

Book Review: *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research*

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The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research
by Lauren Fitzgerald and Melissa lanetta. New York: Oxford
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There's no doubt that writing center researchers and practitioners have benefitted from guides, handbooks, and sourcebooks that focus on supporting the writers who visit our centers. What sets Lauren Fitzgerald and Melissa lanetta's *Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research (OGWT)* apart from these other models of tutor education is that, in addition to introducing tutors to best practices in supporting others, the *OGWT* ultimately positions tutors as researchers. By dedicating its final two sections to an introduction to research methods, as well as to scholarship published largely by tutors themselves, the *OGWT* enacts its commitment to supporting tutors' research and makes a convincing case that writing center administrators should do the same.

As a writing center administrator who uses the *OGWT* in a tutoring pedagogy course, I strongly recommend Fitzgerald and lanetta's book. In writing this review, I hope to offer examples of how administrators could use the *OGWT* in their own pedagogy courses through narrating some of my experiences using the text. Students in the pedagogy course where I used the *OGWT* for the first time became tutors who possess an understanding of writing center pedagogy and have a strong motivation to research the work they do in the center. Inspired by the tutor-authored research they read in the *OGWT*, one undergraduate tutor went on to submit his research to the journal *Young Scholars in Writing: Undergraduate Research in Writing and Rhetoric* and many others went on to propose panels at local conferences. Beyond a pedagogy course, the *OGWT* can easily be adapted for ongoing tutor education. Each section of the guide,

and the chapters they contain, can be isolated for consideration at a staff meeting or assigned as a writing prompt for a writing center's blog or tutors' online discussion board.

In many ways, *OGWT* is an extension of work that Fitzgerald and lanetta began during their time co-editing *Writing Center Journal (WCJ)* from 2008-2013. In 2012, Fitzgerald and lanetta published a special issue of *WCJ* titled "Peer Tutors and the Conversation of Writing Center Studies," dedicated exclusively to research conducted by tutors themselves. Building on this foundation, Fitzgerald and lanetta acknowledge in their preface to *OGWT* that their work joins established fora committed to undergraduate research, citing *Young Scholars in Writing* and the regular Tutor's Column in *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* (xiv). In the same way that writing centers redistribute the authority of a typical classroom, the *OGWT* focuses on tutors' creation of knowledge through and about the work that they do, thereby revising notions of who is authorized to perform research in the field of writing studies.

Section III, "Research Methods for Writing Tutors," is specifically dedicated to preparing tutors to design a research plan. This section is particularly useful for administrators and students. For example, as the instructor of a pedagogy course, this section offers me a structured way to introduce research design and methods to my tutors. Within this section, Chapter 8 "The Kinds of Research—And the Kinds of Questions They Can Answer" provides administrators with accessible language to discuss institutional review and teach tutors how to recursively design a research plan. Likewise, tutors using the *OGWT* will find templates at the end of this chapter—one each for brainstorming, planning, and gaining informed consent—which serve as practical guides for moving them forward in their own research. Section III concludes by offering tutors an introduction to theoretical, historical, and empirical methods for grounding their research questions and answers. As the authors indicate, this chapter prepares tutors "to create original research that both responds to and furthers the conversations in writing center studies" (197).

By collecting scholarship from undergraduate and graduate tutors as well as faculty in the field of writing center research, Fitzgerald and lanetta choreograph Section IV, "Readings from the Research," as a mini-anthology of writing center scholarship. In my own pedagogy course, we read and discuss Sections I, II

(more on those sections in a bit) and III, while each tutor selects an article from Section IV to present to the rest of the class. Pairing tutors' readings about writing center pedagogy and research design with the articles in Sections IV offers concrete examples of scholarship to orient tutors to work in the field. For example, Fitzgerald and lanetta include Natalie DeCheck's article "The Power of Common Interest for Motivating Writing: A Case Study," written while DeCheck was an undergraduate writing tutor and originally published in *Young Scholars in Writing*. An administrator using the *OGWT* in a pedagogy course could usefully pair DeCheck's article with scholarship written by faculty, like Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson's article "Motivational Scaffolding, Politeness, and Writing Center Tutoring," originally published in *Writing Center Journal* and also collected in Section IV. This pairing of undergraduate and faculty research allows administrators to demonstrate a range of research methods—case studies, coding for linguistic markers, and theory-based concepts in education—related to a general topic that tutors think about often in their own writing centers: motivation. In representing diverse research projects and diverse researchers, *OGWT* invites tutors into the conversation of writing center scholarship, not merely as spectators, but with the possibility that tutors themselves can participate in that conversation.

Fitzgerald and lanetta's emphasis on tutor research does not sidestep a more nuts-and-bolts approach to tutoring. In fact, the *OGWT* opens with Section I, "Introduction to Tutoring Writing," and Section II, "A Tutor's Handbook." Section I offers prompts that ask tutors to reflect on their own writing education. This is a useful starting place for writing center administrators who value empathy in tutor education; we understand the value of sharing our educational histories for discovering where those histories intersect and diverge amongst our staff members, and among tutors and students. Likewise, as a "Handbook," Section II contextualizes tutors' learning experiences within writing center history, theory, and practice. For example, Chapter 3 "Tutoring Practices," saliently identifies "foundational advice for writing tutors" (49), where Fitzgerald and lanetta indicate a tutor's need to be specific, flexible, ethical, and professional. Section II also contains chapters devoted to indispensable topics in writing center studies, like authorship, identity, writing in/ across disciplines, and tutoring for online sessions. Here, the authors offer best practices in writing center sessions and cross-reference, as evidence, the scholarship anthologized in Section

IV. For example, when communicating to tutors that “overdoing questions [in a session] might make the writer feel interrogated or frustrated, especially if the tutor responds to the writer’s questions with more questions” (59), Fitzgerald and lanetta cite tutors Alicia Brazeau’s and Molly Wilder’s articles collected later in *OGWT*. In constructing a “Handbook” portion of the *OGWT* that references research collected in the text itself, Fitzgerald and lanetta demonstrate their commitment to tutor-authored research in all aspects of their text. This integration of practice and research, particularly from the point-of-view of tutors, extends the writing center ethos of treating tutors as colleagues.

As a busy writing center administrator, I imagine that many readers may ultimately be asking themselves, “Why should I consider using a different guide in my center?” It is with that same mindset that I encourage you to consider how fostering undergraduate research could support the work that you and your tutors do. Compelling tutors to view their work as research-worthy helps them understand the writing center as part of the larger discipline of writing studies. This can ultimately have a positive, recursive effect on tutoring: if tutors are researching their work and implementing results of their research in the center, the center presumably will improve supporting its local, institutional populations. But fostering undergraduate and graduate research in our centers may have larger institutional implications as well. In addition to the number of students and faculty writing centers support, a writing center that is committed to producing research—and can eventually demonstrate that commitment through its own tutors’ research projects—becomes an even greater institutional asset in conversations with higher level administration that involve resources. When I speak to administrators on my campus, I point to the research my tutors submit to journals and conferences as evidence of our center’s contribution to the field, but also to the intellectual lives of our undergraduate and graduate tutors; when institutional support for undergraduate research becomes available, I have an entire staff of tutors who have projects at the ready; designing their own research projects helps tutors become more deeply committed to their writing center work. In short, *OGWT* offers administrators like me a way to expand our narratives beyond reporting numbers of sessions and students served; Fitzgerald and lanetta encourage us to build writing centers that are sites for tutors’ research, as well as our own.