

W|C|N

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

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Editor's Note

Julia Bleakney

In this latest issue, each contribution focuses on new ways of re-seeing or reframing our writing center work: Anderson and Molloy reframe the idea that writers having different tech choices can increase, not inhibit, their access to tutoring sessions; Blackmon offers a model for tutors to help writers reframe lack of writing motivation; Monty's book review shows how Georganne Nordstrom invites researchers to re-see collaboration; and Bryan learned to re-see and rejuvenate her tired tutoring practice.



When the Covid-19 pandemic forced many writing centers to go online, many opted to use one online platform to ease the already chaotic transition. But at Centenary University and William Paterson University, consultants and clients could choose which online platform to use for their tutoring sessions, as Erin M. Andersen and Sean Molloy describe. Results of their survey show that writers were comfortable having tech choices and did not face barriers or delays in accessing tutoring.

When they are required to visit the writing center, writers can sometimes lack motivation, and tutors might be unsure what to do. Enter Elizabeth Busekrus Blackmon's "Writing MAP," a heuristic Blackmon has utilized and tested at her community college since 2015. Blackmon's Writing MAP provides questions to help tutors determine a writer's underlying motivations and then to understand their feelings of writing competency. These questions, Blackmon found, help with rapport-building and lead to productive sessions.

In his review of Georganne Nordstrom's *A Writing Center Practitioner's Inquiry into Collaboration: Pedagogy, Practice, and Research* (2021), Randall Monty describes how Nordstrom's model of collaborative inquiry navigates the contradictory position writing centers inhabit within institutions of higher education that privilege individuality. Nordstrom complicates a familiar definition of collab-

oration, Monty explains, by rooting her understanding of it in Native Hawaiian scholarship, poetry, and proverbs of community and communal work. Nordstrom's book offers advice for how to conduct writing center studies that are "democratic and socially just."

Finally, as tutors, we sometimes see the same type of writing assignment repeatedly and tutoring can easily become rote, failing to take the time with a writer who may be doing this type of writing assignment for the first time. In her Tutors' Column, Victoria Bryan shares a story of how taking on a new project—preparing Instagram posts to advertise the writing center—unexpectedly helped her remember the struggles writers face when working on something new and reminded her to create space for students to practice writing.

A FEW ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CWCAB BLOG EDITORS!

Season 3 of the *Slow Agency* podcast is here! On this podcast, we try to slow down, listen, and dialog. This season we focus our conversations on books and/or edited collections related to writing center praxis. We recorded with Noreen Lape, Joe Essid and Brian McTague, and Susan Lawrence and Terry Myers Zawacki in Fall 2021. Our topics range from multilingual writing centers, to writing centers at the center of change, to approaches to supporting graduate students in the writing center. For listening on your mobile device, we invite you to subscribe to *Slow Agency* on Anchor, Apple Podcast, Spotify, and Google Podcasts.

Our second post in the "*Dear CWCAB*" series is live! In this new series, Stacia Moroski-Rigney provides answers and updates to perennially asked questions related to writing center operations and practice. We invite you to respond with your comments on these posts at <https://www.wlnjournal.org/blog/2022/04/dear-cwcab-april-2022/> or to email the blog editors at writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com with your pesky or heavy questions related to your own writing center work and Stacia will crowdsource answers from the scholarship and the community.

Finally, we invite you to subscribe to our newsletter at <https://www.wlnjournal.org/blog/subscribe-to-blog-newsletter/>. The Spring 2022 newsletter will be released at the end of May.

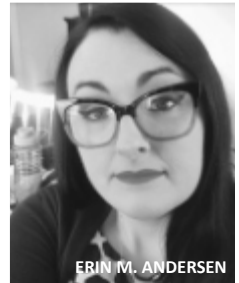


Retooling the OWC: Offering Clients Online Platform Choices during a Pandemic

Erin M. Andersen
Centenary University

Sean Molloy
William Paterson University

Our two writing centers (WCs), like so many others, were thrown suddenly online by the pandemic in March 2020. Having been mostly face-to-face writing centers, and with mere days to make this major shift, we both adopted TwentySix Design LLC’s scheduling, online meeting, and document sharing platform, WOnline. We were not alone. TwentySix Design reported a 19,000 percent increase in use of its online module during the pandemic year (TwentySix Design LLC “UPDATE Online”). Without a doubt, TwentySix Design’s support staff were invaluable to our sudden jumps online. But when WOnline failed from time to time from March through August 2020, our consultants scrambled to find their own Plan Bs and Plan Cs.



Offering more than one online platform and document sharing tool during a stressful time might seem like a bad idea. New and unfamiliar technology tools can create barriers to access and comfort both for clients and consultants. But we saw in both our centers during the early pandemic that when consultants and clients pivoted to new technical options that they chose together, they were more comfortable, and they overcame technical glitches that interrupted sessions. Hoping to capture the benefits we saw in these informal practices, in Fall 2020, we implemented a formal consultant/client platform-choice model in both of our WCs. In this article we review our client survey data from Fall 2020—the first semester of our two-campus, IRB-approved study. We have many questions about our new model, which we are pursuing together. But we viewed Fall 2020 as our “Phase One Trial”—our initial limited data collection was not so much intended to prove that offering clients voluntary platform choices was effective and beneficial, as to confirm that it did not cause any harm through inaccessibility. As such, in this analysis, we address four questions:

- Did platform choices confuse clients or make them less

- comfortable?
- Did clients help choose platforms for their sessions?
- How often did tech problems delay or disrupt sessions?
- Which platforms did clients ideally prefer at each university?

BACKGROUND: TECH AS A BARRIER TO ACCESS

Writing center theory has long focused on the need to apply flexibility when working through the rhetorical situation of the tutorial (Corbett). We argue that this idea applies not only to tutor-client interactions (Bourgeois and Giaimo) but also to platforms, modalities, and document sharing tools. Now that writing center practitioners largely accept the validity and importance of digital media tools in WC sessions (Grutsch McKinney, “New Media Matters”; Hewett et al.), and as more WCs add both asynchronous and synchronous online sessions, the field has begun more in-depth critical analysis of technical literacies as part of our everyday praxis (Bancroft).

Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle are conflicted about adding new tech tools to online writing instruction systems. They argue for “a learning environment that is more inclusive” (36) and is “user-centered and user-driven” (37)—which suggests systems that offer clients and consultants agency to shape each writing session. But Borgman and McArdle also worry that remote learning already “creates enough barriers for students” (38). As such, they recommend against complex systems which require “too many clicks or links,” or make “the navigation of the CMS too complicated” (37). The “mediating” effects of platforms and tools also raise questions of power and privilege (Hewett; Prince et al.). As we developed protocols for platform choice in our centers, Borgman and McArdle’s words weighed heavily on our minds, and we were concerned that our new choice-based system would confuse students and tutors alike. The potential benefits of a choice-based system, however, outweighed these fears.

BACKGROUND: TWO DIFFERENT CENTERS, TWO DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS

Our two writing centers, one at William Paterson University (WPU) and the other at Centenary University (CU), are located about fifty miles apart in New Jersey. WPU is a public university designated as both a minority and Hispanic-serving institution with 8,600 undergraduate and 1,500 graduate students in 2019 (WPU). Traditionally a face-to-face (f2f) center, the WPU Writing Center (WPUWC) piloted synchronous online sessions during 2019 and made all sessions online optional in January 2020. But most clients still chose

f2f meetings until mid-March 2020 when WPU jumped fully online. In Fall 2020, the WPUWC remained fully online. The Writing Collaboratory at Centenary University is a less busy resource at a small campus of less than 1,800 students. CU is a small liberal arts college and a private, predominantly white institution located in rural New Jersey. The Writing Collaboratory offered exclusively f2f sessions until March 2020, when all campus activity was moved online. In Fall 2020, the Writing Collaboratory remained fully online.

OUR METHODS

In August 2020, both WCs asked consultants to designate at least one digital meeting platform as an alternative to WOnline. We set no limits as to platform choices or using personal or institutional accounts. Almost all consultants chose only one alternative. At WPU, almost all chose Zoom, which was provided free to the entire campus. At CU, which did not pay for Zoom access for teachers or students, most consultants chose Microsoft Teams. We wanted to avoid confusion before consultants and clients began to talk together. So, we asked consultants to offer these alternatives to clients once they met within the WOnline platform prior to starting paper reviews. They also served as quick alternates if either a client or a consultant could not access WOnline for any reason before or during the session. In practice, some repeat clients and consultants soon began to jump straight to alternate platforms that they preferred.

Survey invitations were generated by WOnline automatically for each completed session at CU and upon completion of a consultant session report at WPU. Surveys began with three or four questions about general client satisfaction; these questions varied slightly between the two centers. Then the surveys asked five questions (identical at both centers) which address more specific questions of comfort, tech disruptions, agency, and alternate platform choices/preferences. We provide those five questions and results below. In Fall 2020, the WPUWC received 241 anonymous client surveys, representing 9.8% of 2466 total sessions. The Writing Collaboratory received 86 anonymous surveys, representing 23% of its 365 total sessions. As the surveys are anonymous and clients were offered new invitations for each session they completed, we do not know how often returning clients turned in multiple surveys.

FINDINGS

Our Clients Were Very Comfortable with the Tech Choices We Offered

We asked: “Were You Comfortable with the Way You Met Online? (Zoom, WOnline, Meet, Telephone. etc.?)” with five-choices of re-

sponses from “Very Comfortable” to “Very Uncomfortable.”¹ Of 327 total responses (WPU 218/CU 73), 291 replied they felt very comfortable, and 31 more were somewhat comfortable. Three were a little comfortable. Only two (out of 327) felt either somewhat or very uncomfortable. While these surveys represent only a fraction of actual sessions and clients, we saw almost no direct evidence of tech discomfort or confusion.

Most Clients Said They Helped Choose Platforms

We asked clients: “Did you help choose how you met online for this session (Zoom, WOnline, Meet, etc.)?” The answer options were yes/somewhat/no. Most clients said yes: 70.1% at WPU and 84.9% at CU. Enough said no to concern us: 16.6% at WPU and 9.3% at CU. We believe that most tutors and clients collaborated on a crucial point of agenda-setting for sessions in a way that complements other collaborative practices central to WC pedagogy. But we see room for improvement.

Clients Reported Few Session Delays or Tech Disruptions

After our chaotic experiences during spring 2020, we expected there would be a lot of tech glitches and disruptions in the fall. We asked about initial overall connection problems and mid-session tech disruptions. Clients reported that most online sessions went smoothly. At both schools, 86-87% of reported sessions started within two minutes of the scheduled time.

How long did it take to meet online and then get started with the session?					
	> 1 min.	2 min.	3-4 min	5-10 min.	10+ min.
WPU	76.8%	10.0%	5.4%	4.6%	3.3%
CU	62.8%	23.3%	7.0%	1.2%	5.8%

Table 1: Responses to survey about length of lead time for start of online sessions.

(Again, clients reported about only a small fraction of total sessions.) We did see small but significant reports of sessions at both schools (7-8%) that were delayed five minutes or more for some reason. We had not tracked late starts before, so we are not sure how to read these delays. We know some had little to do with tech as consultants juggled back-to-back sessions and dealt with normal, other non-tech distractions as they worked from home. (Indeed, in our f2f sessions, sessions sometimes run late for many non-tech reasons.) We expected more initial delays at WPU because it has no gaps between scheduled 45-minute sessions and was also far busier than CU, which builds in 15-minute breaks after each 45-minute session. But the results were very similar. In a blog post, A WPU consultant described her scramble during the spring

for workable options, including Zoom, Skype, and Meet: “Here and there, all platforms have failed... and a good old-fashioned phone call has saved the day during these desperate times” (Polidore). In the fall we asked clients: “If you lost your connection during the session, what happened?” After the chaotic spring, we were surprised to find that 85% (WPU) and 90% (CU) of the reported Fall 2020 sessions had no tech interruptions. Almost all interruptions were resolved by reconnecting to the same tools. Based on this limited data, only one session at WPU, and none at CU, were reported as completely interrupted. Staying in our “Phase One” mindset, we again saw no evidence of harm. On one hand, maybe we simply benefitted from the national embrace of video conferencing during the pandemic, especially in colleges like ours. But clients with interrupted sessions may also have been less likely to fill out anonymous surveys. And returning clients may have quickly developed tech choice habits and thereafter experienced fewer delays or interruptions. For example, Sean spent ten sessions with a graduate student who was revising her medical school statement. Deciding to meet by video on WConline and share a Google Doc draft took a few minutes in the first session— and zero time after that.

Local Circumstances Affected Platform Preferences

Given our different ecosystems, we were surprised at the consistency of many client responses across both schools. But we did see very different answers to our final question. Offering ten choices, we asked what platforms clients would prefer using in the future. Though we cannot directly compare CU's results to WPU's results since CU allowed clients to select multiple preferences, whereas WPU's clients selected one option, we can determine trends in clients' preferences for the platforms they would like to use in future sessions.

Some differences are hard to explain. We don't know why WConline was so much more popular among clients at WPU than at CU. Other differences align with systemic practices at our schools. WPU bought Zoom accounts for all students and faculty in early 2020. Although administration strongly encouraged the use of BB Collaborate and MS Teams, many faculty members preferred Zoom for classes and meetings. But CU had very limited Zoom licenses available and more strongly pressed its community to use MS Teams. The ideal choices may have been shaped by the options offered by consultants. At WPU, where consultants all had free Zoom, 13 of 14 consultants offered Zoom as their only alternate platform. The other consultant offered both Zoom and Google Meet. None offered Collaborate, Facetime, or MS Teams. (In practice, phone sessions remained our usual informal Plan C.) By contrast, due to

budget deficits and deep operational budget cuts, Erin at CU was forced to find creative ways to pay for multiple platform subscriptions in this study. All CU consultants chose to offer MS Teams, Zoom, and Google Meet as alternatives to WOnline. Although clients could have chosen any of the ten offered platforms as their ideal choice, we suspect that the choices offered to them in actual sessions shaped their preferences.

For online sessions, what way to meet would you prefer in the future?		
Platform/Technology Tool	WPU (241 clients selected one option)	CU (84 clients selected multiple options)
WOnline	154	13
Zoom	54	28
BB Collaborate	4	3
MS Teams	0	77
Google Meet	5	9
Apple FaceTime	2	15
Voice Phone Call	5	2
Texting	2	4
WhatsApp	0	0
E-tutor Session (draft drop off)	15	13

Table 2: Responses to survey about client preference for future meeting platforms.

We think the variation here offers a strong argument for tech choice. We note that these ideal platform responses would have been radically different a year ago when very few of us at either site regularly used Zoom. Plus, had we deferred to administrators' preferences for Teams and Collaborate at WPU, we would have pressed many clients into less comfortable choices. We also think clients' needs and preferences may shift rapidly in the future, and bottom-up choice systems will enable us to see and adapt to those changes more quickly.

CONCLUSION

While we focus here on harm, we think the benefits of tech choice may be substantial, depending on local circumstances. Flexibility about location, time, and mode already make online sessions a powerful tool to enact material, cultural, and disability justice as we use them to reach clients where they are (Hamper). We expect online writing sessions to remain a large part of our practice from now on. We have many more questions about tech choice. How will it shape our pedagogy and future consultant training? What data

should we report, and what inferences should we argue about these choices in our programmatic assessments? Will more bottom-up, open systems help us meet (or maybe resist) future administrative demands to join centralized top-down systems?

We are excited that adding more tech platform options did not seem to create new barriers for our clients during this challenging year. As we continue to use and study platform choice systems, we hope to learn more about how we all can use new technologies as bridges instead of barriers in this strange new normal that we all face together.

NOTES

1. We agree with critiques of the concept of “comfort” in WCs as a problematic goal that can limit confronting harmful or oppressive ideas and that ultimately negate any progress towards social justice in the WC (Grutsch McKinney, *Peripheral Visions*). But we also agree with Borgman and McArdle in affirming technological comfort as critical to full accessibility and, therefore, dis/ability justice. We also used tech comfort to gauge confusion or frustration.

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CALL FOR STORIES ON WRITING CENTER LABOR

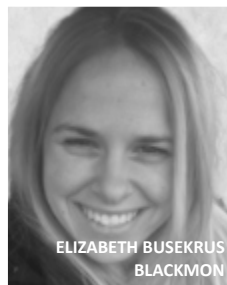


The editors, Genie Giaimo and Dan Lawson, seek to have unmediated first-hand stories of writing center and writing administration labor for a book under contract with WAC Clearinghouse. For details, go to www.wlnjournal.org/blog/2022/04/call-for-stories-june-15/.

“I Just Need a Green Sheet”: Generating Motivation for Required Visits

Elizabeth Busekrus Blackmon
St. Louis Community College

“I just need a green sheet,” the student mumbles, sliding into the chair next to the tutor. This statement has become a classic line at my writing center where we use the green sheet to prove the student came to the writing center. As evidenced by this example, some students seem unmotivated during the session, only present to receive the credit. At my community college, many instructors require their entire classes to visit the College Writing Center (CWC). My writing center has a long-standing history of debates regarding the validity of these required visits and if these visits benefit our students. The staff has concluded that sending entire classes is beneficial for the community college student body. Our diverse student population, varied in languages, abilities, educational backgrounds, race, age, and gender, uniquely perceives the value of a required CWC visit in light of their prior experiences, but some may question the value of a required visit because the many demands they have to manage. Some writers, particularly those pursuing a mathematics or science degree, have said they do not see writing as applicable to their lives or future careers. Other students have mentioned their lack of time due to other commitments such as a full-time job or family obligations. Finally, some writers have shared their negative prior experiences with writing or with English instructors and tutors. For those who seem unmotivated, some may view the writing center as a remedial service they do not need, or they procrastinate and view visiting the writing center as a burden. Since writers may come to sessions unmotivated, I developed a heuristic called the Writing Motivational Assessment Pathway (MAP) that may support tutors in motivating reluctant writers, providing tutors with strategic questions to move past writers’ lack of motivation barrier in the first few minutes of a tutoring session. While my CWC tutors are professional writers or professionals with master’s degrees, the process outlined may benefit peer tutors as well.



REQUIRED VISITS AND MOTIVATION

Empirical writing center research has found required visits to be valuable. Beth Rapp Young captured archival data for one such study. Looking at 83,045 records of student appointments, she notes that one-third were required visits. The results of her study emphasize that the required visit “encourages writing center use without negative effects.” In another study, Wendy Pfrenger et al. analyzed students in developmental English classes, showing that students who were required to visit the writing center had a higher chance of passing the course than those who did not come. Required visits also lessened the intimidation students felt about the writing center space and increased their sense of agency and understanding of the importance of revision. Rapp Young and Pfrenger et al. found that those who were required to visit one time had a higher chance of coming back. Other scholars have cited the advantages of mandatory visits in that they might motivate procrastinators (Rapp Young and Fritzsche) or show students the significance of the writing process. Gwendolyn Osman describes how required visits increase the confidence and skill level of students. L. Lennie Irvin conducted research at the community college level, showing that a higher percentage of students passed if they were required to come to the writing center three or more times. This study also revealed how required sessions increased student retention and persistence.

Since many students care about the grade in their class, tying the required writing center visit to the grade encourages them to attend. However, grades as an extrinsic motivator may not be enough to promote engagement in the session. Heather Robinson suggests that tutors should foster intrinsic motivation in writers to help them learn how to experience pleasure from the act of engaging in writing. While students may initially come to the writing center seeking assistance with lower-order concerns, tutors can move students toward intrinsic motivation by encouraging them to brainstorm and develop effective topic ideas that connect their experiences, expertise, and background to their writing. Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson emphasize how important it is for writing center tutors to be aware of students’ motivation since it can encourage their effort, engagement with a task, and writing performance (“Motivational Scaffolding”). Students’ motivations impact their thinking about their writing, perceptions of themselves as writers, and various writing habits and behaviors, and tutors can help writers unpack their motivations to better engage students. In the tutoring session, questioning becomes the intervention that aids tutors in reflecting on a student’s motivational habits in order to help them engage in the revision process.

THE WRITING MOTIVATIONAL ASSESSMENT PATHWAY (MAP)

Because I wanted to learn how to engage students in more effective ways, in 2014-2015, I conducted an IRB-approved research study, examining the writing motivations of four students when they took English Composition 101 (fall 2014) and English Composition 102 (spring 2015). Although this research study was conducted several years ago, the Writing MAP was developed from the initial results of this study and has continued to transform through additional research and application. This case study approach involved interviewing these students at the beginning and end of each semester, surveying them before and after each tutoring session, and audio recording each session in the writing center. Two students exhibited a low self-efficacy that decreased their effort at writing. Three students emphasized an extrinsic goal framework which focused their attention on pleasing the instructor. While overlap existed in their motivations, they varied in their personality types, identification as writers, and interest level in the writing assignment and writing center. Applying motivational theories to this study challenged me to create an approach that would benefit tutors in a writing center context. Using the Writing MAP, tutors seek to (1) pay attention to what motivates students and (2) determine tutoring strategies that could motivate different types of students. This approach allows tutors to identify the most prevalent motivational traits during a student session and apply strategies that encourage students to avoid procrastination, consider new writing habits, build their confidence, and/or generate metacognition.

Markus Dresel and Nathan Hall define motivation as “the processes underlying the initiation, control, maintenance, and evaluation of goal-oriented behaviors” (59), and Mackiewicz and Thompson connect motivation to three essential concepts: interest, self-efficacy, and self-regulation (*Talk about Writing*). Applying these concepts, the Writing MAP helps tutors discover writers’ underlying motivations to find out how they can encourage and engage these writers. Mackiewicz and Thompson’s strategy presents many parallels to the Writing MAP in its purpose. Motivational scaffolding centers on using strategies to “build rapport and solidarity with students and to engage students and keep them engaged in writing center conferences” (47). Similarly, the Writing MAP works toward facilitating motivational habits and developing students as writers. The difference lies in the Writing MAP’s systematic approach to identifying the student’s motivational framework and responding to those needs. The Writing MAP offers a way to assess a given writer’s motivation so tutors can respond to them.

To motivate students, tutors first must understand students’ under-

lying motivations (i.e., the first step of the Writing MAP). The Writing MAP examines three areas: a student's goal framework, perception of competency, and level of engagement in a session. In our writing center, a session using the Writing MAP starts with rapport-building, where the student typically reveals their requirement to come to the writing center. The tutor then asks the student, "What is your goal for your writing?" From these required-visit students, common responses include wanting a good grade, making sure they are following the teacher's expectations, or checking to make sure their grammar is correct; these responses identify whether the student has extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. Reluctant students are often extrinsically motivated, coming to the writing center because of the requirement. Tutors then work toward understanding how the student feels about their writing competency. Students often convey a low or high perception of competency, and at times, this self-perception affects the student's level of engagement in the tutoring session. While the questions listed in Table 1 are provided for tutors, they are taught to improvise questions based on student responses.

Based on these initial questions, tutors parse students' motivational habits, such as a tendency to procrastinate or a lack of interest in writing. Tutors then use tailored strategies in the first few minutes of a session to move to the second step of the Writing MAP. If the student has revealed nothing about their goal framework, competency, or engagement level in the first few minutes, the tutor can use any of the questions listed in Table 1. Dealing first with the students' motivation helps move past barriers that cause resistance to the assignment or with their writing process. The tutor can continue asking directed questions, as identified in Table 1, to investigate past writing behaviors. Asking questions about the past can help tutors understand obstacles to a student's current and future writing processes. For example, when a student expresses a focus on the grade, the tutor can investigate what the student considers to be the purpose of that writing assignment and what past experiences correlate with the writer's focus on the grade. Understanding students' motivation can help tutors to empathize and relate to these students' experiences.

As the tutor reflects on the student's motivational attributes, the tutor considers the purpose of the session and decides what strategies to use to move the session forward. The Writing MAP investigates the motivational habits behind students' behaviors and encourages them to self-reflect on their own processes. While these strategies have worked effectively at our community college writing center, each institution has its own population and culture, and the

Writer's Observable Behavior	Tutor Strategies	Questions for the Student
Opening Questions: Explore Students' Goal Framework		
Procrastinates on the writing assignment	Discuss the assignment's purpose and investigate reasons for procrastinating. Emphasize how to improve the writing process to save time.	When you receive a writing assignment, how do you determine when to start the assignment?
Focuses on receiving a good grade and positive comments from the instructor	Discuss why the student thinks the instructor created this writing assignment.	What do you think the purpose of this writing assignment is? What does your instructor want you to learn from this assignment?
Displays a fixed mindset about writing	Ask the student questions about their prior writing experiences.	What have been some of your past experiences with writing assignments in school? Are these experiences more positive or negative?
If the student exhibits extrinsic motivation, continue questioning to discover their perceptions and level of engagement.		
Discover Students' Perceptions of Competency		
Displays confidence and/or competency when writing	Highlight students' strengths since this student is a confident writer.	Why do you feel like a confident writer?
	Determine how the student views a successful writer.	What are important attributes of a good writer? What writing attributes do you have? When you complete a writing assignment, how do you evaluate your success? Do you evaluate success based on your grade, learning the task, or both?
Displays little confidence or agency when writing	Emphasize how writing relates to decision-making and ownership.	What are your strengths as a writer? What essays have you written that you relate to?
Reveals a narrow view of the writing process	Show students the importance of revision.	What is your writing process like? How do you typically approach a writing assignment?
Determine Students' Level of Engagement in the Writing Center Session		
Lacks interest in the topic	Engage with the student's writing, ask questions, and express a desire to hear more.	Why did you decide to write about this topic? What about this topic interests you?
Reveals a lack of engagement in the session	Discuss the goals of the session and the purpose of the writing center.	What do you see as the purpose of the writing center visit? (For "just need a green sheet" students, the answer can lead into a conversation about the purpose of the center.) What goals do you want to set in this session? Are there any obstacles preventing you from completing this writing assignment?

Table 1: Strategies for Required Visits¹

techniques listed in Table 1 may need to be modified. The questions serve as a guide and are not comprehensive. In a session, questions can arise organically according to the situation.

The types of questions tutors ask can aid in understanding writers' motivations and guide tutors in how to strategize their sessions. These questions are not meant to take the entire session but to assist with initial rapport-building in the first few minutes of the session. While Table 1 presents a set of strategies for those who are required to come to the writing center, these strategies can easily be altered to fit non-mandatory sessions.

THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF THE WRITING MAP

Helping students to improve their motivation begins with identifying obstacles that are preventing them from having productive writing habits. Beginning the session with questions should be purposeful; each tutor should be transparent about why they are asking these questions. Several tutors at St. Louis Community College have commented on using the Writing MAP. According to one professional tutor, the Writing MAP "helps to raise the writer's awareness of writing as a process and as connected to identity rather than writing as functional or a way to receive a grade. It moves students into a different space, creating a narrative of improving as a writer as lifelong." In working with one writer, this tutor foresaw some vestigial self-doubt the student had by asking a few questions outlined in Table 1. The tutor had the opportunity to validate the student's experience and build an alternative narrative to what the student told herself.

Another tutor mentioned two scenarios where the Writing MAP came into play. One session started with the writer mentioning that he had never written an evaluation essay, which he was recently assigned. With this statement, he constructed a wall between his self-perception and his capabilities, showing low self-confidence in his ability to succeed on this new project. To circumvent this resistance, the tutor encouraged the student to become more personally invested in the topic. In another session, a student began by asking, "What's the point of this assignment?" This student appeared apathetic about the assignment and displayed a low perception of competency. The tutor asked and answered questions about the student's writing process to help the student understand the relevance of this writing assignment.

For my writing center, the Writing MAP is a starting point toward understanding students' motivations and offers numerous potential benefits for tutors. Due to the complexity of motivation in each

student case, the Writing MAP might not always be successful. However, by assessing students' writing motivation, tutors can encourage them to consider what is motivating them and to reflect on ways past experiences have affected these motivations. I have learned that a student's motivation can limit or enhance the strategies they use, diminish or increase their confidence, and hinder or strengthen their progress as writers. Tutors can use the Writing MAP to understand the mindsets of those required to come to the writing center and other students as well. Getting to the heart of what motivates a student is complex, but questions can serve to explore students' motivations and help tutors engage students in productive work.

NOTES

1. These strategies were created with the assistance of Niara Jackson, a former professional writing tutor at my community college.

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Writing Centers as Democratic Spaces: A Review of *A Writing Center Practitioner's Inquiry into Collaboration: Pedagogy, Practice, and Research* by Georganne Nordstrom

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Writing center scholarship and assessment have long incorporated quantitative, empirical, and mixed methods approaches to research and data collection, even if Writing Center Studies (WCS) hasn't quite been able to shake the reputation that it is a field directed by lore and qualitative research. During the 2010s, partially in response to this perception, there was a noticeably intentional disciplinary pivot towards scholarship that promoted and employed research methods that were replicable, aggregable, and data-driven (RAD). This turn was embraced by researchers, journal editors, and conference organizers alike, partially because RAD scholarship was characterized as "a process that shapes our inquiry, facilitates our scholarly identity," and that in turn, "strengthens our credibility, and positions us to speak with authority" within our own institutions and within the academy writ large (Driscoll and Powell). In *Writing Center Practitioner's Inquiry into Collaboration: Pedagogy, Practice, and Research*, Georganne Nordstrom responds to this disciplinary pivot, exposes a bit of the lore that surrounds it, and provides a model for empirical research in writing centers that is locally-based, centers identity and embodied experiences, and is rooted in social and restorative justice.

Implicit in arguments supporting RAD research is that colleagues in other disciplines, upper administration, and the public have been skeptical of writing center expertise. At the same time, institutions will hold up writing centers (along with programs for accessibility services, counseling services, cultural support, and student food banks) as examples of how those institutions provide support for students. This is typically done without acknowledging that it is the institutions themselves that create the conditions necessitating those kinds of support in the first place, conditions that writing centers can often reproduce. Separating the privileging of quantitatively measurable education outcomes (Giroux) from histories of white supremacy (Inoue) and undemocratic institutions (Brown)

cannot be easily done. Such efforts can come across as late capitalist solutions to problems caused by capitalism, as individualistic responses to collective concerns—and that’s even before getting to the question of whether sorting out *all of that* should be the responsibility of writing centers.

Rebecca Hallman Martini and Travis Webster drew attention to these complications in 2017, noting that “the field’s emphasis on empirical and replicable aggregable data-supported (RAD) research that attempts ‘objectivity’ may inhibit identity-based research that recognizes how race, sexuality, gender, ability, privilege, and emotion impact our work.” Along similar lines, Elisabeth H. Buck identified that the “explicit and ongoing focus on RAD research” in writing center scholarship remains a point of contention among practitioners (99). With those critiques in mind, the pivot towards RAD writing center research calls for critical evaluation in its own right: In what ways has the discipline been legitimized because of its embrace of RAD research? How has this pivot towards RAD scholarship materially benefited our discipline, ourselves, our students, and our tutors? For instance, are there now more tenure-track or non-contingent writing center positions than before? To what extent are researchers replicating studies and aggregating data? In what ways has RAD research supported goals of social and restorative justice? What do researchers need to do so that WCS’s embrace of RAD research does not reinforce neoliberal, white supremacist, anti-democratic ideologies?

In *A Writing Center Practitioner’s Inquiry into Collaboration*, Nordstrom directly addresses at least the latter two of those questions by presenting Practitioner Inquiry (PI) as a way to square the conditions of higher education with the socially just ambitions of writing centers. Extending an argument she has articulated elsewhere, Nordstrom’s conception of PI is that of a research method applicable for writing center contexts because of its ethical obligations to researchers, tutors, students, and communities (“Practitioner Inquiry”). As such, PI has much in common with frameworks like grounded theory, teaching-research, and Critical Discourse Analysis, each of which seeks to empower research participants as epistemological collaborators, as opposed to treating them as research subjects. Further, PI necessitates that research questions respond to local needs, rather than work backwards to prove a predetermined theory.

Although Nordstrom only mentions the concept of “democratic validity” once, the idea resonates across her central argument that writing centers are—or, at least, should be—sites of equitable, col-

laborative pedagogy and research. Built out of the field of education research, democratic validity measures the extent to which research (a) emerges out of a local context, (b) includes collaborators from the community, and (c) aims to recognize solutions that are appropriate for that context and those collaborators (Herr and Anderson). Democratic validity assumes an ethical obligation that classrooms and other learning spaces should be equitable and collaborative and extends that ideal to the research process. Defining collaboration this way calls to mind Andrea Lunsford, who advised that collaboration in writing centers must be practiced and researched with care for the collaborators and for control over the process.

Nordstrom's home site of research is at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM). Localness and context are at the core of her ethos as a researcher and person, as evidenced by her careful consideration of her own status and privilege as a professional academic, as an administrator, as a white person working on stolen land. In her writing, she repeatedly reminds the reader of the United States's history of using the educational system to disenfranchise Indigenous and other marginalized people, including groups like the "Kānaka Maoli (Hawaiian), and descendants of the mostly Asian laborers brought to the islands to work on the plantations" that many of the students she works with at UHM identify as (55). In response to these conditions, Nordstrom positions empirical research as a counter to "hegemonic and oppressive constructs both in and out of the academy" (27). This is a bold move, reifying writing centers as places that are at once counterhegemonic and socially just because they are suited for collaborative epistemological practices that have been and are intentionally oppressed by institutional power. That institutional power—characterized as Western, white supremacist, capitalist, individual—suppresses Indigenous collaborative epistemological and ontological practices and the people who embody them precisely because those practices and people are definitionally anti-white supremacist and anticapitalist. This is especially important in contemporary contexts of higher education where neoliberal and white supremacist language preemptively claim so much territory.

Following Nordstrom's argument, for collaboration to work as a viable approach to research, it must be grounded in approaches stemming from cultures that value collaboration. This complicates the situations of writing centers, which exist within institutions of higher education that contemporarily are designed to reinforce and privilege individual accountability. This creates conditions wherein writing center researchers must work both inside the academy

(produce replicable research) as well as outside of it (utilize anti-hegemonic methods borrowed from anti-hegemonic groups). In order to accomplish the latter, Nordstrom argues that it is incumbent on researchers to reconcile the contradictions and power imbalances brought about when writing center administrators and tutors collaborate. That core objective is an immediately recognizable strength of Nordstrom's writing, and it is reinforced across a coherent methodological foundation and a clearly defined set of terms in her book, which unfolds accordingly.

The introduction, "Practitioner Inquiry and Empirical Research in the Writing Center," establishes writing centers as pedagogical sites of scholarly inquiry, a starting point widely accepted within the field, but also one that is persistently, annoyingly, disconsidered by university administrators and interdisciplinary colleagues (this latter sentiment also seems widely felt within the field). Placing her work along a recognizable trajectory of arguments for writing center disciplinary autonomy through empirical research (see also: Gillespie et al., Babcock and Thonus, Grutsch McKinney), Nordstrom adds important caveats: PI is not any research done by teachers (or, in this case, writing center administrators), the shared construction of knowledge must be the goal, and place-based does not mean that work isn't transferable. Most importantly, writing center practitioners should utilize empirical research methods because the contexts of writing centers are uniquely positioned to provide for them and because such approaches lead to research practices that align with "the values and goals of writing center practitioners and demonstrate veracity and validity" (19). In other words, focus on the appropriateness and benefits of empirical research within the specific contexts of writing centers and less on hoped-for institutional or cross-disciplinary acceptance.

In Chapter 1, "What Indigenous Practices Can Teach Us about Collaboration," Nordstrom positions collaboration as the core operating mechanism of writing center work and research. This is a riskier rhetorical maneuver than it might initially seem because, as Nordstrom alludes, the neoliberal structures of contemporary higher education emphasize culpability and ownership at the individual level, and thus offer limited pathways for action or accomplishment that are truly collaborative or symbiotic. Drawing mainly on Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) scholarship, poetry, and proverbs of community and communal work, Nordstrom incorporates nuanced understandings of collaboration, sustainability, and communal well-being. For instance, the core concept of "kuleana" invokes "a heightened awareness of our collaborative acts and their implications" that "goes beyond an individual's actions" and

attunes participants to “a dynamic interplay that attends to the concerns and interests of the community” (44). Applied to the context of writing center research, collaboration is then expanded to account for not just different practitioners or researchers cooperating on a project; it provides a central purpose of working together as meeting the needs of the wider group within the context in which you’re working. Throughout this section, Nordstrom’s approach is careful and measured; she always comes across as aware that she is leveraging concepts from communities she respects but does not embody. Likewise, Nordstrom avoids positioning Indigeneity as a monolithic opposition to hegemony, but instead as diverse and contextual cultural and rhetorical traditions that can inform research if done within specific, appropriate conditions.

Nordstrom provides a deep description of her methodological approach as a research model in Chapter 2, “Practitioner Inquiry: A Model for Research and Practice in the Writing Center.” With the goal of leading to empirical research that can be replicated in other writing center contexts, Nordstrom’s model relies on triangulation, systematicity, and transferability. First, cross-referencing concepts of reflexivity (Liggett et al.) with political stance (Cochran-Smith and Lytle), Nordstrom identifies commonalities and limitations in existing models of PI in WCS. From there, Nordstrom proposes that researchers develop a reflexive “habit of mind,” an overarching principle that reminds the researcher to continually interrogate their own practices and biases in relation to their collaborators (colleagues, tutors, students, etc.), the broader social and political contexts within which their research takes place, and in consideration of previous scholarship. This habitual practice helps ensure that the researcher’s “assumptions are then reevaluated and often reformulated” throughout the research process (63).

Next, building off of these commonalities, Nordstrom introduces a version of PI suited for WCS, one that emphasizes transferability, as “a frame for validating and making use of our research in a way that more readily lends itself to empirical research in our field” because it “accounts for the differences that people—students, administrators, faculty, writers, practitioners—bring to a practice site” (69). Grasping the intricacies of Nordstrom’s model relies on accepting her subtleties of meaning and intention of recognizable terms, but she skillfully promotes transferability twice over. First, in direct and practical terms, because her description is detailed and can be reasonably replicated by other researchers. Second, on a meta level, because her thorough description serves as a prototype for researchers who may be anxious about introducing their own new or modified approaches. For those researchers, follow the pattern

Nordstrom lays out here: set the terms of your debate; justify your terms in relation to previously established understandings while recognizing how and why you diverge; expect your readers to accept your terms, but afford them the opportunity to respond or critique after they've listened to your evidence.

Enacting her methodology and ethos, Chapter 3, "A Practitioner's Inquiry into Tutor Professionalization vis-à-vis Collaboration," is the first of two research studies detailed by Nordstrom. Here, PI is used to interrogate two familiar presuppositions about writing center administrator and consultant partnerships: first that they are collaborative interactions and second that consultants gain professional skills through their work. Immediately, Nordstrom's theoretical framing is essential. Because she is researching the impacts of collaboration and consultant-writer relationships, her research model requires a theoretical underpinning that accounts for and is attuned to the potential benefits and limitations of collaboration. Fostering her study's reproducibility, Nordstrom organizes this chapter to promote transparency and transferability, clearly describing her methodology, purpose and objectives, data collection, and triangulated data analysis. Ultimately Nordstrom finds a correlative relationship between collaboration and consultant learning, her reflective approach pointing to nuanced findings that further the argument of writing centers as collaborative, pedagogical, and professional spaces.

Chapter 4, "Translingual Practice vs. Academic Discourse," describes a second application of PI, this time a comparative study conducted at UHM and the National University of Ireland at Galway. By implementing the study at two different sites, Nordstrom once again demonstrates the transferability and replicability of her project and research model. Intentionally, these research sites draw attention to the intentional limitations of English language education policies, as the people of both Hawai'i and Ireland have experienced a "long history of language suppression due to British colonization, and efforts at language revitalization" (100). The United States has continued the linguistic colonization practices of its own former colonizers, resulting in contemporary conditions where institutions of higher education, including writing centers, can reinforce hierarchical, racist standards of written and spoken English. In response are grassroots efforts at local writing centers to sustain and recapture Indigenous and heritage languaging, meaning-making practices, and traditions.

In this paired study, consultants are active participants, helping to develop research questions and providing data via interviews with

the practitioner. One complicated issue is consultants' attempts to turn consultations into collaborative interactions with students through translanguaging. Although democratizing practice, one problem with translanguaging, as their study sees it, is not that it pulls away from some preferred language standard, but that institutions are ill-equipped to support and acknowledge the value of students who practice it. Therefore, given writing centers' liminal space on their campuses, it is the responsibility of those practitioners with "more relative cultural capital" to enact change that supports translanguaging language users (115). For new writing center administrators and graduate students getting their first solid footholds in practitioner research, chapters 3 and 4 will be anchors. Nordstrom even has a suggestion for how: replicating her study by triangulating it with additional cohorts at comparable writing centers.

The book closes with a brief epilogue where Nordstrom reasserts writing centers' obligations to social justice, of identity and recognition, and for student writers and consultants. These historical responsibilities are linked to contemporarily exigent ones: reckonings with institutional racism, safely teaching during a global pandemic, and supporting Dreamers. Researching these issues through empirical methods, in Nordstrom's view, provides multifaceted returns "not only for the important knowledge it yields but also for the way it forces those who have traditionally marginalized support services to take notice" (122). In other words, methodologies like PI can be used to critique the very conditions of institutions of higher education that directly and negatively impact students and writing centers.

Throughout *A Writing Center Practitioner's Inquiry into Collaboration*, there is a clear and concise synchronization of method and purpose. And yet, this strength draws attention to the fact that, outside of Nordstrom's overview of student demographics at her school, it's not always clear who the collaborators are in this book's projects. Nordstrom made a convincing argument for collaboration in her article co-authored with tutors from the UHM Writing Center, "Affirming our Liminality & Writing on the Walls: How we Welcome in our Writing Center" (Nordstrom et al.). That piece, along with its partner presentation at the 2017 International Writing Centers Collaborative ("Roundtable"), were absolute highwater marks for demonstrating collaboration between writing center practitioners and consultants and for establishing writing center identity and purpose as inextricably linked to the local community. Taken together, Nordstrom's ongoing project provides a robust argument for writing centers as research spaces that are democratic and so-

cially just, even if the institutions we are working in are not.

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Tutors' Column: "Reconnecting with Students' Needs: Resetting Tutors' Mindsets to Regain Lost Empathy"

Victoria Bryan
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I first started tutoring when I volunteered in a writing center at a community college and then moved to a large university that offers everything from certificates to associate's degrees up to graduate programs. The university allows anyone, from students to the community, access to all its resources, which means our writing center sees a large variety of clients including many students from the same classes. When I started working in writing centers, I had already written a few annotated bibliographies for my

own classes, and within a short time of tutoring, I had seen enough of these assignments from students that I began to get sick of them. Admittedly, I fell into a routine where I would teach annotated bibliographies the same way almost every time. This habit was helpful for a lot of students as I could quickly tell them how the assignment was supposed to look, but I started to notice a pattern with myself. I would explain the assignment to get the tutorial over with and then forget to give students a chance to practice creating an annotation for themselves. I became so accustomed to my pattern that I would fail to adapt my methods for students who needed more than just an explanation for the sake of getting through what I wrongly perceived as another of the same tutorial. As I noticed this, I tried to break myself out of this pattern but only succeeded occasionally.

I began to realize that when I teach the same concepts in the same ways, these patterns caused me to lose touch with the struggle students go through when learning new genres of writing. We are taught in training to treat each tutorial like it is new and to tailor our approaches to the needs of each student. Due to a kind of burnout, we tutors can become disconnected and lose empathy for students who are learning a new genre of writing we have helped previous students with many times. In working through this problem, I found a possible solution. We as tutors can take on new projects or research topics that we know little about to help us re-

gain our empathy for the struggles students face and to adapt our tutoring practices to meet writers' needs.

Bonnie Devet and Alison Barbiero talk about how tutors can fall into habits like the one I described. They refer to this habit as “stagnation of practice,” which means falling into habits of tutoring where all students are “handled the same way” (12). They present three reasons for this: human nature, time pressure, and tutors' self-assurance (12). While time pressure and self-assurance play key roles, the first reason deals more with what I experienced. We all want to help students as best we can, so using the same tutoring strategy feels like the best and easiest way to help a larger number of students. Devet and Barbiero focus more on how students' interpersonal behaviors cause stagnation. For me, it was caused by getting burned out while repeatedly working with the same assignments, and I wanted to find a way to get past it. As was the case with me, even new tutors can deal with stagnation of practice. So, how can we as tutors maintain our connection to individual students' struggles with writing?

For my final unit of the College Reading and Learning Association training, I took on a project that gave me a new perspective. I was given several choices for what type of project I could complete, and I decided to choose one that I knew the least about. For me, this was one centered around social media and marketing. I don't normally use social media and had never even looked at Instagram, the platform my writing center primarily uses for our social media posts. I thought because I knew a little about design and plenty about rhetoric, I could learn something from this project without it being completely alien. Turns out, this project ended up being a lot harder than I thought.

I was told to create a series of hiring posts for our Instagram. While working, I ran into several problems, most of them revolving around images. I was told that the best posts have pictures with people, so I tried to find some of our tutors in our employee Box, the cloud program we use. The issue was that the only pictures we had were a few years old, back when I was a newer tutor, and were mostly of people who didn't work in the center anymore. This led to many drafts of each post, weeks put into what seemed like a simple project, a lot of frustration on my part as I needed to repeatedly change the pictures, and ultimately, only three posts ended up with images of people. I even had to learn a new program and spent two entire shifts in Photoshop trying to get just one picture to work.

In what was, I think, my third meeting with the director of our

writing center to ask questions about this project (I don't remember how many times I had to message the assistant coordinator, who runs our social media and marketing), our director brought up an interesting connection between my process with this project and the experiences of students who come see us. This learning process for writing in new genres is familiar to us tutors, as we see it with students all the time. They too must take on assignments they know little about and learn new skills, programs, and conventions just to complete what may, at first, seem like a relatively simple task, only to find out they too have no idea what they are doing. I was experiencing that same learning process of trying to figure out a new way of writing for the first time, so with each new draft of Instagram posts I turned in, I could feel the connection to students' struggles that my director brought up. We sometimes forget how hard writing in new genres can be since we have already gone through the learning process and taught the concepts many times.

The solution I found for this assignment burnout is a sort of reset on a tutor's ability to empathize with the struggle students face when learning new genres of writing. Kelsey Hixson-Bowles and Roger Powell discuss tutors' self-efficacy and how it relates to their confidence with both tutoring and writing. They bring up the idea that when tutors participate in new and challenging tasks where they intentionally lose self-efficacy, they can regain empathy for students because they get out of their comfort zones and are "reminded what it's like to be a novice.... These new experiences could involve writing, tutoring, or something else; the important factor is simply that they be truly new." Like with my project, tutors, new or experienced, could try taking on new projects to regain empathy for students struggling with this same lack of confidence and, as a result, help lessen assignment burnout as I experienced to avoid the stagnation of practice.

I found that by taking on things that are new and challenging, we better connect with students because we can reflect on and remember how it feels to be a student facing the same challenges. In other words, by working through and remembering the insecurity and frustration that comes from learning a new genre, we can better empathize, focus on, and adapt our tutoring to students' needs.

Since I had this reset, I feel less burned out when working with students on repeated assignments and am able to go into tutorials with a more empathetic mindset towards tailoring tutoring sessions, rather than just getting through fixing the assignments. When I help students with annotated bibliographies now, I remem-

ber more often to help them practice writing annotations instead of just explaining how to do them, like I did before. This practice comes from when I was given a task during my project but not told how something from that genre should appear. My challenge of dealing with stagnation of practice hasn't completely gone away, but I now strive to better empathize with students' struggles with new genres and to adapt my tutoring to better meet student's needs. Hopefully, other tutors can take on new experiences and reflect on them in order to better help students, too.

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Conference Calendar

May 25-28, 2022: Canadian Writing Centres Association, virtual conference.

Contact: Nadine Fladd: nadine.fladd@uwaterloo.ca; conference website: <https://cwcaaccr.com/2022-conference-cfp/>.

July 6-9, 2022: European Writing Centers Association, virtual conference.

Contact: Doris Pany-Habsa: doris.pany@uni-graz.at; conference website: <https://europeanwritingcenters.eu/conference>.

September 16, 2022; Nebraska Writing Center Consortium, in Omaha, NE

Contact: Katie Kirkpatrick: kirkpatrickkatherine@clarksoncollege.edu.

October 26-29, 2022: International Writing Centers Association, in Vancouver, BC, Canada

Contact: Lucie Moussu: moussu@bell.net; conference website: <https://writingcenters.org/events/cfp-2022-iwca-international-writing-centers-week>

October 27-30, 2022: National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Omaha, NE

Contact: Travis Smith: gtadams@unomaha.edu; conference website: <https://www.thencptw.org/omaha2022>.

March 2-4, 2023: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Lubbock, TX

Contact: Jennifer Marciniak: jmarcini@ttu.edu.

Announcements

Nebraska Writing Centers Consortium

September 16, 2022

Clarkson College, Omaha, Nebraska

“From Pandemic to Endemic: Writing Center Evolution and Opportunity”

Keynote: Lydia Kang

Proposals can be submitted to <https://forms.gle/6UorcSv5wqCzGVNS9>, and are due by June 1, 2022. The contact person is Katie Kirkpatrick; individuals can email questions to kirkpatrickkatherine@clarksoncollege.edu.

South Central Writing Centers Association

March 2-4, 2023

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas

Jennifer Marciniak (jmarcini@ttu.edu) says to watch for the CFP in late summer/early fall.

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Managed and Produced by

TWENTY SIX DESIGN LLC

52 Riley Road #380, Celebration, FL 34747

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