WLn

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

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Guest Editors' Note
Genie Nicole Giaimo and Yanar Hashlamon

Writing Center administrators and workers struggle with issues of wellness—be they affective, situational, or systemic—and the effects of stress on these populations have not been deeply studied in the field. This special issue on wellness and self-care in writing centers responds to this exigency with a set of methodologically diverse articles. In "Tutoring Begins with Breath," Nicole Emmelhainz analyzes two semesters' worth of written reflections from students engaged in guided meditation in a tutor training course. Kelly Concannon, Janine Morris, Nicole Chavannes, and Veronica Diaz provide an autoethnographic account of writing center administrators' engagement with mindfulness practices that replicates and extend past research. Erik Simmons, Laura K. Miller, Caroline Prendergast, and Christiana McGuigan conducted the first published biometric writing center assessment, collecting saliva samples from tutors to measure how stress levels are impacted by tutoring. While the authors engage with wellness interventions differently, they find common ground in their focus on writing center workers.

GENIE NICOLE GIAIMO

YANAR HASHLAMON

Because the focus in writing center research tends to be on the experiences and emotions of writers (Simmons et al.), this issue focuses on the affective experiences of tutors. Katelyn Parsons' Tutors' Column about tutors' feelings of guilt provides a much-needed critical lens into how tutors are impacted by unclear boundaries in their work. Parsons concludes that saying no is an important part of one's tutor practice. In Emmelhainz's article, tutor anxiety is addressed by implementing mindfulness training interventions in a tutor training course. However, wellness interventions might not be welcomed or understood, and, as Concannon et al. suggest, are further complicated by administrators ignoring tutors' bodily and emotional needs, even as they mentor and support others.

As we consider if wellness and self-care interventions are "enough," we must consider the material conditions under which we labor, the ways in which we support marginalized workers, and the ways we ethically incorporate wellness and self-care into writing centers. A future Digital Edited Collection on wellness in writing centers will extend the work of this special issue.

Tutoring Begins with Breath: Guided Meditation and its Effects on Writing Consultant Training

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NICOLE EMMELHAINZ

Preparing undergraduates for the role of writing center consultant must include more than writing center histories, theories, and flexible approaches. It's also important to recognize these students' and their peers' wellbeing and wellness needs. I learned this when I first taught a required tutor training course for undergraduates. The students became so intent on learning the 'right way' to tutor that their stress over other assignments increased. I witnessed this as I worked one-to-one with these students on their writing and keenly felt each student's writing anxieties. This experience led me to consider mindfulness as a pedagogical resource. A regular meditator, I developed this practice during yoga teacher training. Mindfulness, I believed, would help me answer a key question: how could I best prepare consultants to help their peers in the writing center when they also experienced similar insecurities about their writing?

Mindfulness and wellness practices now provide the pedagogical foundations to my teaching and training of writing consultants. Helping writing consultants develop an awareness of their wellness needs will prepare them to help students with theirs. As Sarah Johnson describes, the common "multifaceted nature" of most writing center encounters demands that consultants learn strategies for handling the "multiple layers of stress and anxiety" that both consultant and client may bring to a session. Specifically, in two sections of the training course (spring and fall 2018), I incorporated guided meditation practices to help bring awareness to each student's need for wellness support. This type of mediation, Johnson notes, involves directed "observation [and] a nonjudgmental acknowledgment of one's internal or external surroundings" (28). Both observation and nonjudgmental attitudes are necessary abilities when working with others and their writing but are also valuable in establishing personal wellness. Writing consultant training, then, should help consultants develop strategies

to cope with stress to provide a more complete preparation for the work they will ultimately perform.

In this article, I will provide a review of literature that supports bridging writing center work with wellness and mindfulness practices. I'll discuss how I incorporated such practices into my training course. Finally, reflections written by students enrolled in the tutor training course, completed at the course's end, and published on their public blogs will demonstrate the personal benefits students perceived from participating in guided meditations and mindfulness practices. Meditative practices as a means to help with wellness initiatives have increased in a variety of realms, including government, corporate, and academic environments (Mack and Hupp). Despite this, I was hesitant to incorporate such practices into the training class, as I worried students would take the course less seriously. However, students report that a regular meditation practice has, overall, had a positive effect not only on them but also on the class's environment. As the students' course reflections will show, meditations are now a vital part of the class, an asset to student engagement and learning. Most importantly, these meditations have provided opportunities for students to consider their own wellness needs.

Mindfulness and wellness are practices an individual can use to improve their quality of life. Nicole Albrecht notes that mindfulness is understood as "'wellness-oriented' and a 'wellness intervention,'" and commonly focuses on "social, emotional, physical, spiritual and cognitive outcomes" (22). While mindfulness generally suggests "a way of 'being'" (21), and can be cultivated through a variety of practices, wellness more specifically encapsulates a series of unified behaviors that brings in the "whole being of the person—his body, mind, and his spirit" to expand an individual's potential (Halbert L. Dunn qtd. in Albrecht 23). In other words, mindfulness allows an individual to attend to their current state of being and asks them to develop an awareness of what they need in order to best meet their potential. Developing such self-awareness helps individuals to better achieve a state of wellness because they learn to consciously direct attention to their physical, mental, and/or spiritual needs and to address them. In the writing consultant training course, practicing wellness and meditation becomes beneficial for all students, even those who choose not to work in the writing center.

One of the more common ways for individuals to begin mindfulness practices is meditation. As Jared Featherstone et al. discuss in "The Mindful Tutor," instructors who wish to incorporate meditation into their classes should receive formal mindfulness training and have

a regular meditation practice. Training prepares the instructor for leading others in meditation and also provides ways for adapting mindfulness to a variety of needs and recognizing that not all mindfulness practices are appropriate for everyone. My training to run meditation with a group comes from my 200-hour yoga teacher training, in which I learned a variety of meditative and breathwork practices. In my training courses, I use a type of guided meditation in which practitioners sit comfortably, close their eyes, focus on their breathing, and direct their attention as noted by the meditation leader. A benefit of this type of meditation is that it's simple to perform for new practitioners. The verbal cues and directions, such as paying attention to what Featherstone calls an "anchor," like the breath, also keep a novice meditator focused.

In writing center studies, several examples demonstrate the ongoing relevance of contemplative practices to the field. Paul Gamache suggests focusing on the "deeper philosophical issues of tutoring" writing rather than just focusing on writing tutoring technique (2). Gamache draws on the Buddhist concept of the Eightfold Path and suggests that through personal reflections, writing center practitioners can develop the "right mind," which is "the first step toward developing 'right action'" (2). Though Gamache's methods of "critical self-examination" may help writing consultants form new knowledge about their own "motives, assumptions, purposes, and actions" (2), Jesse Kavadlo questions additional potential outcomes. Kavadlo believes that such "critical self-examination" can lead instead to "self-consciousness" that comes from "reticence and embarrassment" (10). Kavadlo offers an alternative: practice. Both the act of writing and the act of tutoring involve not only "exercise and performance, but also a whole way of living. [...] The obstacle to tutoring is tutoring. The path to tutoring [is] tutoring" (11). Viewed in this way, the practice of tutoring becomes thoughtful, contemplative. As an individual practices tutoring writing, that person builds more trust in themselves and their abilities. According to Kavadlo, this trust in one's abilities lessens doubts they may have. And when doubt lessens and belief in one's abilities increases, performance improves.

Gamache and Kavadlo establish the usefulness of understanding writing center work through a contemplative lens. Developing this lens should begin with consultants' training and preparation. The scholarship on such training is growing. Writing center coordinators like Katie Hupp have facilitated voluntary mindfulness training with meditation to great success, as she and consultant Elizabeth Mack discuss. Others, including Claire Kervin and Heather Barrett, have examined how mindfulness practices may help consultants work

with students who struggle with procrastination. Finally, Sarah Johnson believes that mindful meditation practices could be successfully incorporated into writing tutoring sessions themselves, thus "expand[ing] tutors' affective roles by giving them the tools they need to use in a session to reduce students' stress levels and then create the room that students need to write." These scholars detail effective strategies for bringing mindfulness into writing center work. Featherstone et al. discuss the benefits of beginning that contemplative training into a classroom context. Featherstone and two consultants not only present how to make silent meditation part of a class, but they also discuss the metacognitive benefits these practices can have on both students' writing and the tutoring of writing.

Not all writing centers, of course, have the opportunity to train their staff before they begin work, though many do offer on-the-job training or continued training, such as Mack and Hupp discuss. As these scholars demonstrate, though, all writing center practitioners could potentially benefit from bringing such practices into their centers' daily operations or continued training. With this in mind, what follows is a brief description of how I incorporated guided mindfulness meditation into a 15-week consultant training course. This course is open to any student who meets the prerequisites, and many students take it to fulfill the required writing-intensive credit. Not all students who take it, then, work in the writing center. Despite this, incorporating formal mindfulness meditation is still a valuable exercise for these students as it develops a range of beneficial skills.

During the first class, I explain that each day will begin with five minutes of guided meditation. On the syllabus students see that one week is dedicated to reading scholars' works that explore this issue. Most recently, I've assigned Gamache's and Kavadlo's essays. Additionally, I explain that mindfulness is an appropriate way of learning to be more patient, accepting, and understanding of oneself, and those same qualities are important for writing consultants as they will use them when working with their peers. I further explain that this meditation will not be a religious practice and will be voluntary, but if students choose not to participate, they will need to sit quietly during the meditation. As a means of further credentialing myself, I let students know that I have completed a 200-hour yoga teacher training and am trained to run guided meditations.

Next, I teach the students how we will meditate. Each class in which I've incorporated meditation has been different, but usually about a

third have meditated before. Few, less than five students total across two classes, have acknowledged practicing meditation regularly. The rest have never meditated. I explain that though there are many approaches to meditation, including walking meditation and transcendental meditation, we will use a form of guided meditation that I will lead them through. The first meditation lesson consists of the following:

1. *Demonstration of posture*: Sitting in a chair, I place my feet flat on the floor, underneath the knees, back straight, shoulders relaxed, and hands in a comfortable position on the knees. Students get into a similar position, and close their eyes, if comfortable.

2. *Focus on breathing*: I ask students to focus on the sensation of breathing.

3. *Disengaging with thoughts*: Finally, I prompt students to consciously return their attention to their breath instead of engaging with thoughts. Doing so keeps them focused on the present moment.

The first few weeks of class help students who are meditation novices learn to sit quietly and focus on the breath. Being able to do this is foundational for meditation, so starting slowly is vital to the success of their practice. I vary the prompts used to draw attention to their breathing, which may include:

*   Guiding students to become aware of where their breath enters and exits the body. Do they feel the air around their nostrils or the top of their lips? Can they feel the breath expand the lungs and even the belly? This conscious breathing not only helps some students keep attention on this basic life function but also brings some into a deeper awareness of their body in the present moment.

*   Controlling the breath through counting: inhaling for four counts, holding for two counts, exhaling for eight counts, and repeating.

I prefer to start with a focus on breath because, as renowned yoga teacher Donna Farhi explains, "the breath is always present, [and] we can use it as a means of anchoring the mind in that which is constant" (78). This is an effective way of bringing students into the practice with an easy-to-replicate model they can follow anywhere. In fact, I close such meditations by encouraging students to find time throughout their day to come back to their breath, like when they are standing in line for coffee. All these types of breath meditations help students begin to develop stamina for the practice.

After students learn to meditate with breath focus, the meditations

then ask them to concentrate on wellness-centered concepts. For example, one meditation asks students to learn to accept themselves for who they are at that present moment. Students repeat the mantra "I am" silently to themselves. I guide students by asking them to think "I" on the inhale and "am" on the exhale. By asking students to repeat, but not add to, this mantra, the guided meditation prompts them to consider who is seated in that chair. This meditation aims to help students develop acceptance of themselves, and prompts them, for the duration of the meditation at least, to drop expectations they may have of themselves. Another meditation that focuses on relieving anxiety directs students to imagine something causing them stress, like an upcoming test, as a cloud floating in the sky of their mind. As students exhale, the cloud/anxiety floats away, out of the students' attention.

Regular meditation not only builds students' abilities to sit silently and accept themselves but also allows them to take on the role of objective observer. Students observe but do not engage with certain experiences like their thoughts, the room's temperature, the chairs in which they sit. Being an observer provides students first-hand experience of gaining a "moment-by-moment awareness" that allows them to develop both a sense for the "nature of things" and a "critical distance" needed for effective writing tutoring (Kavadlo 11). This will help them learn to identify issues pertaining to their own wellness needs and help them assist others in learning to recognize similar wellness concerns. And like Kavadlo says of writing tutoring, the more students meditate, the easier and more natural both practices become, as do the associated observations and reflections.

At the semester's end, students write a reflection in their publicly-available class blogs. The reflection prompt reads: "Reflect on your semester of learning about tutoring: where you were at the beginning, where you are now, how you'll apply what you've learned, etc." Many students elect to discuss their experiences with meditation. Students earn points by completing the reflection post and are not graded on the post's content, which is why I believe that those who discuss the meditations can present valuable evidence of the practice's usefulness. Feedback from the fall 2018 class was overwhelmingly positive: out of twelve reflections completed, eight students discussed the meditations, and all eight not only enjoyed the meditations but also wrote about their perceived benefits. Several respondents discussed how the five minutes of guided meditations were a welcome break in their day. One student wrote:

> Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays were my busiest days. [...]
> Most days, meditation was the first time in the day that I would

just sit down, relax, and take a breath. [...] I felt as though it was so beneficial for me and my mental health. It forced me to take a few minutes to myself and just focus on my breathing.

Other students also mentioned the perceived mental health benefits. One wrote that "I found myself to be more relaxed and less anxious. I was also able to calm myself down when I felt myself becoming stressed." Another student explained, "There were some days where I personally felt overwhelmed and stressed with the upcoming due dates and other responsibilities where I wanted to throw in the towel. I was able to successfully use the mindfulness [...] to calm myself down so I could truly focus on what was ahead of me in a timely and chill fashion." One student who had meditated frequently before class admitted that while at first they were skeptical of the in-class meditations, they came to appreciate this practice because the meditations "did a good job grounding the class each day and keeping the energy levels manageable." Finally, another student simply said, "The guided meditations were always exactly what I didn't know I needed."

This last reflection is especially telling. As Gamache admits, he tries to give students "what they need, not what they *want*" (emphasis in original 3). The results from the meditations have been encouraging enough that my next step is to establish more regular practices for those students who work in the writing center, as part of continued training. Regular meditation has potential to be an appropriate complement to other practical and theoretical training for writing center work. What I discuss here are the preliminary results from a small study with limited participants. However, the results are promising and align with what other writing center practitioners have already discovered: meditation and mindfulness allow consultants to develop personal wellness. This, I believe, provides a foundation to improve their abilities to work with peer writers. When consultants learn to accept themselves as they are, they in turn may learn to accept their peers as they come to them. This state of mind will support wellness for both consultants and peers.

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Cultivating Emotional Wellness and Self-Care through Mindful Mentorship in the Writing Center

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The practice of mindfulness is growing both in higher education (Wenger) and in writing centers (Johnson; Kervin and Barrett). Because mindfulness involves being attuned to what's happening in a given moment and maintaining a purposeful awareness of what one feels, thinks, and does, we argue that writing center administrators can utilize principles of mindfulness for mentoring writing center tutors. We adopt Jennifer Clary-Lemon and Duane Roen's definition of mentoring as an "activity that is both reciprocal and transformational" (181), whereby "the mentor is learning by monitoring and evaluating his or her mentoring activities and their effects on the mentee" (179). Their definition incorporates elements of mindfulness: self-awareness, reflection, and presence.

We approach mindfulness from the premise that emotions and affect are always already shaping our encounters, whether or not we are conscious of their presence. Through emotions we come "to know things, to develop connections and attachments to others, and to function in the world" (Micciche xii). Becoming mindful of how affect and emotion impact our well-being is a crucial part of making sense of our experiences and practicing self-care. In this article, we suggest that setting in motion mindfulness practices *with* writing center tutors cultivates more effective working relationships in the center. Our work is inspired by Elizabeth Mack and Katie Hupp's strategies of "being present and listening," as well as "paying thoughtful attention to understanding and articulating [one's] needs" (13).

In this article we expand Mack and Hupp's definition of mindfulness as a "deliberate practice" and describe how we implemented a semester-long commitment to creating conditions of mindfulness

and self-care. We also suggest how administrators can implement mindfulness practices. We believe that incorporating mindfulness into mentoring relationships can allow us to prioritize and value the emotional and affective dimensions of our work—particularly since both administrators and tutors are often in positions where they are the recipients of others' emotions and must learn to carefully navigate this terrain (Grouling and Buck; Johnson). Mindfulness and self-care, when practiced together, can positively impact our professional relationships and well-being.

SETTING MINDFULNESS IN MOTION
Nova Southeastern University's Writing and Communication Center (WCC) serves 20,000 graduate and undergraduate students and faculty. The WCC is run by an Executive Director and three faculty administrators (including Janine and Kelly); includes 7 Graduate Assistant Coordinators (GACs) (including Nicole and Veronica); and has a staff of approximately 17 graduate and 37 undergraduate tutors. GACs work closely with WCC leadership on initiatives as well as with the tutors to host professional development workshops, maintain social media platforms, conduct research, and implement tutor training. Our leadership structure in the WCC is meant to be empowering. Each tutor is part of a 7-8 person group that has a GAC and faculty administrator. Within the groups, GACs consistently check in with and support their teams as well as act as liaisons between the tutors and the faculty administrators.

Like many writing and communication centers, we maintain a commitment to professional and personal development. Each semester, tutors attend a day-long orientation, complete online training modules, and attend at least three 60-minute professional development workshops (totalling approximately 25 hours). At the beginning of the fall 2018 tutor orientation, Janine and Kelly offered an overview of mindfulness, emotions, and affect and situated those terms within scholarship and the work of the WCC. We introduced these topics to make it clear to tutors that these are present, yet often undiscussed, elements of our work. We believed that having conversations on mindfulness and emotions early on would set the stage for tutors to identify strategies to navigate the emotional and affective terrain of their work. After conducting mindfulness workshops, the four of us continued talking about stress, mindfulness, and our roles as mentors. To better understand how stress-related emotions affect relationships in the mentor groups, we spent four weeks implementing mindfulness and self-care practices in our daily lives.

WEEKLY MINDFULNESS AND SELF-CARE PRACTICES
Inspired by Mack and Hupp's mindfulness project, we implemented

weekly mindfulness exercises, such as practicing acceptance and being aware of feelings and experiences. While Mack and Hupp asked all tutors to engage in weekly mindfulness exercises, we wanted to focus on how mindfulness related to our experiences as leaders, hoping that this would positively affect our engagement with the mentor groups. In what follows, we detail the four weeks of activities with reflections from Nicole and Veronica. The following reflections are excerpts of our more extensive written reflections.

WEEK 1: SETTING THE TONE

We began by defining and describing how we practice self-care. We also defined mentorship and identified characteristics of strong mentors we've had in the past. Along with creating shared definitions, we engaged in daily self-check-ins where, each morning, we outlined self-care intentions and kept track of how we succeeded or were limited in achieving those goals. During Week 1, we focused on observing our behaviors without placing value on them.

> *Nicole:* During Week 1, I defined "self-care" as actions done for my own benefit, either mentally or physically, and being mindful of my emotions. I defined a "mentor" as someone who has experience in the field and provides wisdom and support while maintaining authority and fostering honest communication. I noticed during Week 1 that I often neglected many of my self-care goals (like eating regularly, drinking three bottles of water, and breathing deeply). Additional personal self-care goals included journaling each day, practicing yoga twice a week, doing my nails, and spending time with my family. Prior to beginning the exercise, I felt I would have more success with these at-home self-care rituals (journaling, yoga, etc.). However, because I often take on more professional projects than I can handle, my at-home commitments proved just as difficult to maintain.

> *Veronica:* To me, "self-care" is understanding the importance of striking a balance between professional/academic work and time for yourself, as well as acting to ensure the latter does not get put on the back burner. I define a "mentor" as someone who provides guidance and makes themselves available to others. Mentors should be well-versed in work policy as well as compassionate/understanding and accessible/approachable. Throughout Week 1, I tried my best to spend time away from things that added to my stress, but the intention of self-care often became procrastination in practice, which led to stress and guilt for the lack of productivity. I kept intended self-care activities manageable—making time for music and TV, reaching out to at least one friend each day, being present with family, etc. Despite these activities' seeming low intensity, I only successfully engaged in them three out of the five days of the work week. My

academic and personal obligations prevented me from achieving even the simplest of self-care tasks.

WEEK 2: KEEPING TRACK

We met at the beginning of Week 2 to report back and share our struggles and successes. We used this discussion to talk about the personal and professional tasks we wanted to complete that week. In Week 2, we focused on understanding how we split our time between our personal and professional commitments, examining when and how often we say yes. Significantly, we found that what we set out to do did not always correspond to what we actually accomplished.

> *Nicole:* During Week 2, I worked to achieve my self-care goals while meeting academic and professional deadlines. I also reminded myself to not punish myself when I didn't complete one of my self-care goals. The goals I completed were those that I actively incorporated into my schedule (like spending time with family and doing homework), as opposed to those I wanted to complete "if I had time" (like eating regularly, practicing yoga, and doing my nails).

> *Veronica:* For Week 2, I classified meeting several professional and academic deadlines as "self-care." As these were responsible for the majority of my personal stress, completing them not only alleviated said stress, but allowed me to make time for the more conventional self-care goals I had set the week prior. Upon incorporating these self-care-adjacent tasks, I worked to better pace myself both in and out of the center. As a result, I successfully met all of my personal and academic self-care goals that week, and only occasionally succumbed to "self-sabotage" (e.g., sending work emails off the clock).

WEEKS 3 & 4: ENGAGING IN SELF-CARE

During Weeks 3 and 4 we decided to purposefully schedule daily time for self-care (such as exercising, breathing, or meditating) that brought us personal fulfillment. As we completed self-care tasks, we reflected on how attention to and barriers to self-care affected our interactions, experiences, and relationships with others in the WCC. Coming out of the Week 1 and 2 discussions, we wanted to focus on setting boundaries, saying no, protecting our time, and offering tips/strategies to others.

> *Nicole:* I found that practicing mindfulness allowed me to remain calm in situations of high stress, which I think affected my relationship with my mentees. Mindfulness for me was linked to my self-care. Once I realized that each assignment or task would be done one way or another, I was more *present* with those around me. When I had conversations with colleagues and mentees, I truly listened. On the days that I diligently practiced

and documented simple self-care tasks (like eating regularly, drinking water, and meditating for 5 minutes), I noticed my mood improved significantly. When I was in a better mood, I interacted more with my mentees, in both a professional and social way.

Practicing mindfulness in the writing center made me more aware of both my own and my peers' stressors, which fostered more communication and relationship-building with my mentees. By honestly expressing moments when I felt overwhelmed or stretched too thin with my faculty mentors and Veronica, I realized that I was not alone in my stress. As a result, I felt validation in my experience as a working grad student, as well as an enhanced sense of community with my colleagues. By learning and adopting self-care practices from my faculty mentors, I felt empowered to take what I learned and provide a calming presence to my mentees when they felt overwhelmed, which in turn gave me a renewed sense of purpose in my position as a mentor.

Veronica: In the last two weeks, while the intention to engage in self-care was in the back of my mind, I did little to no activity of that nature. Given that I was swamped with work for the two courses I was taking, as well as with initial research for my thesis, I gave myself only one free day to spend time with friends, and even that was prefaced with a shift at the WCC. My commute to and from campus—an hour each way—left me exhausted and rendered me unproductive once I made it back home. Because I felt that way myself, I was reluctant to burden my mentees with any extra work, and my interactions with them and other tutors reflected this reluctance. Quite a bit of apologizing and checking-in happened in-person and through text message.

Being both a mentor (to other tutors) and a mentee (of a faculty advisor), I felt obligated to keep my stressors to myself and present as "ready to go" in the WCC. Despite juggling several personal matters, being at work provided me an alternate, stress-free space in which to engage with others. This did not erase my stressors entirely, of course, but neutralized them temporarily as I shifted my focus to my interactions within the WCC. However, once in the WCC, the listening went both ways—I provided support to my mentees, and both they and my mentor offered a listening ear in return. Because of this, I felt more present in these interactions and the relationships were more open, resulting in a communicative, honest environment.

As faculty administrators, this four-week experience of mindfulness was eye-opening for us (Janine and Kelly). Because mindfulness involves a presence and awareness of our bodies and actions, mindfulness and self-care are inextricably linked. Like Nicole and Veronica, we also struggled with making self-care a goal and often talked about how mindfulness and self-care are *practices* that need

to be cultivated and are not something that automatically happens just because we say we're being mindful. As faculty administrators in a center with many tutors, we don't always spend as much one-on-one time with tutors as we'd like. Working alongside Nicole and Veronica on mindfulness and self-care reminded us of the significance of their leadership roles and helped us be more purposeful in what we asked of them.

From our perspective as leaders, this experience also made us think critically about what we ask of our tutors. As mentors ourselves, what does it mean when the practices we model go against the mindfulness message we preach? We recognize that the line between professional life and personal life can be blurred, insofar as when we work harder to alleviate stress, it can potentially cause more stress. Self-care work in a paid job context can add to writing center administrators' labor. However, we believe in the value of doing this work and recognize that these practices take work and will not resonate with or look the same for everyone. While self-care for Janine and Kelly might mean yoga, for Veronica it might mean avoiding procrastination and accomplishing work-related tasks. And that's ok! As each institutional context and each writing center community differs, some of what we outline might not be the most appropriate model to use.

As practicing yogis embedded in affect and embodiment scholarship, we believe that there are benefits to practicing mindfulness and that self-awareness can positively impact the relationships we have with others. By remaining attuned to mindfulness and our mentor relationships during this four-week period, we realized how much work it is to create space for these practices and to actually practice what we set out to accomplish. This work asks us to be fully present and allows us to be vulnerable alongside tutors.

STRATEGIES FOR BRINGING MINDFUL MENTORSHIP INTO WRITING CENTERS

Our work with mindfulness as "deliberate practice" in the WCC has taught us the importance of being aware—of our feelings, of our levels of stress, of what we're choosing to do or not do—and that recognizing our emotions can allow us to be more present in the moment. We acknowledge that this work is uncomfortable and requires willingness on behalf of faculty and tutors. However, we also recognize the fact that we're disrupting institutional structures. Any time we engage and disrupt those structures, things will be uncomfortable. Through this article, our aim is to set in motion different kinds of practices. People may not be used to doing this kind of work. Given that, as we experienced, these conversations

and practices are difficult, we conclude this article with strategies that, as leaders, we can share with those we mentor:

- Remember that mindfulness is a practice—something that takes time, effort, and attention.

- Establish healthy limits for personal and professional commitments, which includes prioritizing tasks and mindfully engaging with them. By being present, we can set small and realistic goals that can be accomplished on a daily and weekly level. Celebrate small successes and continue to modify *how* goals are accomplished—being flexible and resilient when things do not go as planned—rather than altering the actual goals.

- Encourage communication with tutors. If tutors feel comfortable expressing when they're overwhelmed, it is easier to more evenly distribute a center's workload.

- Share self-care goals with tutors and colleagues—both for support and to keep one another accountable. Rather than limiting mentee interactions to task assignments, take time in the day to ask others about their personal self-care dynamic, offering them a safe space to express their own joys and frustrations.

- Recognize that self-care and wellness work might not be appealing to all staff or center members; try to create a culture around these interventions that allows people options to opt-in and out.

- Schedule time for self-care. Remember that self-care looks different from person to person. Utilize downtime in the center or between sessions to practice meditation, desk yoga, or journaling.

Because mentorship is a crucial component of professional development (Clary-Lemon and Roen), we believe that as writing center leaders we have a responsibility to help our tutors cultivate a range of skills they can use in their professional and personal lives. Practicing mindfulness together has given us the opportunity to learn from one another and help keep each other accountable to our goals and supported through our struggles. As mentors, sustained mindfulness practice has helped us become more present when we listen, aware of what we're asking others to do, and understanding of the different ways that stress manifests and affects us all. Just as emotions "stick" as they move between bodies (Micciche), our intention is that by incorporating mindfulness in different ways in our centers, the practices (though they may look different for everyone) will also "stick," positively affecting the relationships we build with each other.

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Is Tutoring Stressful?: Measuring Tutors' Cortisol Levels

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When exploring the emotional work of tutoring, writing center literature typically foregrounds writers' emotional health, with limited consideration of tutors' wellbeing or stress levels. For instance, tutors are advised to "gauge the cognitive load of student writers" (Feitosa 15) and be attuned to writers' mental states (Bullock), in addition to helping their peers self-regulate their emotions (Kervin and Barrett). Tutors may even take on the role of counselor or "psychoanalyst" if students "exhibit behavior patterns of anxiety, self-doubt, negative cognition, and procrastination" (Murphy 14). Although experienced tutors know their work can be emotionally draining and stressful, current research does not fully investigate these experiences. To address this gap, researchers in our writing center explored tutor stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout in a pilot study, the results of which we shared at the 2014 International Writing Centers Association Collaborative (Schubert et al). We found, by surveying tutors (n = 7), that factors within the tutoring session (e.g., stressed students, unfamiliar genres, language barriers) caused more stress for tutors than external factors (e.g., coursework, personal issues, health). The top three stressors for tutors were self-imposed high performance expectations, weak papers, and "problem" students (i.e., students who were demanding or rude). Although our response rate was low (15% of total staff), these preliminary results identified potential stressors and inspired us to design a biometric study to understand how stressful tutoring can be.

While some stress can be beneficial, high levels of stress are associated with a variety of health problems, including cardiovascular disease, decreased immune response, and sleep disruption (Kelloway et al.). Stress can also impair thinking and decision making (Porcelli and Delgado). In the writing center,

tutors are expected to prioritize among various writing concerns; however, session productivity may suffer if stress impedes a tutor's ability to make sound judgments. Noreen Lape has argued that tutors need to develop their emotional intelligence in order to enact "a pedagogy of empathy" (3), but we have little evidence that describes how this pedagogy influences tutors' emotional states. Since writing centers are places where we often labor in under-resourced working conditions (Boquet), studying stress in this context should be a higher priority.

BIOMETRICS IN THE WRITING CENTER

To explore tutors' stress levels in greater depth, we used biometric procedures, which are methods of quantifying physiological states and characteristics (e.g., heart rate monitors, voice analysis, skin conductance response tests). We measured salivary cortisol levels, which indicate how much cortisol (a hormonal indicator of emotional stress) is present in a person's saliva. Cortisol is a commonly used biological indicator of stress, and it provides reasonably accurate information about the physiological processes that contribute to perceived stress levels (Hellhammer et al.). Although it may seem counterintuitive to study tutoring through a biological lens, evidence provided by carefully applied biometric techniques can expose previously invisible tutoring experiences. Additionally, biometric approaches to stress measurement can complement commonly-applied self-report approaches. Although both biometric and self-report techniques provide limited views of stress, we chose a biometric approach because of its underrepresentation in existing writing center literature. Specifically, we chose to measure salivary cortisol (instead of urinary or blood-based cortisol measurement techniques) because it provides a relatively easy method of cortisol measurements without inducing additional stress in participants. Moreover, salivary cortisol has been found to correlate highly with plasma and serum cortisol measurements (Hellhammer et al.).

We were guided by the following research question: Do writing tutors at our university show changes in cortisol levels before and after a tutoring shift? We hypothesized that tutors would experience higher levels of stress, reflected through elevated cortisol levels, after completing their tutoring shifts. We designed this study to provide a preliminary understanding of stress, knowing that we could not account for all of the confounding factors that may contribute to tutor stress. Our goal was not to provide a definitive understanding of the experience of stress in the writing center, but to explore tutors' stress levels through a biometric lens, a model for research methods not previously used in writing center research.

METHOD

In total, 18 subjects participated in the study and ranged in age from 19 to 45. Research participants included four faculty tutors and 14 peer tutors who were employees in our university's writing center. Participants were recruited through the writing center's email list and in person during weekly professional development meetings. Participating tutors provided a saliva sample upon entering the writing center and then worked their shifts as usual. Tutors provided a second saliva sample immediately following their shift. Shift durations ranged from one to four hours, and samples were collected from any time between 10:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.

After all samples were collected, we processed them using the Salimetric Cortisol High Sensitivity Enzyme Immunoassay Protocol. In general, the range and interpretation of cortisol concentration varies widely based on a number of factors, such as the type of analytical procedure used, the gender and age of subjects, and the time of day. The average half-life (rate of metabolization or natural decay) for cortisol is 66 minutes. This means once cortisol is secreted, it takes, on average, 66 minutes for the body to reduce levels of original secretion in half (Weitzman et al.). Given this half-life, the cortisol level measured at the end of the shift was influenced by stress levels during the shift and at the time of collection. According to the interpretation guidelines provided by the manufacturers of this particular assay kit, an acceptable range for our sample would be approximately 0.021 (extremely low stress) to 1.551 (extremely high stress) micrograms per deciliter. Lower scores indicate lower cortisol concentration.

To interpret tutors' stress levels, we calculated the difference in scores between pre- and post-sample cortisol concentrations (i.e., the difference between the mean pre-shift cortisol concentration and the mean post-shift cortisol concentration). A paired samples *t*-test was used to compare the mean scores of pre-samples to post-samples. Although additional factors may induce stress (e.g., tutor demographics, length of shift, or time of day), our analyses did not account for these factors due to the limited sample size and the exploratory nature of the study.

RESULTS

Our overall findings suggest that tutors' stress levels significantly decreased from pre-shift to post-shift, which contradicts our hypothesis. The paired samples t-test indicated a statistically significant difference between pre-shift samples ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 0.46$) and post-shift samples ($M = 0.09$, $SD = .05$), $t(17) = 3.735$, $p = .002$. This difference suggested a large effect size ($d = 1.16$).

Specifically, cortisol concentration (measured in micrograms per deciliter) decreased by an average margin of 0.38: a 65% decrease over the span of a shift. The magnitude of the difference varied greatly across participating tutors (see fig. 1).

Figure 1 displays the observed salivary cortisol concentrations for each of the 18 sample pairs. Each line represents one participant's sample pair. The horizontal axis displays the two time points at which data were collected (pre-shift and post-shift), and the vertical axis displays the salivary cortisol concentration in micrograms per deciliter. The dotted line indicates the mean values for pre- and post-shift cortisol concentration (0.47 and 0.09, respectively). Note the high variance among the pre-shift samples compared to the relatively uniform post-shift sample values.
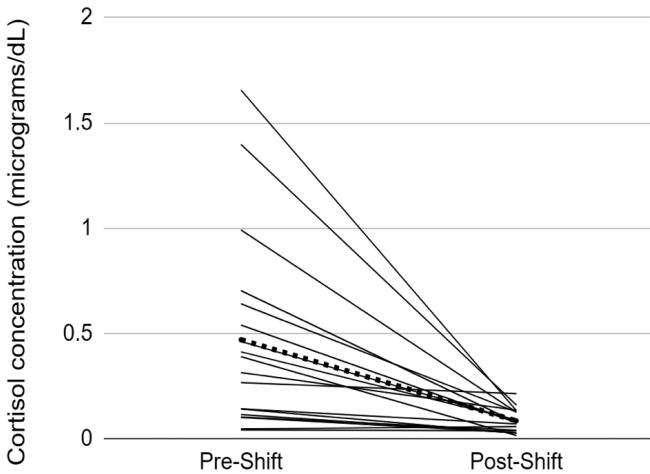

Fig. 1. Comparison of Cortisol Concentrations for Individual Participants.

DISCUSSION

Although we hypothesized that cortisol levels would be higher at the end of a tutoring shift than at the beginning, we found the opposite to be true: cortisol levels dropped significantly after a tutoring shift. Our preliminary study was able to identify this pattern of decreased stress, but more rigorous studies are necessary to verify this effect, explain why this pattern occurs, and explore additional factors that may affect tutor stress. As noted by Hellhammer et al., there are a variety of physiological, demographic, and situational factors (e.g., gender, medication, health) that influence salivary cortisol levels. Future investigations may seek to control statistically or methodologically for these influences. One possible explanation for our findings is that tutoring provides an opportunity to

simultaneously perform meaningful work and reduce stress—perhaps because tutoring is a helping profession. Research has shown that helping others can alleviate the stress of the helper (Melkman et al.) and contribute to reports of more life satisfaction (Buchanan and Bardi). For example, productive sessions may allow tutors to share in students' relief and appreciation. Tutors may also enjoy the process of helping others and the work of tutoring. These positive emotions could explain the decreased cortisol concentrations. Some research also suggests that increased social interaction may reduce cortisol levels, meaning that the social interaction inherent in tutoring may lead to lower stress (Stetler and Miller).

It is also possible that tutoring provides a welcome reprieve from outside stressors, as tutors get a break from class obligations and personal stress. Research has shown that work breaks can prove mentally advantageous for remaining sharp and engaged (Ariga and Lleras). Conversely, the expectancy of starting a new task could increase stress. For example, a tutor coming from a class with an entire work shift ahead of them may experience heightened stress. As the shift ends and another portion of the day is complete, the tutor may experience relief, which could explain part of the decrease in cortisol concentration. However, since the half-life of cortisol is 66 minutes, relief could only play a part in reduced cortisol levels because the post-session sample still reflected cortisol levels secreted during the shift. In the future, collecting mid-shift saliva samples could provide richer information about when and how steeply cortisol levels change during a shift. For comparison, researchers may also examine how tutors' stress levels change over a comparable period of time in the absence of tutoring (e.g., while reading or writing). In addition to collecting more biometric information, researchers could interview or survey tutors about their stress before and after tutoring shifts. For example, survey items such as "Before a shift, I am often anxious about how it will go" and "After a shift ends, I feel a sense of relief" could effectively supplement biometric measurements.

The observed decrease in cortisol concentrations could also be attributed to the task at hand. Tutoring is challenging, but if a tutor's skills adequately meet that challenge, a tutor may experience a flow state—extreme, goal-directed focus on a task (Csikszentmihalyi). In a flow state, people can lose a sense of time, experience reduced self-focus, and devote all their attention to the activity at hand. If a tutor feels a sense of flow while tutoring, they are likely not ruminating on personal stressors, which could cause cortisol levels to decrease. Different skill levels could affect flow states; therefore,

future research could investigate links between stress experiences during tutoring sessions and tutors' levels of skill and education (e.g., differences between undergraduate peer tutors and faculty tutors). It is also possible that a tutor's perception of a session's effectiveness influences their stress levels. Future researchers could therefore explore relationships between tutors' perceptions of success and their experiences of stress and flow.

We acknowledge that our exploratory study has limitations. For one, we had no control over participants' behavior outside of the workplace. Participants were instructed not to engage in any activities that would influence cortisol levels, such as eating large meals, exercising immediately before a shift, drinking alcohol, or consuming caffeine within 15 minutes of providing a sample; however, participants may not have followed these instructions from the assay kit. Also, the writing center's location on campus required some degree of physical activity, as students walked from other buildings on campus to begin their shift. By the time the post-shift sample was collected, tutors had likely been sitting for several hours, which could explain lower cortisol levels. Future research could investigate this possibility by including a control group of tutors who sit in the writing center for two to three hours before data collection. This research design could help isolate the social effects of tutoring from the physical effects.

This small study was also unable to differentiate between contextual or demographic factors because the sample size lacked sufficient power to investigate additional variables of interest. For example, we could not study whether different shift durations were associated with different stress level changes because there were not enough participants in each condition for comparison. It is possible that different shift lengths and number of tutoring sessions accounted for different levels of stress reduction. A larger sample or replication across different universities would represent more demographic variation in peer, graduate, and faculty tutors, which would enable researchers to explore other important variables (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, experience level). Despite our inability to control for these variables, the consistent trend seen in this data set suggests that a similar pattern of decreased stress levels could be expected in future research.

These findings provide a glimpse into the stress experienced by writing center tutors. Although we cannot determine causality, we encourage more biometric approaches to investigating tutors' experiences because they can illuminate otherwise veiled experiences. For instance, we can envision researchers using

affordable heart rate monitors or smartphone apps to track and monitor tutors' or clients' moods. Measures of psychological constructs inevitably represent a single piece of the emotional picture; therefore, repeated research using a variety of approaches and modes of study is critical to developing a more complete understanding of tutors' and clients' experiences. Collaborating with scientists across disciplines who can help administer such experiments, as we have done, is an approach we hope others will also undertake. We believe biometrics offer unique ways to make the invisible labor of writing center work (Caswell et al.) more observable.

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Tutors' Column: "Just Say 'No': Setting Emotional Boundaries in the Writing Center is a Practice in Self-Care"

Katelyn Parsons
University of Maine

KATELYN PARSONS
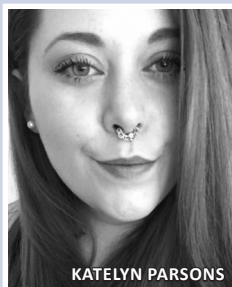
Just like the act of writing itself, you need to do *the thing* in order to *get it*; you need to work in a writing center in order to understand it. Sometimes you see your peers cry during their sessions because they have no idea how to start writing. There's no emotional distance; this is real life. As a tutor, you are granted the honor of getting to know writers through their sorrow, through their happiness, and most importantly through their writing. Writing itself is so inextricably personal—style, voice, rhetorical choices—all indicators of who you are. Some of the writers you help will tell you they aren't writers, that they can't write. As a tutor, you spend time assuring your peers that they *are* and that they *can*.

Before you start working in a writing center, they tell you to read *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring* (Gillespie and Lerner), or some other tutoring guide, or some set of tutoring articles. You learn the importance of being sensitive and flexible to the needs of writers and the dangers of "appropriating" and "reformulating" their work. You may read Isabelle Thompson's article "Scaffolding in the Writing Center" and learn that your role as a tutor is to make sure you're never working harder during the session than the writer.

Yet tutors work just as hard as most writers, but in a different sort of way. Elizabeth Boquet writes in *Noise from the Writing Center*:

> What...if we were to...admit that the writing center is indeed a place where actual labor (gasp!) takes place, look our colleagues in the eyes and say, yes, we work with our hands. We take texts and we turn them around and over and upside down; we cut them into their bits and pieces; we tug at them, tutor to student, student to tutor, back and forth, to and fro…. (18)

Writing tutors work hard; tutors feel invested in their work and this can be emotionally and mentally laborious. In the paragraphs that follow, I will connect my own experience as a writing tutor to the guilt I have experienced in my work and the importance of self-care

in these instances.

Many writers are unable to remove their feelings from the act of writing itself, which can carry over to tutoring sessions. Writers often tell tutors that they "feel" better at the end of their sessions. Therefore, some tutors use this verbiage to measure the success of the session and, inherently, how guilty they should feel. Some tutors experience guilt if they think they failed to make writers feel better. In what situations do tutors feel the most guilty? Are these feelings of guilt common? Jennifer Nicklay insists that writing tutors feel more guilt when they employ directive tutoring styles rather than minimalist ones. Nicklay references Susan Blau and John Hall's findings that "consultants in their center felt guilty for stepping outside the 'rules'" (16). This guilt stems from the tutors' ideas about what type of work they should be doing based on writing center orthodoxy ("rules"). I agree with Nicklay, but I also feel guilty when writers insist that I be overly-directive and I refuse.

I've tutored writing for three years, and certain writers have come to know, and appreciate, my personality and style. Writers often ask me to come in early, stay later than I'm scheduled, or be available to work with them over the weekend, and, because I feel guilty, sometimes I say yes. I say yes because I care about my peers and want them to succeed. For instance, I say yes when employing directive tutoring styles over minimalist ones during sessions. Nicklay's "inquiry into minimalism and directivity...revealed the most acute feelings of guilt" (21). While directivity within sessions can be necessary and helpful, through my experience as a tutor I have experienced guilt over employing this pedagogical choice.

One writer I worked with consistently (several hours a week over a couple years' time) taught me the importance of setting boundaries. It was typical for him to rush into the writing center without a scheduled appointment while holding an assignment in his hand that was due in a couple hours and was barely started. Sometimes, we would work together for two hours straight, and I would warn him that we only had five more minutes left of the session because I needed to leave for class. He would often beg me to stay later to help him more. I reminded him that other tutors were available to assist him, but he refused to work with anyone else. Because he always desired more help from me than I was literally able to provide, I felt like I had failed him, and the guilt negatively impacted my mental state. I would ask myself: *Were the two hours we just spent working together not helpful? Where did I go wrong?* Sometimes our sessions were challenging in other ways, particularly when he would expect me to tell him exactly what to

write. Often, the two of us would sit in silence and, in that silence, I forced him to plunge into the messy process of writing, revising, rewriting. Nothing frustrated him more than being forced to take the time to write.

My inability to say no does not exist solely in the realm of the writing center; it's pervasive across many facets of my life. I mention this because it isn't the work of the writing center, or even the policies in place at the writing center, that make me feel incapable of saying no. As a writing tutor, I want to help people become better writers, which drives me each session. Together, my passion for writing and the empathy I feel for others make me a helpful and effective tutor. Yet, taken to the extreme, this passion can be a tutor's undoing.

In "Tutoring a Friend," Adam Greenberg writes, "[i]f anything, we can stand to be a little less friendly, as when a student tries to get you to do his work for him, or when blunt honesty about an essay's deficiencies will do a student more good than the usual dose of cheerleading" (27). Greenberg discusses the emotional component of writing center work that can make it hard for tutors to say no even though there are times when saying no is best for both the writer and the tutor. The most frustrating sessions I have participated in are those where writers were "forced" to seek help at the writing center by their professors. The student I discussed earlier began visiting the writing center because of his professor's insistence. It is this student's professor who is saying "no" here; when the professor says no (by refusing to help the student), the tutor may fail to say no and overhelp. Likewise, the writer may fail to say no and, instead, come to the writing center angry and frustrated.

According to Peter Bregman's article, "Nine Practices to Help You Say No," saying no is an essential part of setting and preserving boundaries. Bregman argues that people who ask you for anything extra most likely believe that you're the most capable to complete additional tasks, or, if you have a history of saying "yes," that you'll say yes again. Bregman suggests that it's important to "be appreciative" and remember that you're not rejecting the person making the request but rejecting the request itself. However, Bregman warns that saying "yes" all the time can easily lead to burnout.

So, I am here to tell you: tutors, it's OK to say no. In itself, saying no is a practice in self-care. Elizabeth Boquet insists that "[t]utors are placed, on a daily basis, in impossible positions... that im/possibility is the challenge, is the passion" (20). Tutors slip into and out of many different roles: tutor, friend, classmate, confidant. Tutors, it's OK to be flexible by using a more directive tutoring style over a

minimalist one. Choosing between a minimalist tutoring style or a directive one should depend on the writer's needs and not what writing center orthodoxy dictates is "right" (Nicklay). However, it's also important to refuse to be directive if you believe the writer is potentially taking advantage of your support. It's important to set tutor-writer boundaries in writing center sessions as well as beyond the walls of the writing center. It's equally important to set emotional boundaries; setting emotional boundaries is a practice in self-care.

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Conference Announcements

COLORADO WYOMING WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION
April 24-25, 2020
Pueblo, CO
Colorado State University Pueblo
"Engaging the Local: Writing Centers and Place-Based Learning"

Proposals due on Jan. 31, 2020. Conference chair: Chad Pickering: chad.pickering@csupueblo.edu; conference website: www.cwwca. com.

WRITING CENTERS IN ASIA SYMPOSIUM
February 23, 2020
Osaka, Japan
Osaka University
"Opportunities and Challenges for Writing and Writing Centers."
Plenary speaker: Judy Noguchi

To register for the conference, please visit: docs.google.com/ forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSecl5E_9yNFtZKHPVhLQZGfKO0TiQ5pnttbYe rgpz8AFVa_Sg/viewform. For further information: sites.google. com/site/wcajapan/upcoming-events.

Conference Calendar

February 20-22, 2020: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Birmingham, AL
Contact: Jaclyn Wells: wellsj@uab.edu; conference website: southeasternwritingcenter.wildapricot. org/2020swcacfp.

February 23, 2020: Writing Centers in Asia, in Osaka, Japan
Contact: sites.google.com/site/wcajapan/upcoming-events.

March 5-7, 2020: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Indianapolis, IN
Contact: Mark Latta: mlatta@marian.edu; conference website: marian.edu/ecwcca2020.

March 6-7, 2020: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Towson, MD
Contact: Carmen Meza: cmeza@towson.edu; conference website: mawca.org/2020-conference.

March 12-14, 2020: Midwest Writing Center Association, in Cedar Rapids, IA
Contact: Ben Thiel: bthiel@mtmercy.edu and Kristin Risley: risleyk@uwstout.edu; conference website: midwestwritingcenters. org/conference/2020/.

March 12-14, 2020: South Central Writing Center Association, in Stillwater, OK
Contact: Anna Sicari: anna.sicari@okstate.edu; conference website: scwca.net.

March 13-14, 2020: Secondary School Writing Centers Association, in Arlington, VA
Contact: sswca.board@gmail.com; conference website: sswca.org/ sswca-conference/call-for-proposals/.

April 24-25, 2020: Colorado Wyoming Writing Centers Association, Pueblo, CO
Contact: Chad Pickering:chad.pickering@csupueblo.edu; conference website: www.cwwca.com.

July 8-11, 2020: European Writing Centers Association, in Graz, Austria
Contact: Doris Pany: schreibzentrum@uni-graz.at; conference website: europeanwritingcenters.eu/conference.html.

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