. In the fall 2010 semester, NNES students constituted nearly three-fourths of all visits, up from about half of all visits a few years earlier. As I looked around our center and checked our appointment scheduler, I realized our tutors worked with NNES writers much of the day. Students from China and Korea, in particular, filled our appointments and walk-in hours—with many returning almost daily. The average NNES student came in for 7.2 visits (a 30-minute slot counts as one visit, an hour-long slot counts as two visits) in fall 2010, while the average native-English-speaking (NES) student had 2.1 visits.

Having spoken with other writing center directors and tutors at national and regional writing center conferences, I know my experience is not unique. Some writing centers are experiencing an unprecedented increase in international students, as U.S. schools expand their recruitment of “full-tuition-paying” students from abroad. This shift in writing centers’ demographics has many consequences—some of which may dramatically affect our centers’ clientele and practices. Some consequences may affirm our value—for instance, this growth has increased demand for writing center services. But NNES students often have different needs from NES students—both in terms of the frequency and content of their visits. Are we prepared to meet their needs? Are tutors adequately trained to work with NNES students from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds? Will other students find themselves shut out because of the increased demand from international students? How will writing centers handle this increasing demand at a time when their budgets may be flat or shrinking?

As Martha Davis Patton notes in a 2011 article on resources for NNES students at the University of Missouri, “a network of robust services” is required to support this expanding group of writers—including a writing center, a writing program with sections designed for NNES students, a WAC program, and an international student affairs office. “Not only are these services under-funded and staff under-prepared to serve the special needs of L2 students on our campus, there is little connection between and among campus units associated with teaching of writing,” she writes. At colleges nationwide, writing centers are just one piece of the NNES resources needed to aid these students to enable them to meet the linguistic goals of a rigorous English-based college education. Writing center leaders must grapple with these issues now so we can strategically adapt to the demographic shift. Otherwise, we risk being saddled with an increasingly difficult task as American colleges look for more students (and tuition income) abroad, where the demand for higher education exceeds their native universities’ capacity and economic changes expand access to American schools.<sup>2</sup>

### STATISTICS ON THE INCREASED NNES STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND WRITING CENTER USAGE

Recent statistics at U.S. colleges reflect the broader international student demographic trends described above.<sup>3</sup> According to “Open Doors,” an Institute of International Education annual report, more than 764,000 international students attended U.S. institutions in 2011-12, a 35 percent increase since 2005-06. Students from China, India, and South Korea dominated, with Chinese student enrollment in the U.S. nearly doubling since 2008.<sup>4</sup> At one large public university, Indiana University, undergraduate ESL usage of its writing centers grew from 23 percent of undergraduate appointments in 2006 to 32 percent in 2011.<sup>5</sup> The University of Missouri reported a 79



## New and Old on the *WLN* website

### *WLN Reviewers*

Our writing center colleagues who have reviewed articles appearing in *WLN* offer important professional service that helps to maintain high standards of writing center scholarship. We offer our thanks and appreciation to these reviewers who worked with authors during the 2012-2013 academic year and have listed them on the *WLN* website: <[writinglabnewsletter.org/submissions\\_review.php](http://writinglabnewsletter.org/submissions_review.php)>.

### *Studies of WLN*

Other new additions to the website are several studies of *WLN*: <[https://writinglabnewsletter.org/other\\_studies.php](https://writinglabnewsletter.org/other_studies.php)>:

- Kim Ballard and Rick Anderson's "The Writing Lab Newsletter: A History of Collaboration"
- Michael Pemberton's "The Writing Lab Newsletter as History: Tracing the Growth of a Scholarly Community"
- Molly Phelan and Jessica Weber's "Our Documented Growth as a Field and Community: An Analysis of the Writing Lab Newsletter."

### *Other WLN Website Contents*

Plus, the *WLN* website contains guidelines and suggestions for submissions, a page on which to manage your subscription, open archives of all 37 previous volumes of *WLN*, a link to the blog for international writing centers, links to the *WLN* Facebook and Twitter pages, the most current Tutor's Column, and under "Related Stuff" (<https://writinglabnewsletter.org/other.php>) are archives of #WCCChats, some awards and tributes, and "Great Moments in Writing Center History" (cartoons that appeared in the very early days of *WLN*, drawn by Bill Demaree).

percent increase in two years among undergraduate international students in its College of Arts and Science (Davis Patton). At Boston University, which is private and educates more than 33,000 students each year, including over 5,500 international students, the number of undergraduate international students has tripled in the past several years. As of 2012, international students represented 18 percent of the freshman class. The BU fall 2012 freshman class had a 253% increase in international applicants from the previous year. (At the graduate level, enrollment numbers have been steadier, with about 19 percent international.) This boom in undergraduate international students has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in their usage of our writing center. In 2007, NNES student visits amounted to 50 percent of our overall visits. By the fall of 2010, 73 percent of our visits were with NNES students. The numbers starkly reflected what I had seen first-hand: We had become a de facto NNES resource center. By debating what these demographic changes mean for individual writing centers' philosophies and practices, administrators and tutors can determine how best to adapt to such dramatic shifts, especially when other economic pressures are already reducing or stretching higher education resources.

## CONSEQUENCES OF THE GROWTH IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT USAGE

The increase in this international student cohort in writing centers has multiple consequences. Because NNES students often want longer—and more frequent—sessions than native English speakers here, the NNES-student increase leaves even fewer available hours for NES students. In our center, we allow students to choose whether to come for a half-hour visit or an hour-long visit. In most cases, students who choose an hour-long visit are non-native English speakers, and they often return for additional sessions during the week (until 2011, we allowed up to three hours per week for each student). As noted earlier, the average NNS student came in for 7.2 visits (counted in 30-minute slots) in fall 2010, while the average native-English-speaking (NES) student had 2.1 visits. So NNES students took up far more of our writing center's available time than NES students did, even though individual NES students outnumbered NNES students (208 to 163).

Sessions with NNES students also often involve more directive tutoring than with NES students. In her dissertation on successful methods of tutoring NNES students, Elise Joy Bonza Geither summarized several studies (Powers 1993; Clark 2001; Blau and Hall 2002; Thonus 2004; Weigle and Nelson 2004; Williams 2004; Xu 2006) that show that in sessions with NNES students, tutors often use directive methods and line-by-line discussion to help NNES writers clarify their work. This directive approach may lead to more remedial assistance than the higher-level writing support at the heart of most writing centers' missions. Some writing center theorists and practitioners argue that this directive approach emphasizes error correction more than idea clarification. Paul Kei Matsuda and Michelle Cox note that "studies of error gravity generally show that professors tend to react more negatively to global errors" than to local errors (2009). However, I have argued (Blau and Hall 2002), as has Sharon Myers (2003), that this sentence-level instruction is an effective and essential pedagogical technique for many NNES writers—particularly among those with a weaker grasp of writing in English.

Finally, writing centers' identities may change as their demographics change. The rise in NNES students could lead to a new (and possibly undesirable) image of the writing center—among administration, faculty, and students—as the place where only NNES students go for help, instead of the center as a resource for all writers. As one of our tutors wrote in a survey, "Our center is very ESL-centric, but because the university does not offer these students any other option, I don't really think we have a choice. It is unfortunate that ESL students often take the place of the College of Communications (COM) undergrads who need us, but I don't think we can turn ESL students away because they literally have nowhere else to go."

## IMMEDIATE IMPACTS ON OUR WRITING CENTER

The COM Writing Center, which I oversee, targets communication students; the two other main writing centers on campus serve many of the other students at Boston University. The College of Communication pays all costs associated with the COM Writing Center, so it behooves us to concentrate our resources on students enrolled in communication classes. But in the fall of 2010, communication majors comprised only 4 percent

of our clients. Of our NNES clients, 68 percent majored in something other than communication. The possible adverse consequences of this dramatic shift in our writing center and elsewhere concerned me. Were some students getting shut out? We do have “walk-in” slots, but those are limited. In our end-of-the-semester fall 2010 survey, a majority of the respondents said they were “usually” able to get an appointment when they wanted, with a few noting that sometimes they could not. (This tally omits students who never used the writing center because appointments were too difficult to get.)

In spring 2011, driven by my concerns, I changed the weekly limit from three to two hours per week for all students. I hoped to see more communication students using our center than had been possible before. (I considered also restricting some periods to only COM students, but eventually decided that might draw a boundary between writers that we might regret.) Post-term statistics revealed that our policy change notably affected our demographics. NES student usage increased, and NNES student usage dropped, compared to the previous spring. We served 11 percent more clients overall in spring 2011. We also saw a similar increase in the number of NNES students in spring 2011—a jump that fit with the broader growth in international students at our school.<sup>6</sup> But the number of appointments with NNES students declined dramatically—we had 33 percent fewer NNES student visits than a year before, while the number of NES student visits rose by 6 percent. Overall, NNES student visits dropped to 55 percent of our total visits from 66 percent (and an even bigger drop from the 73 percent of the previous fall). In fall 2011 NNES student visits climbed up to 68 percent of our overall usage as more international students enrolled at BU. But we were able to serve 100 more students than the previous fall (470 unique clients in fall 2011, compared to 370 in fall 2010), while maintaining approximately the same number of overall visits (1558 total visits in fall 2011, compared to 1602 in fall 2010). I was especially pleased to see that we had worked with 285 COM majors in fall 2011, compared to just 170 COM majors in fall 2010.

## LONG-TERM IMPACTS ON WRITING CENTERS

This nationwide demographic shift has already affected writing centers’ identities and missions. If, as ours did, a writing center reaches the point where a majority of its appointments are with international students (who may represent only a fragment of the student body), the writing center may no longer serve all writers; rather, the center may unintentionally morph into an NNES-student resource center, with implications for both the type of tutoring and the tutor training required.

As these kinds of sessions accrue, the tutors may feel as if they are “cleaning up” NNES students’ writing rather than engaging in a conversation about the writers’ goals, ideas and style. Of course, most writing centers’ philosophies discourage such sentence-level tutoring to avoid “proofreading” requests. But the international students, often driven by their professors’ remarks and grades, are likely going to insist on such intensive help. Naturally, as the international student cohort grows, writing centers will need to increase NNES training for their tutors. (Another Boston University writing center just created a required two-credit course dedicated to NNES training for tutors.)

Some writing centers, including those at our school, have created “ESL Specialist” positions to address the issue. This step can raise the staff’s expertise, if the writing center director has access to tutors with a higher degree in TESOL or a related discipline. However, Elise Geither, in her doctoral dissertation, has questioned whether ESL Specialists really improve how we tutor NNES students. “It was unclear in this study whether employing an ESL Specialist at a writing center was a significant factor in determining session success,” Geither writes in her conclusion. Still, she notes as follows:

Because writing skills are important for academic achievement at universities, and because the writing of NNES students differs significantly from the writing of NES students, it is important to address the needs of these students. As the NNES student population continues to grow on campuses in the U.S., this population will create the need for policy change at universities. . . . Students and instructors are turning for assistance [to university writing centers] and thus, the writing centers would be appropriate places to start change. (86)

## EUROPEAN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

**July 19-22, 2014**

**Frankfurt (Oder), Germany**

**European University**

*"Let's Peer Across Borders:  
Writing Centers in Motion"*

For conference information, see the conference Website: <www.ewca14.eu>. Contacts: Franziska Liebetanz, Dr. Katrin Girgensohn, Schreibzentrum, Europa-Universität Viadrina, phone: +49 335 5534 3730; ewca14@europa-uni.de. The EWCA board plans to host a pre-conference event dedicated to peer tutors that will be prepared by peer tutors from Frankfurt (Oder) and Lodz (Poland) collaboratively.

Send 250-300 word abstracts or workshop and poster proposals to <ewca14@europa-uni.de> by November 30, 2013. All updates will appear on the Bulletin Board of European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) Home Page: <ewca.sabanci-univ.edu/eng/>.

## NORTHEAST WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

**March 1-2, 2014**

**Smithfield, RI**

**Bryant College**

*"Difference and Inclusion: Writing Centers as Sites of Inclusion"*

**Keynote speaker: Vershawn Young**

For CFP information, see the conference website: <northeast-wca14.org>. Proposal deadline: Dec. 4, 2013. Conference Chair: John Hall: <johnhall@bu.edu>. Host: Stephanie Carter: <scarter@bryant.edu>.

## CONCLUSION: A NEW RESOURCE CENTER FOR NNES WRITERS

Some American colleges' academic services run workshop series and conversation groups aimed at helping small groups of NNES students adapt to the writing demands and cultural shifts of American higher education. While those efforts can aid the few NNES students who make the effort to attend them, perhaps writing center directors and higher administrators should advocate for an even more dramatic solution: a resource center dedicated to NNES writers. This solution might allow writing centers at institutions with an NNES resource center to stick to their traditional emphasis on global writing issues.

A dedicated NNES resource center might include the following:

- A designated, flexible space suited to simultaneous sessions, as well as small workshops;
- A staff of ESL Specialists;
- An NNES writing fellows program in coordination with NNES-heavy classes;
- Flexible policies on appointment length;
- Promotion of directive-style tutoring when appropriate;
- Workshops on common issues NNES writers face, such as stating an argument or constructing clear sentences suited to American readers;
- Access to online or print resources geared toward NNES writers;
- Professional development for faculty and tutors on NNES-student writing issues.

Of course, such an NNES resource center has significant costs, given the need for physical space; administration; and a sizeable staff with the necessary NNES expertise and time to run tutoring sessions, in-class discussions, and workshops. Writing center directors, with limited institutional power and budgets, typically must live with their current resources. We make smaller, inexpensive (or even no-cost) changes to adapt to shifting demands, as I did in our center. If we want to address the issue head on, however, we must push for higher administration in our colleges to take money gained from recruiting international students and fund the specialized resources needed to support them. Writing center directors may also find power by banding together. The IWCA and other writing center-affiliated organizations could advocate, perhaps through the Association of American Universities, for a dramatic increase in support for international students. If American colleges and universities are going to open their pools to a larger cohort of students from around the world, these same institutions must supply plenty of lifeguards, life jackets, swimming lessons, and lifeguard training. These demographic changes are likely to continue, and the necessary resources must follow if writing centers are expected to adjust. ♦

### Notes

1 Throughout this article, I use NNES to refer to students for whom English is not their first language. ESL, ELL, L2 or multilingual may be preferred terms elsewhere. However, NNES should serve as readable, consistent shorthand for describing the many different kinds of non-native-English-speaking student writers from overseas who use English in American colleges.

2 See Karin Fischer's article "Number of Foreign Students in U.S. Hit a New High Last Year" in the November 16, 2009 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* for a detailed look at reasons for the large increase in Chinese student enrollment in American colleges. She mentions a variety of economic changes, as well as the desire for an "American-style" education, as some possible causes.

3 Note that statistics for "international" students may include some native English speakers from countries such as Canada, England, Australia, India, and elsewhere. So the "international" student population may be somewhat larger than the population of non-native English speakers. In our writing center, we track students according to their native language, as identified when they register online, so our statistics reflect the precise number of clients who are native English speakers or non-native.

4 *Open Doors 2012 Fast Facts*.

5 Writing Center Director Laura Plummer supplied the University of Indiana's writing center figures.

6 Precise numbers related to these percentages: 11 percent more clients overall in spring 2011 (368



students, compared to 331 in spring 2010); a similar increase in ESL students in spring 2011 (134, compared to 118 in spring 2010).

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## MICHIGAN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

**October 12, 2013**  
**Allendale, MI**  
**Grand Valley State University**  
"Creative Collaborations"

The Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors and the Grand Valley State University Libraries are partnering to welcome attendees to visit a new collaborative space at GVSU - The Knowledge Market. Conference website: <sites.google.com/site/mw-caconference/>. For further information, contact Patrick Johnson: (616-331-8077), <johpatri@gvsu.edu>.

## RESEARCH MENTORING: EXPANDING THE ROLE OF WRITING TUTORS

◆ *Carolyn White Gamtso, Rachel Blair Vogt, Nicole Chartier,  
Gail Fensom, Natalie Glisson, Jennifer Jefferson, Dorothy Sherman  
University of New Hampshire at Manchester  
Manchester, NH*

*Fall 1994:* Carolyn, a writing center tutor in a New England college, is working with a first-year student to revise a rough draft of his research-based argument paper. She notices a fundamental problem. While the student has the sufficient number of references, the sources are inappropriate for the writing task. What began as a typical writing tutorial now morphs into a personalized library instruction session, requiring the tutor to reposition herself as a guide through the research stage of the writing process.

*Fall 2012:* Almost two decades later, Carolyn is a reference and instruction librarian at the University of New Hampshire at Manchester (UNHM). Students bring to her library instructional sessions only vague understandings of why or how to evaluate their sources, just as they did when she tutored. Carolyn knows that good writing depends upon good research. She believes that, unless they are educated, students run the risk of producing fundamentally flawed arguments based on erroneous, inaccurate, or biased information. Her intervention is even more critical than it was in the past because electronic availability has dropped students into a sea of information they are often ill-equipped to navigate.

### PROGRAM CONTEXT

UNHM is the commuter campus of the University of New Hampshire. Its small size and culture of collaboration make it an ideal setting for cross-departmental partnerships. The college's composition curriculum has a strong research component. Librarians visit all First-Year Composition classes to provide scaffolded workshops presented over multiple class sessions. Lessons include brainstorming topics, generating keywords, finding sources using the library's catalog and databases, and evaluating sources. In addition to the librarian, writing tutors from the Center for Academic Enrichment (CAE), UNHM's tutoring center, support students in their research process. College-level writing demands sophisticated information literacy. Responding to this need, UNHM formalized the library/writing tutor connection by adding a research mentor component to the traditional writing tutor program. Founded on the principle that students must learn both how to locate legitimate sources and how to critically engage with them, the new approach echoes the Association of College and Research Libraries' view of information literacy, which calls for students "to recognize when information is needed and . . . to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (par. 3).

Tutoring at UNHM is grounded on the premise that writing centers and libraries benefit from "sharing their reputations and expertise, leveraging their strengths, and learning from each other" (Elmborg 18). It was the likely place, then, to incubate an expanded approach to training tutors about the importance of critical research. In 2003 the UNHM Library and the CAE collaborated to develop a pilot program for writing tutors to do just that (Fensom et al.; White and Pobywajlo). By empowering tutors to help students understand that researching and writing are "integrally related processes," the pilot program redefined the role of writing tutors (Hook 21). Because they see papers at all stages of development, writing tutors are uniquely positioned to address issues of source selection and use. Because they are peers, they can offer this assistance in a safe and non-authoritarian environment. Because they are part of a larger process that goes beyond revising and editing, tutors are important players in library instruction and writing classes. This pilot led to the establishment of the research mentoring aspect of the writing tutor program. Under the new research mentoring component, the original tutor roles have been retained, but expanded to include information literacy skills: locating and evaluating appropriate sources. Today, all writing tutors are trained in these areas, resulting in a holistic approach to research and writing assistance. With the new emphasis

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

on research, writing tutors across the curriculum are able to address a common scenario in which “students encounter difficulties in their academic writing because they have not had adequate instruction in information literacy” (Van Horne 1).

### AN ADDITIONAL FOCUS: INFORMATION LITERACY

The initiation of the research mentoring component resulted in structural and content changes to the existing Tutor Development course, a two- or four-credit offering required of all students wishing to work as tutors in any subject (math, science, writing, etc.).<sup>1</sup> All tutors take the course in their first semester of tutoring. The director and associate director of the CAE co-teach the once-a-week class meeting for all tutors, where students learn about theory, pedagogy, and tutoring strategies. The second class meeting of the week is subject-specific. With the additional focus on research mentoring, a librarian now joins the director in teaching the writing and information literacy-specific class meeting. Library elements include brainstorming research topics, locating materials, and evaluating sources.

Through various assignments, writing tutors apply what they have learned. For example, significant time is built in for mock tutorials and discussion of situations tutors encounter in the research phase. A librarian may pose as a student with little knowledge of how to generate keywords or select and navigate databases. Later, mock tutorials may include analyzing research choices using sample student papers. In this way, tutors gain experience in helping a writer to brainstorm topic choices, develop and organize ideas, and work with sources. The director and the librarian collaborate each semester to adapt the writing portion of the course to the needs of the current tutor cohort. One information literacy-focused assignment, for example, asks tutors to locate appropriate books and periodical articles on an assigned topic, and to create an annotated bibliography. One semester, the instructors responded when tutors indicated they felt knowledgeable about general library sources used in First Year Writing courses, but less confident in their understanding of discipline-specific databases. The librarian conducted a workshop utilizing actual reference questions to model the use of a variety of discipline-specific resources. The addition of this workshop now helps train tutors for newly-expanded writing drop-in sessions that include papers from a wide range of courses. Another addition to the course is an evaluation session allowing tutors to physically handle popular, trade, and peer-reviewed journals and to discuss their differences. A research-and-writing-in-the-disciplines approach is further enhanced by faculty guest speakers who discuss the norms and expectations in their areas of expertise.

### TUTORS EXTENDING THE REACH OF INSTRUCTORS

The mark of any successful pedagogical change is the effect on the learner. Just as important, a tutoring program must consider what faculty identify as successful learning in their courses. To enable this, over the years, the tutoring program developed a class-linked role, whereby the majority of tutors are paired with individual First Year Writing faculty in the classrooms. Writing tutors develop solid relationships with First Year Writing students by attending class regularly and assisting with peer review workshops and other classroom writing activities. They also meet in individual tutorials with students from their linked classes. In addition, as at many schools, writing tutors assist writers from all class years and disciplines in individual tutorials. Their information literacy training prepares tutors to assist First Year Writing students and writers in other disciplines. Today, the tutors' new role has enhanced their importance in First Year Writing courses, and students benefit from tutors' refined research skills. Recognizing the tutors' expertise as a valuable resource, some instructors ask tutors to model productive research behaviors by demonstrating how to choose, narrow, and develop search strategies for a sample topic. In their expanded roles, tutors demonstrate that, while daunting, research can be a solvable puzzle. Tutors extend the reach of the instructor by helping students refine their understandings of the assignment. In one class, conversations with the tutor allowed a student to realize that gun control was a topic too broad to meet the assignment expectations. With the tutor's

### 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.



@WLNewsletter



Writing Lab Newsletter



### International Writing Center Blog

### CONNECTING WRITING CENTERS ACROSS BORDERS

“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 <[www.writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/](http://www.writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/)>.

help, the student was able to narrow the topic to the assault weapons ban, thereby marking a clearer research path. The tutor also guided the student's emerging understanding of the limitations of using the National Rifle Association as a central source, and helped the student cast a wider research net to capture more appropriate resources. Because tutors have been trained in the research process in such detail, they are more equipped to handle a variety of situations typical of the demands of the writing class. A student expressing an interest in robotics, for example, was unsure how to turn that curiosity into a topic that met the writing assignment expectations. By brainstorming possible angles with the student, and encouraging her to read current news about the topic, the tutor guided the student to discover a focus that met both her passion and her assignment. Tutors continue their partnership with students to locate and assess sources throughout the writing process. One student, with the help of the tutor, came to understand, four weeks and one draft after beginning her research, that she needed sources to more definitively trace the history of her topic, genetic engineering. Another came to realize, once he was asked to develop an argument based upon the background information he had gathered, that he needed help in locating and understanding constitutional arguments about airport security, a need the tutor was able to meet. The regular meetings between writing instructors and their linked tutors allow them to share insights about instructional needs. For example, when a tutor suggested that students were having trouble understanding the legalese in court cases, the instructor demonstrated in the next class how to use reference sources such as encyclopedias and specialized dictionaries to build prior knowledge. By defining pedagogical challenges collaboratively, instructors and tutors improve their point-of-need responses.

### TUTORS EXTENDING THE REACH OF LIBRARIANS

Just as tutors collaborate with instructors, they also collaborate with librarians. At various times during the First Year Writing course, librarians conduct information literacy workshops in which tutors model how to locate and think critically about sources. Prior to the workshops, librarians and tutors review the lesson plan and discuss where the tutors could be helpful in supporting the students. This discussion allows the tutors to examine strategies learned in the Tutor Development class and apply them in the workshop. Tutors might help librarians facilitate brainstorming sessions on evaluating web sources by modeling their own assessment strategies of a particular website. Tutors also assist the librarian when the students are working on finding articles in the databases. When in-depth reference questions arise, the tutors offer suggestions and flag the librarian. This second set of eyes and ears during a busy workshop helps when the librarian is not available to reach everyone at one time. The tutor/librarian collaboration in the workshop helps establish a connection between students and librarians outside the classroom. Often, students hesitate to directly approach librarians with research questions but feel comfortable with peer tutors. While connecting with a student during a tutorial, tutors often demonstrate that asking questions and using the librarian as a resource is standard practice. Tutors model this by accompanying students to the librarian when faced with a complex research question. Together they connect with the librarian to seek additional help. As a result, tutors extend the reach of librarians by emphasizing their accessibility.

### THE TUTOR EXPERIENCE: REFLECTIONS FROM NATALIE AND NICOLE

As tutors, our research training and collaboration with librarians distinguishes our experiences from those of many writing tutors at other institutions. Irene Clark observes that writing centers work with students “usually either fairly early or fairly late in the process. . . . The steps in between, the decisions students make about what sort of information they might need, the strategies they use to locate and evaluate that information, and the methods they use to integrate that information and reshape the text—these are the steps the writing center usually doesn't see” (204). However, compared to the typical writing tutor, we (Natalie and Nicole) are in the unique position of witnessing that messy process of research and writing because of our research training. It is in the application of this type of classroom learning, “the steps in between,” where we do see students flounder. We have been trained to work with students in research and writing and understand what students have been exposed to in library workshops and in the classroom. This background provides us with the contextual knowledge we need to steer students in promising directions. Our goal is then clear—to demonstrate and facilitate the connection between good research and good writing.



Many students hold a fractured view of research and writing as two distinct processes. Often, even after library instruction, students struggle to convert a general research idea into a manageable argument and waste time and energy aimlessly searching the Internet. Without a narrowed topic, students have difficulty formulating keywords that will yield useful sources. In one example, Nicole encouraged a student to refine the terms “guns” and “gun control” to “gun policy,” eventually revealing a more productive focus of the database search. Our peer status often better enables us to interpret students’ notions about writing that interfere with success. Dave Healy contends that “tutors and writing centers provide an alternative to the authority of teachers and classrooms, and . . . that alternative is important as a catalyst to students’ developing sense of independence and their own authority” (184). We are situated advantageously at the junction between classroom learning and independent learning. Trained as research mentors, we can nurture student research skills that have been sown in library instruction, and tailor them to the needs of specific classroom assignments. Students are more comfortable revealing their research strategies to us, even if those strategies are faulty, because of our status as peers. In one instance, a student used information from Wikipedia but cited the highly technical sources he did not understand. In this situation, Nicole educated the student about the ethical ramifications of this practice, and the two then collaborated to find manageable and credible sources. The honesty and trust Nicole initially established through the classroom encouraged the student to turn away from a dangerous habit.

The research mentor component of tutor training develops tutors who are competent in guiding the symbiotic nature of research and writing. Even though students may view research as one area, taught by the librarian, and writing as another, taught by the composition instructor, we become the link. The program has helped us establish ourselves as knowledgeable, approachable, trusted tutors who know when to refer students to the appropriate professionals.

## CONCLUSION

As with any new initiative, UNHM’s research mentor component in the tutoring program grew out of the needs of students in a particular educational context. The program evolved to respond to those needs in a way that was feasible based on the institutional setting. For example, in this small school, interested parties—librarians, the Center for Academic Enrichment director, instructors, tutors—already knew each other and worked together. Because the school has such close relationships and runs relatively fewer sections of First Year Writing than do larger institutions, it was possible to coordinate this program across all sections of the class. At a larger institution with many more people and class sections involved, this type of program may need to be organized somewhat differently. The UNHM program started small by training only a subset of writing tutors and working with a few of the First Year Writing instructors. The program has now expanded to include all writing tutors and all First Year Writing instructors, but such expansion may pose different challenges in a larger school. In part, the UNHM expansion was possible because the research workshops were brought into and made a formal part of the Tutor Development course. At institutions where there is no tutor course, and where the training time that writing center professionals have with new tutors is considerably more limited, negotiating additional time for research skills training may require more creative scheduling. We hope this article demonstrates the value in training peer writing tutors in research skills, and in initiating conversations among writing center professionals, tutors, librarians, and instructors. At UNHM, the ultimate goal of the research mentor component of the tutor program has been to help students see that “in an academic environment, research means writing and writing means research,” and that cooperation among parties is crucial to that end (Boff and Toth 149). The program at once benefits the students, tutors, instructors, and librarians, creating a synergy that maximizes the strengths of all the parties. ♦

### Note

<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the number of credits they are taking the course for, each tutor attends all class meetings and completes all readings. The two-credit version requires fewer assignments than the four-credit version.



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## SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

**March 1, 2014**  
**University of California—**  
**Irvine**  
**Irvine, CA**  
*“Transformative Reflections”*

Join us for a day of individual and panel presentations by writing tutors, for writing tutors! Reflecting on our tutoring practices can be highly instructive, showing us what works well, what not so well. Writing center tutors are invited to submit proposals for fifty-minute sessions, led by an individual or group. Sessions include 10-15 minutes of presentation, followed by a facilitated discussion or guided activity, or both. Writing center directors will meet separately.

Deadline for proposals:  
November 15, 2013.

Questions? Contact Denise Kruienga-Muro: <Denise.Kruienga-Muro@rcc.edu>. Conference website: <sandbox.socialwritingcenters.org/2014-tutor-conference/>.

(continued on p. 9)

## TUTOR'S COLUMN

### FROM COGNITIVE “LOADING...” TO “OVERLOAD!”

◆ *Bernardo Feitosa*  
*Denison University*  
*Granville, OH*

A writer's stress, like any other stress, can develop from many sources. From my experience at Denison University's Writing Center, students only acknowledge that they are “stressed” after exceeding a high threshold, usually because of an accumulation of smaller issues: family, romance, jobs, extracurricular activities, etc. These stress sources add to a student's daily cognitive load from academic demands, which largely encompass reading and writing. Psychologists Taimur Ismail and Suhana Chikatla define cognitive load as “the total amount of cognitive activity imposed on working memory at an instance in time.” Although most experts differentiate between intrinsic, germane, and extraneous cognitive loads, one can refer to any stress that exceeds someone's “total cognitive load” simply as cognitive overload (Taimur and Chikatla). Beyond affecting working memory while “loading” information, people's cognitive loads can interfere in their writing when they are in the process of adapting to the format or the level of information they interact with. A writing tutor's sensitivity to the influences of such stress on writing can help both tutors and student writers focus on the students' most important writing concerns.

As we write, we transfer thoughts into paper, but several unconscious processes between the initial ideas and the final result can be affected by the writer's stress levels (*Writing Across Borders*). When we experience a high cognitive load, our effectiveness at adapting ideas into writing may decrease because of the stress added to our thinking process, which involves some inherent degree of stress or fatigue due to its reflexive nature. Although student writers recurrently attribute their writing struggles to grammar, their major obstacle is often the way they process information. When a paper requires a complex discussion or when the writer has not fully grasped the ideas in a text he read, the cognitive load of adapting a form of thinking into a specific form of arguing can overwhelm the writer's fluency (Reynolds 13). Everyone is susceptible to some level of this “brain-fritter” phenomenon, especially during all-nighters and late-night writing; writers make grammatical and structural mistakes that they usually would not make if they had written under less stress.

From my experience, format or content issues generate cognitive overload more often than time-management issues. Inexperienced writers certainly have more problems writing in specific formats and about new subjects than more experienced writers, but experience with a genre never inoculated anyone against a cognitive overload. Whether students need to write a research paper for the first time because of their class year or their first lab report for an elective, this additional cognitive load of adapting to a new writing format can produce easily perceptible results. An art student may focus on description rather than analysis, a science major may not compare theories in interpretative essays, and a First Year Composition student may believe that her summary is an argumentative essay.

Sometimes during writing center training and discussions at Denison University, our group talks about international students' cognitive overload because we associate it with the stress of accommodating their thoughts in a second language. This useful analogy generates a discussion that breaks many commonly stereotyped correlations between stress and language and between higher and lower order concerns. In the end, the group acknowledges that native students, independently of their fluency in writing, face similar difficulties: all writers make mistakes despite their language skills. The most common experience is the stress from writing for long hours at night until the writers' cognitive load affects their grammar and spelling. Sentence-level issues and omitted words or thoughts can all be the byproduct of a cognitive overload while writing. These minor issues are bound to occur to anyone under similar circumstances, even to the most accomplished writers, so there is no shame in acknowledging them. And even though we writing center tutors never prioritize superficial errors during an appointment, they can also point toward higher-order concerns.

Traditionally, tutors are trained to avoid lower-order concerns so that we can focus on structure and content. But if we can address higher order concerns by identifying patterns of cognitive overload in smaller mistakes, why not take them into consideration while reading? When student writers cannot explain their cognitive load themselves, we can discuss it with them so that they can decide what writing issues need

more attention during and after the session. Identifying and understanding cognitive overload in a paper allows student writers to go back to their resources to reconstruct their argument instead of perfecting superficial flaws, such as fixing grammar or omitting an entire paragraph that the essay shouldn't include in the first place. Some students may need to reread just a page or even a paragraph from a text they used in their paper, whereas others may need to review all of the information discussed in class before they rewrite the assignment.

To gauge the cognitive load of student writers, some of my first questions in a session are about writers' mental state when they wrote the paper, or even now that they are about to discuss it. I might ask if they had any particular difficulties when they do not volunteer such information or ask about their feelings when they come into the appointment (a mere "How are you today?" or "Tough paper?" might do the trick). Sometimes their feedback focuses just on the paper, the instructor, or the class, but they might also discuss the circumstances that affected the written product. Beyond a good conversation starter, this often-rehearsed part of the session allows students to declare upfront that they could not sleep because they wanted to get the draft done, or because this text is their first lab report, or they do not feel confident about their product, etc. My goal is to not take their responses just as a session-starter, since answers like the previous list are the first flags for a cognitive overload while they were writing. Tutors can use these flags to guide their reading and the overall session: the more flags, the more attention a student's cognitive load deserves.

This careful practice of selective surveillance is especially useful when it reflects issues in content or format. In an introductory paragraph, I have noticed and overlooked minor mistakes in the past because I made broad assumptions: the client would catch them on a second reading; the client's background demanded focus on other issues; the mistakes were isolated and did not follow a pattern, etc. All these situations may be true, but it is vital that tutors share their thoughts as they read in order to check whether their assumptions are correct.

Once I started asking questions or keeping track of minor mistakes (either by keeping personal notes on a pad or marking neutral symbols such as asterisks or dashes in the paper's margins), students began to explain their thoughts much better. They could dismiss minor mistakes for lack of sleep and explain why one paragraph would be particularly confusing while the rest of the paper demonstrated much more cohesion. They could also look at the mistakes I pointed out and assess their grammatical or content knowledge. As a tutor, I am no expert on cognitive psychology, so I always ask for students' perceptions on my observations to avoid projecting patterns onto the reading when the patterns do not fit a student's need. When students confirm my assumptions about their writing experience, I explain to them how a cognitive overload might have affected their writing. From there, we can decide whether they should just talk through the material from class to reorganize and understand its content or choose specific paragraphs that were particularly challenging to write. When a paper is very hard to read because of too many minor inconsistencies, discussing the information the writer used proves even more effective, and students already leave with a better idea of what their final draft will look like.

As tutors, we should certainly prioritize global revisions, but if we use small mistakes as symptoms of a client's state of mind that can determine writing performance, we can manage our session time more efficiently and pinpoint specific patterns. We thus help both writer and text improve. In the end, adaptation to new format and information standards results in much better writing when it goes from "loading" new information to "loading complete" rather than when it starts at "loading" information and jumps to "information overload."



(Ed. Note: Bernardo Feitosa invites comments by e-mail: <bernewf@gmail.com>).



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Reynolds, Dudley W. "Where Do I Start?" *One on One with Second Language Writers: A Guide for Writing Tutors, Teachers, and Consultants*. Ann Arbor: U. Michigan, 2009. 1-15. Print.

*Writing Across Borders*. Dir. Wayne Robertson. Oregon State U., 2005. DVD.



## CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

**September 6, 2013:** Nebraska Writing Center Consortium, in Lincoln, NE

**Contact:** Barbara Tracy: <btracy@southeast.edu>.

**October 11, 2013:** Secondary School Writing Center Conference, in Fairfax, VA

**Contact:** Amber Jensen: <anjensen@fcps.edu> and <JGGoransson@fcps.edu>; Conference website: <nvw.org/young-writers/writing-centers-and-tutors/>.

**October 12, 2013:** Michigan Writing Centers Association, in Allendale, MI

**Contact:** Patrick Johnson: <johpatri@gvsu.edu>, phone: (616-331-8077); Conference website: <sites.google.com/site/mwcaconference/>.

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

**Contact:** Carol Martin: <chair@midwestwritingcenters.org>, and Rachel Holtz: <treasurer@midwestwritingcenters.org>; MWCA website: <www.midwestwritingcenters.org>.

**October 25-26, 2013:** Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association, in Seattle, WA

**Contact:** Amanda Hill: <ahill@cornish.edu>; Conference website: <pnwca.org/2013-Proposal-Submission-Form>.

**November 1-3, 2013:** National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Tampa, FL

**Contact:** Conference chair: Tom Brandt: <brandtom@berkeleyprep.org>. Conference website: <www.ncptw2013.org>.

**March 1, 2014:** Southern California Writing Centers Association, in Irvine, CA

**Contact:** Contact Denise Kruiuzenga-Muro: <Denise.Kruiuzenga-Muro@rcc.edu>. Conference website: <sandbox.social-writingcenters.org/2014-tutor-conference/>.

**March 1-2, 2014:** Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Smithfield, RI

**Contact:** John Hall: <johnhall@bu.edu>; Stephanie Carter: <scarter@bryant.edu>. Conference website: <northeastwca14.org>.

**July 19-22, 2014:** European Writing Centers Association, in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany

**Contact:** <ewca14@europa-uni.de>; Conference website: <www.ewca14.eu>.