

# WJCS

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

SCHAROLD AND BLEAKNEY | TRUJILLO, BOWKER, AND HAMMOND  
RAWLINS AND ARP | SWEESO

## Table of Contents

- 1 **Editor's Note**  
Lee Ann Glowzenski
- 2 **Blog Editors' Note**  
Anna Sophia Habib, Esther Namubiru, and Weijia Li
- 3 **Mentoring as Consulting: A Study of the IWCA Mentor Match Program**  
Dagmar Scharold and Julia Bleakney
- 11 **Asynchronous Writing Consultations: Incorporating Video Feedback to Improve Writing Support for Graduate Students**  
Christina Trujillo, Kelly Bowker, and Lauren Hammond
- 19 **Taking Up Space and Time: How Writing Center Administrators Can Better Support Fat (and All) Tutors**  
Paula Rawlins and Amanda Arp
- 27 **Tutors' Column: "Gestures about Writing: Toward an Art of Gestural Paraphrasing"**  
Andrew Sweeso
- 31 **Announcements**
- 32 **Conference Calendar**

## Editor's Note

Lee Ann Glowzinski

What does it mean to share space or build community with our writers, tutors, and colleagues? How do we create, extend, and adapt our centers and sessions to meet varying and changing needs? The authors of this quarter's issue of *WLN* invite us to consider these questions as we fully settle into the new year.

Focusing on the possibilities of community support for new writing center professionals, Dagmar Scharold and Julia Bleakney examine the benefits of IWCA's Mentor Match Program. Most notably, the authors locate an area of fruitful discord between the expectations/approaches of mentors and mentees: while mentees expect "a more traditional, 'mentor-as-expert' orientation," mentors see their role as "congruent with the approach to writing center tutoring that uses a non-hierarchical, peer-to-peer model" (p.8). Their findings help us think about the vital importance of collaborative goal-setting in all mentoring work.

Turning to the crucial and ever-growing space of online writing support, Christina Trujillo, Kelly Bowker, and Lauren Hammond detail their writing center's practice of offering asynchronous consultations to busy medical school students. They report that these consultations, consisting of text-based comments paired with screen-captured video feedback, allow students to connect their written work with the offered feedback in real-time, much as they would in a synchronous consultation.

In "Taking Up Space and Time," Paula Rawlins and Amanda Arp consider the difficult circumstances of finding one's personal identity targeted within students' writing. Zooming in on the specific identities of fat tutors and administrators, their narratives remind us that writing center work regularly requires us to confront painful or potentially anxiety-provoking moments; nonetheless, we can still help students recognize the limitations of their arguments while



also building in policies (e.g. in-session breaks) that honor/protect our boundaries.

Finally, Andrew Sweeso's Tutors' Column examines the role of hand gestures in tutoring sessions. Having returned to in-person consulting following the quarantine phase of the pandemic, Sweeso considers "the value of body language as a source for productive tutoring rather than a burden on it" (p.28). Gestures communicate intent, understanding, and validation, all of which form a critical part of any successful session.

We encourage you to consider this issue, as well as the *Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders* blog and *Slow Agency* podcast, as your space for collaboration, connection, and community.

## Blog Editors' Note

Anna Sophia Habib, Esther Namubiru, and Weijia Li



We're excited to share what's happening on the blog. This spring, our Global Spotlight features two writing centers in South Africa. From the *Slow Agency* podcast, we bring to you conversations with colleagues in the Middle East and in Ghana about the role of writing and writing center work from a decolonial perspective. We also have a rich conversation with the co-editors of the 2022 edited collection, *Emotions and Affect in Writing Centers*. For our *WLN* author series, we interview two writers about their thought-provoking pieces in *WLN*'s special edition on the post-pandemic writing center, co-edited by Noreen Lape and John Katunich. Listen to *Slow Agency* on our website <https://wlnjournal.org/blog/slow-agency/> or wherever you get your podcasts. And please subscribe to the podcast and our YouTube channel. It's free and it helps us spread the word about writing centers around the globe!

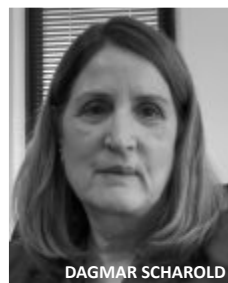
Most recently, we've been contemplating the heated discussions on ChatGPT and what this new AI tool means for writing centers and writing center work. We'd love to hear your thoughts on this topic! Please submit a piece or pitch an idea for a podcast episode to [writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com](mailto:writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com). And, subscribe to the blog by visiting [www.wlnjournal.org/blog](http://www.wlnjournal.org/blog).

## Mentoring as Consulting: A Study of the IWCA Mentor Match Program Reflection

Dagmar Scharold  
University of Houston-Downtown

Julia Bleakney  
Elon University

New writing center professionals (WCPs) often need to look outside their own academic institutions and to their national organizations for support that helps orient them to their writing center work. Writing center scholars such as Anne Ellen Geller and Harry Denny, Dawn Fels et al., and Nikki Caswell et al. have focused on the challenges faced by WCPs and on the need for mentoring opportunities to help WCPs address these unique challenges. The International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) sought to meet this need by developing a mentoring program to match new professionals with more experienced professionals. The IWCA Mentor Match Program was initially founded in 2011; we took over as co-chairs in 2014 and recruited a new round of participants, attracting 32 mentors and 47 mentees. (The program has since grown to over 100 participants.) Our exploratory mixed-methods study based on initial interviews and a follow-up survey focuses on this program, which we co-chaired from 2014-2018. Our study was generously supported by a research grant from the IWCA.



Initially, we set out to understand the benefits to both mentors and mentees of participating in the IWCA Mentor Match Program. In the spring of 2018, we conducted ten interviews with participants who had been involved with the IWCA Mentor Match Program for almost two years: five mentors and five mentees. Interviews were semi-structured, lasting between 20 and 40 minutes, and conducted using Zoom or Skype. We asked both mentors and mentees the same questions, focusing on their expectations for mentoring, their actual experiences, and their personal definition of a mentor. After conducting the interviews, variations in mentoring descriptions led us to refocus our study. We redesigned the study protocol and IRB application to include a survey. We developed separate surveys for mentors and mentees, with each survey consisting of nine

Likert questions; we focus this article on the six statements we posed to both mentors and mentees. Each question provided a statement designed to capture the participants' perspectives on whether their mentor or mentee was meeting their expectations, who should initiate and maintain the relationship, and how to strengthen the relationship both personally and professionally. Fifty-seven participants (72% of the total program participants) completed the survey.

In our analysis of interview and survey responses, we found some similarities but also some differences between mentors' and mentees' definitions of and expectations for mentoring. When we interviewed participants, mentors described using mentoring techniques that we interpret as facilitative and intentionally non-hierarchical, which can be comparable to techniques often used in writing center tutorials, especially with undergraduate peer-to-peer tutoring contexts—for instance, when the tutor asks guiding questions, prompts the writer to think of new language, or asserts the writer's right to accept or reject their suggestions. While the approach used by the mentors we studied might not reflect the full range of approaches to writing center tutoring, we saw how they applied an approach that is similar to writing center tutoring in order to resist a hierarchical, traditional mentoring exchange. However, because their approach was not directly named, some misalignment in expectations among mentors and mentees emerged from the surveys. Because of this variation, we argue for the value of a mentoring model for WCPs—and for writing centers more broadly—that makes a mentoring approach informed by writing center praxis more visible and intentional.

## **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: INTERVIEWS**

Different qualities or traits of mentoring emerged in our interviews with mentors and mentees. Some emphasized the motivational aspects of mentoring, such as the “desire to connect and be helpful,” “willingness,” or “being sincere.” Others highlighted affective aspects, such as “empathy” or “being a good listener.” Additional mentoring traits that emerged were knowledge-related, such as “experience and understanding of the field, its resources, its organizations,” and facilitative, such as the ability to create structure.

This range of mentoring qualities aligns with some of the common definitions from the mentoring literature. Highlighting the characteristics of what W. Brad Johnson calls emotional intelligence and what Andrew Hobson et al. describe as emotional and psychosocial support, interviewees described the importance of “compassion and empathy” and “a sense of being able to identify the other's

needs.” For instance, one response, typical of both mentors and mentees, describes empathy as “understand[ing] where the person’s coming from so that the information that’s given back addresses the question being asked as opposed to coming at it from, here’s what I want to offer to this person.” Other elements of mentoring that are discussed in the literature, such as openness (Hobson et al.) and a willingness to mentor (Gisbert-Trejo et al.) are also described by the interviewees, who talk of the need for mentors to “desire to connect and be helpful,” to have “open-mindedness” and “trustworthiness,” to be “sincere” as well as “willing to listen,” or to “be a good listener.”

Fostering a relationship that is non-hierarchical and encourages autonomy, something Hobson et al. also note as crucial to mentoring, was also discussed in the interviews: one mentee thought that their mentor might “[j]ust tell me what to do . . . but that’s kind of what I’m hoping he’ll be like . . . [Instead] he doesn’t like to try to push me anywhere. But he asks a lot of questions to help himself and me . . . [to] understand the larger picture.” Another mentee offered an understanding of what Hung Yun et al. call “mutual mentoring”: “I was kind of hoping it would be what it has become, to be honest. Someone that I could bounce ideas off of.” Finally, participants described mentors as needing to balance interpersonal skills and practical or technical knowledge; mutual respect is also seen as important. Thus, without referencing any mentoring scholarship explicitly, the interviewees highlighted evidence-based qualities of effective mentoring: emotional intelligence, emotional and psychosocial support, openness, willingness to mentor, being non-hierarchical, and encouraging autonomy.

Many of these characteristics of effective mentoring are also apparent in the writer-tutor relationship that occurs in writing center tutorials; notably, the complicated role of collaboration in contexts in which there is the potential for hierarchy, well documented by early writing center scholars such as John Trimbur, Andrea Lunsford, Muriel Harris, and Nancy Grimm, as well as more recently by Dagmar Scharold and John Nordlof, among others. In addition to collaboration, writing center praxis emphasizes fostering agency and independent decision-making, as discussed by Harry Denny and in tutor training guides written by Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner or Michelle lanetta and Lauren Fitzgerald. The importance of a collaborative, facilitative relationship between mentor and mentee was recently chronicled by Maureen McBride and Molly Rentscher, who were participants in the Mentor Match Program at the time we were co-chairs. Not only was their mentoring relationship collabo-

rative, but also the mentoring led to additional collaborations on conference presentations and an article.

McBride and Rentscher talk about how their partnership thrived, but they emphasize that it did so in the absence of guidelines for how to proceed with their mentoring relationship. Mentoring scholars such as Hobson et al. and David Clutterbuck argue for the importance of providing guidelines for mentoring interactions. However, in the Mentor Match Program, by intentionally giving partners the flexibility to create their own agendas and guidelines for interactions, we did not provide more detailed guidelines. In the absence of these guidelines, some mentors took an approach that we note is similar to a common type of writing center praxis; for instance, letting the mentee set the agenda for what to focus on is similar to how a writer helps set the agenda in a writing tutorial, and fostering collaboration that occurs between the mentor and mentee is similar to what occurs between the tutor and the writer. However, the surveys revealed a lack of awareness that this approach was being used, which may have added to a lack of clarity for some mentoring partnerships on how to proceed and who was responsible for which aspects of the mentoring relationship. The variety of mentoring definitions also reveals different expectations among participants.

## **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: SURVEYS**

Extending from the interviews with selected participants in the Mentor Match Program, the survey was intended to capture the perspectives of all participants. The survey first asked respondents to list three words they would use to describe the role or disposition of a mentor. The mentors' most commonly referenced words were "supportive" and "available" or "accessible" (5 out of 10 responses, or 50%). The mentees' most commonly referenced words were "experienced" or "knowledgeable" (18 out of 36 responses, or 50%). Only four of the 36 mentees (11%) used the word "supportive." While three of the 10 mentors also wrote "knowledgeable," none wrote the word "experienced." While there is some overlap here—both mentees and mentors believe that being knowledgeable is important—mentors emphasize being supportive and available.

In our Likert-scale questions, we sought to gauge the expectations of participants and to understand if mentors and mentees shared those expectations (see Table 1 for results).

These responses show that both mentors and mentees value regular meetings and the opportunity to connect socially in order to build rapport. Other responses, particularly to the statements



about who should set the agenda for meetings and who should make initial contact, vary: regarding agenda-setting, most mentors believe that this is not their role, and regarding initial contact, most mentees believe the mentor should reach out. What these differences reveal is the potential for misunderstanding and a lack of clear expectations about mentor and mentee roles.

**Table 1: Percentages of Mentors and Mentees Who “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” to Mentoring Relationship Statements**

<b>Mentoring Relationship Statement</b>	<b>Mentors</b>	<b>Mentees</b>
I like regularly scheduled meeting times with my mentor/mentee.	56%	58%
It would be beneficial to me to interact with my mentor/mentee socially to build rapport.	69%	65%
I should set the agenda for our meetings.	8%	47%
My mentor/mentee should establish a system to keep our communication ongoing.	67%	46%
My mentor/ mentee should reach out to me and establish contact early in our relationship.	46%	87%

Note: The response rates for this survey includes 13 mentors and 37 mentees.

Given these results, we wonder if mentees are coming into the program with the idea of mentors as experts and themselves as novices, aligned with a hierarchical model of mentoring as discussed by Lilian Eby and Nuria Gisbert-Trejo et al., among other mentoring scholars. This idea may be based on their previous experiences of mentoring but also because the program was organized to pair up an experienced writing center professional with a new writing center professional. On the other hand, mentors—experienced directors but possibly inexperienced mentors, especially in contexts outside of their institution—seem to be approaching their mentoring with a collaborative, writing-tutorial-style interaction in mind, one in which mentees (writers) are invited to set the agenda and reaction or response is favored over direct advice.

**CONCLUSION**

Mentors and mentees in our study emphasized different mentoring qualities and the need for more structure to support their mentoring relationships. The surveys revealed some misalignment between mentors’ and mentees’ expectations for certain aspects of the relationship, such as who establishes contact, determines a system for communication, and sets the agenda for the interaction. We observed from our analysis of the interviews that mentors were

using an approach to their mentoring that was congruent with the approach to writing center tutoring that uses a non-hierarchical, peer-to-peer model, yet mentees were expecting mentors to approach their interactions from a more traditional, “mentor-as-expert” orientation.

While the survey received a high response rate (72%, n=57), with such a small number of interviews (n=10), we are cautious about making broad recommendations from our findings. However, we do recommend explicit discussion between participants about the nature of their mentoring relationship. McBride and Rentscher, drawing on their experiences as participants in the Mentor Match Program, recommend that this program—and other mentoring programs like it—develop professional guidelines, offer training for participants, and provide resources. Many of these suggestions have already been taken up by the current co-chairs of the Mentor Match Program as it continues to grow. For instance, the current co-chairs coordinate a series of workshops to support and enhance the one-to-one mentoring relationships; more information about these workshops is available on the IWCA’s website at [www.writingcenters.org](http://www.writingcenters.org).

The growth of the IWCA Mentor Match Program, recommendations from McBride and Rentscher, and our own research confirm the value of mentoring models that offer alternatives to the traditional hierarchical model, which often emphasizes one-directional expert to novice advice. Monica Higgins and David Thomas offer the framework of a mentoring “constellation” to describe a networked set of mentoring relationships an individual can tap into to help them with various aspects of their professional and personal development (310). Another alternative to a traditional hierarchical arrangement is Jeannette Alarcón and Silvia Bettez’s Muxerista’s mentoring model. This model creates space to work with intersectionalities of race, class, and gender, as it relates to LatinX and other marginalized people. This partnership becomes mutually beneficial, with participants cognizant of mitigating power differences within the mentoring relationship, validating and drawing on each person’s strengths to maintain the mentorship. Both of these models are beneficial for all who participate in mentoring but are particularly important for writing center professionals from underrepresented groups. For instance, people of color in predominantly white institutions can experience both workplace isolation and social isolation, as Dwayne Mack et al. discuss. This is the case for WCPs and also for tutors of color working in writing centers that are predominately white.

We note that the ways that IWCA Mentor Match mentors draw on writing center praxis challenges traditional mentoring hierarchies. The program itself has evolved since we conducted our study to focus on more preparation for new mentors and a more intentional approach to mentoring; this change is occurring as we reflect on our mentoring approaches in our professional conferences and in our daily writing center practices. Given how central non-hierarchical collaboration is to the writing center ethos, we recommend participants in any formal or informal mentoring relationship take time to develop a framework for their mentoring that clearly articulates expectations and highlights how the mentoring relationship aligns with the values and practices of our field.

## WORKS CITED

- Alarcón, Jeannette D., and Silvia Bettez. "Feeling Brown in the Academy: Decolonizing Mentoring through a Disidentification Muxerista Approach." *Equity and Excellence in Education*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2017, pp. 25–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2016.1250234>.
- Caswell, Nicole I., et al. *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors*. Utah State UP, 2016.
- Clutterbuck, David. "Establishing and Maintaining a Formal Mentoring Programme for Working with Diversified Groups." *Mentoring and Diversity*, edited by Bell Ragins et al., Taylor and Francis, 2001, pp. 54–86.
- Denny, Harry C. *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-To-One Mentoring*. Utah State UP, 2010.
- Eby, Lillian T. "Alternative Forms of Mentoring in Changing Organizational Environments: A Conceptual Extension of the Mentoring Literature." *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 51, no. 1, 1997, pp. 125–44, doi.org/1006/jvbe.1997.1594.
- Fels, Dawn, et al. "Toward an Investigation into the Working Conditions of Non-Tenure Line, Contingent Writing Center Workers." *Forum: Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. A10–A16.
- Geller, Anne Ellen, and Harry Denny. "Of Ladybugs, Low Status, and Loving the Job: Writing Center Professionals Navigating Their Careers." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2013, pp. 96–129.
- Gillespie, Paula, and Neal Lerner. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*. Allyn and Bacon, 2000.
- Gisbert-Trejo, Nuria, et al. "Determining Effective Mentor Characteristics in Inter-Organizational Mentoring for Managers: An Approach Based on Academics' and Practitioners' Perspectives." *Industrial and Commercial Training*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2019, pp. 85–103, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ICT-06-2018-0051>.
- Grimm, Nancy Maloney. "Rearticulating the Work of the Writing Center." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 47, no. 4, 1996, pp. 523–48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/358600>.
- Harris, Muriel. "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors." *College English*, vol. 57, no. 1, 1995, pp. 27–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/378348>.

- Higgins, Monica, and David A. Thomas. "Constellations and Careers: Toward Understanding the Effects of Multiple Developmental Relationships." *Human Resources Abstracts*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2001, pp. 309–456.
- Hobson, Andrew, et al. "Mentoring Beginning Teachers: What We Know and What We Don't." *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2009, pp. 207–16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.09.001>.
- Ianetta, Melissa, and Lauren Fitzgerald. *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research*. Oxford UP, 2016.
- Johnson, W. Brad. *On Being a Mentor: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2016.
- Lunsford, Andrea. "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1991, pp. 3–10.
- Mack, Dwayne, et al. *Mentoring Faculty of Color: Essays on Professional Development and Advancement in Colleges and Universities*. McFarland and Company, 2013.
- McBride, Maureen, and Molly Renstcher. "The Importance of Intention: A Review of Mentoring for Writing Center Professionals." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2020, pp. 74–85.
- Nordlof, John. "Vygotsky, Scaffolding, and the Role of Theory in Writing Center Work." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2014, pp. 45–64.
- Scharold, Dagmar. "'Challenge Accepted': Cooperative Tutoring as an Alternative to One-to-One Tutoring." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2017, pp. 31–55.
- Trimbur, John. "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?" *The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*, edited by Robert W. Barnett and Jacob S. Blumner. Pearson Education, 2008, pp. 288–95.
- Yun, Jung H., et al. "Mutual Mentoring for Early-Career and Underrepresented Faculty: Model, Research, and Practice." *Innovations in Higher Education*, vol. 41, 2016, pp. 441–51, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-016-9359-6>.



## Asynchronous Writing Consultations: Incorporating Video Feedback to Improve Writing Support for Graduate Students

Christina Trujillo

California Polytechnic State University

Kelly Bowker

University of Michigan

Lauren Hammond

University of California, Riverside

Social distancing, along with expansions of online class offerings brought about by programs like the California Online Education Initiative, necessitates a reinvestigation of all options for student support. Given students' needs to engage with writing in formats beyond traditional pen and paper assignments, it is important to view literacy as "a multimodal activity in which oral, written, and visual communication intertwine and interact" (Trimbur 88). This further necessitates creative approaches in writing center support. As a result, we at the University of California, Riverside (UCR) Graduate Writing Center (GWC) wondered: How could we better support our diverse student cohorts?

We in the GWC believed that in-person, synchronous consultations were the ideal support modality. It was easier to explain, provide and receive non-verbal cues, and give feedback without veering into editing when working in person. Conversely, due to the lack of real-time interaction, asynchronous writing consultations were considered the "lesser of two evils" when students were faced with the choice between non-real-time support or no support at all. Writing center scholars have noted the fear that working in an email-based format, where students submit their writing and receive a response consisting of tracked changes, text comments, and feedback summary reports, breaks from the traditional ethos of writing center pedagogy, wherein students and writing consultants work collaboratively to build skills rather than fix a single assignment (qtd. in Neaderhiser and Wolfe 61). Stephen Neaderhiser and Joanna Wolfe note, "email consultations more closely mirror the type of interaction we might expect between a student and an in-



CHRISTINA TRUJILLO



KELLY BOWKER



LAUREN HAMMOND

structor than they resemble the dialogic joint inquiry of the ideal writing-tutor relationship” (50). This is a troubling dynamic in a space focused on improving the writer rather than the individual piece of writing, such as the GWC.

Recent scholarship, however, points to the potential benefits of asynchronous tutoring as a way of expanding student support, such as its ability to allow students time to pause and reflect on feedback in ways that are not possible in synchronous sessions (Gallagher and Maxwell). Courtney Buck et al. highlight that despite their differences, the two modalities “share a student-centered model with emphasis on scaffolding, instruction, and a focus on student growth.” With this in mind, in the summer of 2018, Christina, Coordinator of the GWC, sought to address the diverse and increasingly digital needs of graduate students by offering asynchronous tutoring sessions to UCR’s School of Medicine (SoM) students.

At the time, SoM students found it almost impossible to meet with writing consultants during operating hours, even for synchronous online sessions, due to their intensive schedules. Recognizing students’ time constraints, the GWC began developing an asynchronous branch of the Center where SoM students could work with writing consultants. Graduate writing consultants were trained in video/audio recording programs and cloud-based sharing platforms to provide asynchronous consultations. We acknowledged that feedback not provided in real-time had the potential to break down the focus on collaborative skills-building found in synchronous writing consultations. To address this, we inserted a human element in our process by combining text feedback with video responses focused on global skills-building. Consultants make use of asynchronous sessions’ added time to develop intentional, thoughtful feedback in the form of marginal and recorded commentary while students have the opportunity to think through and respond to these changes at their own pace. In what follows, we present approaches for incorporating asynchronous writing consultations with video feedback into writing centers. We highlight the benefits of extended processing time for student writers and peer writing consultants and the added benefits of incorporating video feedback into the response process.

## **OUR METHOD**

Typically, in asynchronous writing sessions, writers provide their manuscripts through email or via an online appointment system and wait for feedback. Students sometimes identify what they hope to receive feedback on, and sometimes the consultant deter-

mines what feedback will benefit the writer. In a synchronous session, this lack of clear direction is often, though not always, resolved through the consultant's use of probing and follow-up questions, leading to the establishment of a goal for the session. In an asynchronous session, however, consultants cannot effectively ask the writer these questions in real time, which is where some of our hesitancy surrounding asynchronous work originated.

The GWC's asynchronous consultations adhere to and break from this model in key ways. Our center has four weekly slots for asynchronous writing consultations. With a relatively small SoM cohort (65 students when this article was written), this number of sessions provides ample consultation opportunities. Due to staffing limitations (graduate student employees only work four hours a week, with a budget for six to eight consultants at any given time), students are advised to expect feedback within seven business days. While this timeline may not work at all centers, we find the need to plan ahead similar for asynchronous and synchronous schedules due to staffing constraints. We do not accept drop-in appointments.

Students complete an intake form and submit their writing through WCOOnline. Given the potential for confusion inherent in any new format, we kept our sign-up process for synchronous and asynchronous sessions similar. Students note the type of document being submitted (CV, personal statement, fellowship statement, etc.) and answer the following question: "What would you like to focus on in your consultation?" While open-ended, the question has generated detailed responses such as:

I would like to focus this review on whether or not I am effectively answering the prompts and how I can improve on this. Also, I would like to know if any topics within the essays do not necessarily fit/flow well. Lastly I need to shed approximately 200-300 words from each of the two essays and would like feedback on what can be sacrificed within the essays. There are also some comments I've added within the text that specify questions I have.

This comment is representative of our asynchronous feedback requests in terms of both quantity and depth of response. We suspect this question was adequate for graduate medical students experienced with self-advocating; those implementing our approach in undergraduate centers may want to experiment with the specificity and number of intake questions.

Consultants comment in the margins of the text using Microsoft Word comment and track changes features. Track changes illus-

trates feedback when a point is clarified through an explanation. The GWC breaks from the one-to-one feedback structure, however, in that two different writing consultants typically review a single document, which students are advised of in advance. Our consultants provide asynchronous feedback between synchronous sessions due to our limited staffing, so a single consultant is often not able to review a full document in the time they have available between sessions. We find that feedback provided by the two consultants demonstrates both collaboration and a help-seeking mindset to writers.

When two consultants review a single document, students are given a glimpse of consultants “speaking” to one another on the page. For example, in a personal statement, Consultant A indicated they felt that a stronger connection between two ideas would clarify the writer’s point but questioned if their lack of understanding stemmed from a lack of content-level expertise. Consultant B followed this comment by agreeing with Consultant A but then went further to articulate what they understood as the student’s point based on the current sentence. Being provided both Consultant A and Consultant B’s feedback, the student author is given “multiple perspectives from a variety of readers” (Gallagher and Maxwell). Moreover, by having consultants communicate and check their understanding with one another, the session demonstrates to the writer how collaborative support can clarify their writing.

Our final feedback component is a video-recorded screen capture. Once consultants provide their comments on a manuscript, the GWC coordinator creates a brief five to ten minute video. Prior to remote learning brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, consultants used any down time in the center to record these videos, with the last consultant reviewing the document taking this final step to complete the process. Graduate consultants work only four hours a week, and as usage of the asynchronous schedule increased while usage of the synchronous schedule remained consistently high, shifting the task of recording to the coordinator became necessary to maintain the seven business day timeframe to return feedback.

Video recordings synthesized in-text feedback and any notes Consultants A and B felt were better explained verbally. Specific feedback intended to be shared verbally is deleted before the video feedback is recorded. Often, this feedback addresses complicated formatting issues in CVs or structural issues in personal statements. Thinking through which feedback to offer orally versus in writing helps the consultants to center global concerns, mitigating the fear that asynchronous feedback may focus strictly on the writing rather



than on building the writer's skills (Wolfe and Neaderhiser 50). Previous studies on the success of screen captured video feedback in instructional settings revealed that students were more receptive to video-captured feedback than written feedback alone. Both students and instructors expressed the importance of discerning tone in personalizing the feedback; students receiving recorded feedback felt that their instructor cared more about their success when they heard the tone in which feedback was provided (Jones et al. 601).

With the screen share of the student's work paired with audio feedback, students are able to connect their written work with the feedback in real-time, similar to a synchronous session. In videos, next steps are discussed and students are verbally encouraged to return to the center. This video is then uploaded to our office Google Drive. A shareable link is created and embedded in the document, giving the writer oral and visual feedback. Gallagher and Maxwell note that such a link demonstrates to the writer "a human being has invested time and energy in the students' success." The positive impact of video commentary is reinforced by multiple students citing the inclusion of video-recorded responses as helpful. One student wrote, "Thank you so much for the incredible MSWord and video feedback. ... I would not have gotten this far without your input." Finally, the document is returned to the student via the online appointment system, which utilizes the student's Google-based university email account. At the end of asynchronous sessions, students receive written feedback from two consultants, as well as a short video synthesizing that feedback.

## **RESULTS**

When assessing the results of our method, we consider two main areas: 1) student usage, specifically how often students schedule appointments; 2) student engagement, specifically the level of intake form response students provide when/if they return for a follow-up consultation.

The GWC has offered asynchronous writing support for two full academic years, including the summer of 2019 and 2020. From Fall 2019 to Summer 2020, twenty-three unique users out of sixty-five registered in the 2019-2020 SoM cohort utilized the system. This represents 35% of the total cohort. Most students registered for two sessions—one for a personal statement and one for a CV—both documents medical students provide for their residency match. Seven students made more than two appointments, with five returning four or more times (one student returned seven times) across Spring 2020 and Summer 2020.

Rather than having a specific formula by which consultation intake form responses are compared, we compare the depth and breadth of engagement students display when filling out the form. In synchronous sessions, where students can verbally communicate concerns to a consultant, intake forms are filled out with short answers, like “grammar” or “feedback on conference paper.” In contrast, students using the asynchronous schedule tend to detail their concerns and, in follow-up sessions, even indicate which of the previous points of feedback they used and which they did not, and their reasoning behind these choices. Gallagher and Maxwell note that students at their institution utilizing asynchronous sessions were “enthusiastic about it, frequently becoming repeat users” (7). We found a similar pattern. When students resubmit for additional feedback, intake question responses tend to become more detailed, creating a conversation by directly addressing the consultant(s) who reviewed past versions.

Some documents shared for asynchronous consultations, like personal statements, are inherently reflective, which may impact the level of self-reflection writers display when re-submitting documents. However, the asynchronous consultations are also utilized for less personal documents, namely research statements. At least one student returned twice for feedback on their research statement. Students self-selecting asynchronous sessions for support beyond personal statements and CVs would seem to indicate that asynchronous feedback is viewed as an acceptable and accessible form of support. A representative example of response level in returning intake forms is illustrated below:

[Y]ou had mentioned that the introduction might be a good place to include a couple lines about this [point]. I thought about this but ultimately, I felt that the story about [this person] was a stronger introduction so I was hesitant to take that away. Instead, I included a quick line about when my interest [in the subject] began in a separate part of my personal statement. Please let me know what you think.

Before seeking additional support, the student thought through consultant feedback, chose what to incorporate and what to leave out, and articulated their reasoning for those choices to identify what they wished to receive further feedback on. This mirrors the structure of a synchronous session, but with the added step of the student expressing their thoughts on their revision process in writing in advance of a follow-up session. With asynchronous sessions, students have added time to process feedback, as well as the opportunity to return to the video recorded feedback, allowing students to “consider the advice at their own pace” with resources

that remain accessible to them for an extended time (Gallagher and Maxwell).

### **CONSULTANT BENEFITS**

There are also added benefits to this model for consultants. The asynchronous format's delayed response offers an opportunity to think about the text more deeply, gather resources like links to citation style guides (Gallagher and Maxwell), and collaborate with fellow consultants when providing feedback. The GWC repeats the mantra "writing is a communal activity" to encourage graduate writers to seek support. In synchronous sessions, consultants model a help-seeking mentality by asking the student, fellow consultants, or the coordinator questions during a consultation. While not the same as a conversation between student and consultant, having consultants ask questions of one another in the text helps illustrate to uncertain writers that even consultants, an assumed authority, do not have all the answers (Buck et al.).

### **STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

For anyone considering asynchronous sessions, the model above is relatively simple to implement. An inexpensive headphone set with a microphone is recommended to maintain sound quality. Beyond that, the most complicated components of incorporating this feedback structure are screen recording software and time. Many computers have QuickTime preloaded, which allows for screen and audio capture. Other screen capturing software, such as Camtasia and Yuja, have a cost associated with them. Given past remote instruction, Zoom's "share screen" and "recording" functions are likely more cost-effective and user-friendly.

Creating shareable links can be done through cloud-based apps like Dropbox, OneDrive, and Google Drive. UCR utilizes Google for student emails, so we chose Google Drive as the platform to create shareable links. This choice integrated with the cloud-based system students are familiar with and required no software for video viewing. Google Drive also allows students to save copied versions of their video feedback to their private drives. Recorded videos are saved for a year before students are advised to copy videos for future reference. This yearly cleanup has kept us from exceeding Google Drive's data limits.

This structure can be scaled up or down based on center needs and staffing. The GWC's small student staff made having the coordinator complete the video recording necessary; however, consultants could take on this final step for centers without these time and staff limitations.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT SUPPORT

Our current moment forces us to grapple with long-established, deeply entrenched notions of education. With universities rethinking how courses are taught as a result of the pandemic, we must ask ourselves how to ensure students maintain access to our centers. While our asynchronous consultations support a very specific student population, the model itself could serve as a means of support to wider, more varied student demographics. We know students do not all have access to reliable internet connections and may struggle to balance competing obligations while also pursuing their education. We can also surmise that online education will continue to expand. Asynchronous sessions allow students to choose when and where they connect to writing centers, empowering them to seek support at a time most conducive to their needs, making asynchronous sessions an additional support structure in the ever-expanding writing center toolbox.

## WORKS CITED

- Buck, Courtney, et al. "I Believe This Is What You Were Trying to Get Across Here': The Effectiveness of Asynchronous eTutoring Comments." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2021, <http://www.praxisuwc.com/182-buck-et-al>.
- Gallagher, Daniel, and Aimee Maxfield. "Learning Online to Tutor Online." *How We Teach Writing Tutors*, edited by Karen Gabrielle Johnson and Ted Roggenbuck, 2019, <https://wlnjournal.org/digitaleditedcollection1/GallagherMaxfield.html>.
- Jones, Nigel, et al. "Student Feedback via Screen Capture Digital Video: Stimulating Student's Modified Action." *Higher Education*, vol. 64, no. 5, Nov. 2012, pp. 593–607. DOI.org (Crossref), doi:10.1007/s10734-012-9514-7.
- Neadheriser, Stephen, and Joanna Wolfe. "Between Technological Endorsement and Resistance: The State of Online Writing Centers." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2009, pp. 49–77. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/43442314](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43442314).
- Trimbur, John. "Multiliteracies, Social Futures, and Writing Centers." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2010, pp. 88–91. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/43442333](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43442333).

## Taking Up Space and Time: How Writing Center Administrators Can Better Support Fat (and All) Tutors

Paula Rawlins  
Yale University

Amanda Arp  
Central Methodist University

The writing center community has long questioned the notion that we offer a welcoming space for all students (Grutsch McKinney; McNamee and Miley). Recently, this conversation has expanded to include not just clients but also tutors (Denny et al; Lockett). Despite this trend, fat clients and tutors occupy one of several identity groups yet to be closely examined within the context of writing centers. The field of fat studies was firmly established by 2004 (Wann xi), but a search of the MLA database for “‘fat’ and ‘writing center’” produces only one result: Erec Smith’s 2013 *Praxis* article “Making Room for Fat Studies.” Smith provides an introduction to the fat acceptance movement, but few scholars have taken up Smith’s call to create a nuanced “understanding of what it means to be a fat writer or tutor” (2-3). A 2020 special issue of *Peer Review* on dress codes in writing centers features two articles that employ a fat studies framework to critique the oppressive nature of dress codes (Hansen and Carrobis; Pender). These articles focus more on the physicality of occupying a fat body in a writing center, whereas our piece offers an answer to Smith’s call that focuses on the rhetorical situation that arises when fat tutors encounter fatphobic content in a student’s paper.

Both authors of this piece identify as fat writing center practitioners, and we have each encountered anti-fat rhetoric during tutoring sessions. In these moments, our bodies were antithetical to the content before us. Below, we tell our most memorable stories of how we navigated such sessions. Through sharing these experiences, we aim to incorporate fat studies more deeply within writing center scholarship. We also offer a few suggestions for administrators, demonstrating how visions for welcoming, inclusive centers can dedicate space and time to fat bodies.



## PAULA'S STORY

In 2017, I conducted a session that left me feeling confused and embarrassed. I had been working in writing centers for over a decade, collaborating with hundreds of clients successfully. These experiences, I thought, meant no paper's content could shock me. I was wrong.

The appointment began like any other. After some small talk, the client described her assignment and then shared a draft of her persuasive essay on the benefits of the keto diet. As the writer walked me through her essay, I noticed myself taking a deep breath. Working as a writing tutor, I had encountered many arguments with which I disagreed, so such a moment was not uncommon. However, the topic of dieting evoked strong feelings of skepticism in me, and I cautioned myself to avoid imposing my views on the student. At the time, I was not familiar with the term “diet culture” or the fact that little scientific evidence suggests weight loss can be successfully maintained longer than 18 months (Gaesser 39). I *did* know from a lifetime of experience that restrictive diets, at least for me, were more likely to lead to weight gain than weight loss. But I had never professed this idea aloud and to do so still felt both revolutionary and scary. After all, why would anyone take a fat person's critique of dieting seriously?

Glancing over the writer's work, I felt my heartbeat quicken. She was sitting to my left, so close I thought she might feel my body tensing up. To convince her reader to engage in this version of food restriction, the writer relied on a pathos-laden description of fat Americans, who, according to the draft, were not just unhealthy but “gross.” I felt something akin to a punch in the gut when I read a sentence explicitly suggesting fat people should be ashamed of themselves. As a woman weighing over three hundred pounds, I did feel shame but also sadness and anger. I stared down at the page, frozen.

The physiological fight-or-flight symptoms I experienced—the tense muscles, accelerated heartbeat, and tunnel vision—were the same as when I had been overtly bullied in the past. When a voice from a passing SUV called out, “Go on a diet!,” I could retreat to my car and cry cathartic tears. When an endocrinologist saw I had only shed five pounds since my last visit and told me he could not help me if I was not willing to help myself, I could choose to never return to his practice. This situation was different. I was sitting at my job, feeling trapped and hurt.

I stalled for time, wondering how to proceed. Finally, I chose my words carefully: “In this section here, where you use words like ‘dis-

gusting’ or ‘gross,’” I pointed to the passage of concern and waited for the writer’s cheeks to blush or for her to utter an apology. In the moments that followed, neither of these things happened, and I grew increasingly hurt and angry.

For the rest of the session, I did what I was trained not to do—what, today, I encourage the tutors I train to avoid: pointing out lower-order concerns instead of inviting a discussion about the content of the paper. Afterwards, I was both ashamed of the writing advice I had given (or failed to give) and freshly conscious of my “disgusting” body.

Afterwards, I explained what happened to my colleagues. While they were kind, I still felt unsettled and hurt long after my shift ended. It was not until years later, when I discussed this session with Amanda, that I came to understand my behavior as a reaction to trauma. The student’s essay had summoned emotions associated with a lifetime of personal and societal body-shaming. Focusing on the paper’s local concerns was an act of self-defense. It did not feel safe to talk about the paper’s content, and so I took on the role of grammar expert, which allowed me to feel some sense of control and power again. I can forgive myself for having a bad session, but I cannot help but ask how I might have been better prepared to face the situation. Now, as an administrator, this question especially troubles me.

### **AMANDA’S STORY**

In 2019, I experienced a session where, much like Paula, I felt discomfort and uncertainty as a tutor. That day was like any other at the center. I greeted the student, and we made small talk as we took our seats.

I began by inquiring about her assignment. She described how her group needed to choose a health issue and create a plan for intervention. The “issue” the team chose to address was a high “obesity” rate.<sup>1</sup> As I heard this description, tenseness spread throughout my chest. I was physically preparing for an appointment that would be topically challenging for me as a tutor with a fat body.

As we devised goals for improvement and went over areas in detail, it became apparent that, throughout this paper, fatness was being described as a problem to be solved. The student spoke with confidence as we discussed how to enhance the paper. I maintained the professional facade of a tutor as I had been trained, yet, as a fat person, I was hearing words and ideas that pushed back against my very existence. Unbeknownst to the student, a silent tension built within me. Behind the calm of my professional exterior, my mind

was racing. I became aware of my fleshy rolls against the desk—the flesh below my chin—the width of myself beside her. Did she think that I, too, was a problem to be solved?

Then, I had a different turn of thought—the student’s proposal went against what I had learned from fat studies scholarship, which underscores how fatness is a natural part of human diversity, not a problem in need of intervention (Wann ix). This group’s framing of fatness ignored the array of classist, racist, and gender-biased influences that fuel Western society’s need to eliminate the fat body. Running parallel to our continued conversation about the paper, these thoughts circled in my mind, and I wondered—what was the right course of action when, as a fat person and fat studies scholar, I was saddened and hurt by this student’s argument, but, as a tutor, I had the professional responsibility to help this student as best I could?

At a loss for how to straddle the line between writing center professionalism and personal desire to intervene, I gave the student a spot to work on as I excused myself. I made my way around the corner to speak with one of the center’s assistant directors, Kelly Wenig.<sup>2</sup> I described the situation to him, summarizing how the paper presented fatness as inherently bad. We briefly discussed how the student and her team were likely viewing the situation as a medical problem “afflicting” people who could be “saved” without considering other connected social and societal aspects. Our conversation turned to what I could do; rather than presenting information directly, the technique of asking questions arose. He liked the idea and cautioned me that I should ask those questions in a professional and respectful way. I nodded and took a deep breath, readying myself to return to the session equipped with this new strategy. I now had a way to stay true to my positionality as a fat studies scholar and fat person and thereby provide a challenge to the group’s perspective, while not betraying the purposes of my role as a tutor.

I reentered the room and asked the writer how her revisions were going. We had a short conversation about some of her changes, during which I mentally prepared what I wanted to say. I mapped out the phrasing, the tone, and the way I could transition from the topic we were on to my intervening thought. After a few minutes, I posed my questions, saying something along the lines of, “Are you aware of other ideas about ‘obesity,’ say from body-positive speakers? How do you think those ideas might impact your team’s study?” She paused and admitted she was not sure.



After this session, I wondered, was my small act of questioning the right move? To what extent should the person I am impact how I interact with a student? Where was the balance between my professionalism as a writing tutor, my professional conduct as a developing graduate student and scholar, and my identity as a fat person?

Not long after this session, I met with a group working on the same assignment; they also sought to fix a high rate of “obesity.” Feeling more confident and prepared, I again used the questioning technique to help them consider another perspective. My questions helped them think through a new angle of their intervention plan, which inspired them to add a subsection describing their efforts to decrease potential negative side-effects of their proposed actions.

Later on, my assistant director and I spoke again about the dynamics of these sessions. At the core of this second conversation was the idea that questioning can be used to encourage more critical thought about a topic from various perspectives. In retrospect, I could appreciate how, through my questions, I had succeeded in getting the students of these two sessions to think about their “obesity” rate topic from a more fat-positive perspective rather than a medical perspective.

## **TAKEAWAYS**

Through sharing our stories, we begin to answer Smith’s question of what it means to be a fat tutor. Both our narratives suggest there is a palpable and potentially painful moment that occurs when a fat tutor is presented with a piece of writing built on the premise that their very embodiment represents a cautionary and vile disease for others. What, then, can we as administrators do to leverage our authority to support tutors when writing consultations take such a provoking turn? The suggestions we offer below have the potential to empower not only fat tutors but all tutors.

## **MAKE SPACE FOR SESSION BREAKS**

Amanda’s story differs from Paula’s due to her ability to give her client a task, momentarily leave the session, and talk to her supervisor. Amanda had a relationship of trust with her assistant director that made his office a collegial space where she knew she could take a break to discuss the session. Conversely, Paula did not have an administrator nearby, but she would have benefited from a moment to collect herself or talk strategy with a tutor or director.

Administrators should consider discussing with tutors how and when to pause consultations. The need for this conversation became apparent during a recent staff meeting at Paula’s center. A

brainstorming session about how tutors could take actionable steps to confront Whiteness in their center led to a suggestion of being able to “tap out” of a session during which a client shared racist content. However, having a policy like this in place does not mean tutors will always want to pause an ongoing session or will feel comfortable doing so.

To address this potential hesitancy, tutors can be encouraged during staff training to make space within sessions for any needed breaks. In Paula’s current center, tutors are taught to assign writers small tasks during sessions. Prompts such as “highlight the topic sentence of each paragraph” or “freewrite about your topic” work well to engage the writer. If tasks such as these become a routine part of sessions, tutors may find it easier to take a break when needed, just as Amanda did. Such a policy provides a safety net for not just fat tutors but all tutors.

Concerns about tutors’ well-being conflicting with clients’ requests for help are not new to writing center literature. In Talisha Haltiwanger Morrison’s account of meeting with a client whose writing proposed the exploitation of Black women, Morrison, a Black woman, shares that she thought of leaving the session but remained due to a felt “obligation to help” the writer (25). Ultimately, Morrison’s client left the session grateful for the help received, but the question remains for Morrison—and for all tutors—“Where was the line between my obligation to the student and my own personal safety?” (26). The answer to this question is inevitably complex and subjective. Each tutor becomes responsible for deciding at what point continuing a session becomes untenable. Administrators can invite tutors to prepare for situations that might be especially troubling for them using the “Cope Ahead Skill” created by psychologist Marsha M. Linehan, creator of dialectical behavioral therapy (“Cope”). Prompting tutors to name their own boundaries and reflect on how they might react to a piece of upsetting content ahead of time can help them know when to continue forward or take a break from the session.

### **GIVE TIME TO FAT STUDIES**

In addition to engaging tutors in discussion and reflection about how to react to problematic content, we encourage administrators to include fat studies literature in their training curriculum. Many centers appropriately include discussions of how to best support specific student populations, including English language learners, BIPOC students, and students with disabilities. We suggest including fat students as part of these discussions and point to Corey Stevens’ “Fat on Campus: Fat College Students and Hyper(in)visible

Stigma” as an excellent introduction to the challenges students in larger bodies often encounter.

Including a text such as Stevens’ affirms fat tutors and helps non-fat peers better understand a diverse range of student experiences. Ideally, fat tutors would also feel comfortable approaching administrators or fellow tutors about experiencing anti-fat bias or harassment. Such communal conversations can generate powerful connections between tutors, while also underscoring the collaborative nature of writing centers. Thus, including fat studies scholarship has the potential to spark a valuable opportunity for individual growth and community building.

## NOTES

1. In the fat acceptance community, “obese” and “overweight” are derogatory terms for naturally occurring human diversity that encourage unfounded and harmful negative attitudes towards fatness (Wann xii-xiii). Hence, we use scare quotes around these words.

2. Thank you to Dr. Wenig for his support while we drafted this article.

## WORKS CITED

“Cope Ahead Skill.” *DBT.tools*, 2022. [https://dbt.tools/emotional\\_regulation/cope-ahead.php](https://dbt.tools/emotional_regulation/cope-ahead.php).

Denny, Harry C., et al., eds. *Out in the Center: Public Controversies and Private Struggles*. UP of Colorado, 2019.

Gaesser, Glenn. “Is ‘Permanent Weight Loss’ an Oxymoron?” *Rothblum and Solovay*, pp. 37-40.

Grutsch McKinney, Jackie. “Leaving Home Sweet Home: Towards Critical Readings of Writing Center Spaces.” *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2005, pp. 6-20.

Hansen, Madison, and Nicole Carrobis. “Addressing Professionalism in the Writing Center: Outfitting Consultants with Intersectional Awareness of Academic Embodiment.” *The Peer Review*, Summer 2020. <https://thepeerreview-iwca.org/issues/issue-4-1/Addressing-professionalism-in-the-writing-center-outfitting-consultants-with-intersectional-awareness-of-academic-embodiment/>.

McNamee, Kaidan, and Michelle Miley. “Writing Center as Homeplace (A Site for Radical Resistance).” *The Peer Review*, Fall 2017. [thepeerreview-iwca.org/issues/braver-spaces/writing-center-as-homeplace-a-site-for-radical-resistance/](https://thepeerreview-iwca.org/issues/braver-spaces/writing-center-as-homeplace-a-site-for-radical-resistance/).

Lockett, Alexandria. “Why I Call it the Academic Ghetto: A Critical Examination of Race, Place, and Writing Centers.” *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2019, pp. 20-33.

Morrison, Talisha Haltiwanger. “Being Seen and Not Seen: A Black Female Body in the Writing Center.” *Denny et al.*, pp. 21-27.

Pender, Carson Leigh. “The Bigger Picture: The Embodiment of Professionalism, Toxic Dress Codes, and a Narrative On Rhetorical Trauma.” *The Peer Review*,

Summer 2020. <https://thepeerreview-iwca.org/issues/issue-4-1/the-bigger-picture-the-embodiment-of-professionalism-toxic-dress-codes-and-a-narrative-on-rhetorical-trauma/>.

Rothblum, Esther D., and Sondra Solovay, editors. *The Fat Studies Reader*. New York UP, 2009.

Smith, Erec Steven. "Making Room for Fat Studies in Writing Center Theory and Practice." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-7.

Stevens, Corey. "Fat on Campus: Fat College Students and Hyper(in)visible Stigma." *Sociological Focus* vol. 51, no. 2, 2018, pp 130-49.

Wann, Marilyn. Foreword. "Fat Studies: An Invitation to Revolution." *Rothblum and Solovay*, pp. ix-xxv.

## EDITORS' CORRECTION

In the December 2022 issue of *WLN*, on p. 12, the article by Megan Kelly, Kelly Krumrie, Juli Parrish, and Olivia Tracy has an error in the institutional affiliation listed there. The authors are all at the University of Denver, not at the University of Pennsylvania. Our apologies for the mistake that somehow crept in.

## GET INVOLVED WITH *WLN*

**Interested in serving as a reviewer?** Contact Karen Gabrielle Johnson (KGJohnson@ship.edu); Ted Roggenbuck (troggenbuck@commonwealthu.edu); Lee Ann Glowzenski (laglowzenski@gmail.com); Julia Bleakney (jbleakney@elon.edu).

**Interested in contributing news, announcements, or accounts of work in your writing center to the blog (photos welcomed)?** Contact Anna Sophia Habib (ahabib@gmu.edu).

**Interested in guest editing a special issue on a topic of your choice?** Contact Muriel Harris (harrism@purdue.edu).

**Interested in writing an article or Tutors' Column to submit to *WLN*?** Check the guidelines on the website: [wlnjournal.org/submit.php](http://wlnjournal.org/submit.php).

## Tutors' Column: "Gestures about Writing: Toward an Art of Gestural Paraphrasing"

Andrew Sweeso  
Saint Louis University

As tutors, we tend to at least be aware that we gesture when we talk, and that our gestures—our ‘body language’—carry some sort of meaning. How I thought about body language and tutoring, though, changed when I worked with a medical student who ‘talked’ as much with his hands as he did with his voice. He was working on a personal statement for a prospective residency position, and he was grappling with how to translate his clinical experiences into something appealing to a more specific professional audience. He used symbolic non-verbal gestures throughout the session, such as making a juggling motion when he talked about struggling with the coherence of his paragraphs. His gestures really clicked for me, though, when we got into the nitty-gritty of revising those paragraphs. The student had separated his learning into categories of “hard” (e.g., medical knowledge) and “soft” (e.g., bedside manner) skills, and he discussed these skills in separate paragraphs. When I questioned this separation, he responded by suggesting his audience would see “hard” skills as more important than “soft” skills, raising his hand in the air when saying “hard” and placing it flat on the table when saying “soft.”



That gesture caught my attention: it seemed not only to represent the conceptual hierarchy of “hard” and “soft” skills, but also to indicate something about his vision for the ‘look’ of his writing. I decided to lean into my toolkit of tutoring practices and paraphrase what I thought his gesture meant. I suggested that his goal was to use his paragraph structure—symbolized by his hands—to represent these skill sets as distinct yet connected areas of practice. To my relief, he confirmed my interpretation. More importantly, this shared understanding gave us a basis for his revisions, as we spent the remaining session focused on his transitions and topic sentences within the structure he proposed.

Of course, gestures do not for writing make. I still needed to describe in spoken words the paragraph structure I thought the student mod-

eled before we could put his proposal into action. This, I argue, is because his gestures were not defective, but *cooperative*. Gestures communicate in partnership with speech, as Isabelle Thompson notes, and they need not be considered subordinate to speech. Moreover, as Jo Mackiewicz writes with Thompson, tutors' paraphrasing—whether of a student's speech, rough draft, or assignment prompt—enables students to “compare their intended meaning to their conveyed meaning” (106). In other words, paraphrasing can give both tutors and students “[an]other language to access the meaning of . . . texts” (154). This is what my student and I achieved through my paraphrasing of his gestures. I attempted to ‘reword’ what I took to be his description, through gesture, of the hierarchy of “hard skills” and “soft skills” he wanted to model in his personal statement. My verbal paraphrasing was simply the other language we used to access and act on what he had not yet put into words.

This was a striking moment for me, especially as it was my first in-person tutoring session since March of 2020. After nearly two years working online, I found it strange to consider the value of body language as a source for productive tutoring rather than a burden on it. Of course, that gestures can play a positive role in tutoring is not a new concept in writing center scholarship. Jeff Brooks' classic “minimalist tutoring” approach treats body language as a means for tutors to motivate students, and Thompson demonstrates that tutors' “hand gestures in writing center conversations act as partners with words or alone without words to convey meanings to listeners and to build rapport” (420). These discussions of tutors' body language can inform our understanding of my student's hand gestures, but it is notable that student writers' gestures are otherwise sparsely discussed. At most, they tend to be described as preverbal, purely emotional acts, or as a sign of “some form of intellectual breakthrough” (Glover 17). For example, they might be the excited hand gestures or brightened face of a student whose thesis just ‘clicked,’ or who just ‘got’ an assignment after a tutor rephrased the professor's prompt. My student did not have such a breakthrough: he instead used gestures to clarify his plan for his personal statement's structure and to *insist* on its effectiveness. With this insistence, the student assured that his vision for his personal statement remained at the center of our session.

This successful tutoring session led me to work toward a more sustainable praxis for what I call *gestural paraphrasing*: an art of translating into spoken and written word what students convey through gestures. With the support of my writing center, I developed a training guide for interpreting students' gestures in tutoring settings, which includes a rubric for categorizing gestures. I developed this rubric from a framework designed by Justine Cassell, who built hers

from foundational work on gesture by linguists Adam Kendon and David McNeely. My rubric divides body language into “non-gestural” and “gestural” categories, and then frames categories for gestures articulated by Cassell (and Kendon and McNeely) in relation to possible student writing goals. For example, my rubric identifies a student moving their hand down the length of their printed-out paper as an “iconic” gesture that models their desire to discuss the whole draft, not just a few parts. My writing-oriented rubric, however, may still be limited in capturing some of the nuances of gestures about writing. This is especially the case in culturally diverse tutoring settings: some students, for example, may use “hybrid” gestures that blend non-verbal idioms from multiple cultures (Matsumoto and Hwang 711-12). Students might also use gestures to model writing goals or structures that are more common outside of American academic settings (Blalock 83-85). However, as Mackiewicz and Thompson note, paraphrasing is not meant to get it right every time; it is meant to compare conveyed and intended meanings. Gestural paraphrasing is a tool for tutors and students to establish collaboratively what the student wants for their writing and to put those goals into action.

In practice, this training produces some mixed results: while trainees have engaged in productive ways with student gestures, they are often just as focused, if not more so, on their fellow tutors’ body language. In the first iteration of this training, I used a video from Purdue University’s writing center intended to illustrate a tutoring session with a nervous student, which featured plenty of gestures to analyze. The majority of the trainees’ comments focused on the tutor’s gestures, but they were also able to connect the student’s hand gestures to his overall writing goals. One trainee even noted a “power struggle” between the tutor and student, suggesting that both used gestures to try to assert control over the student’s writing. This emphasized a crucial element of students’ gestures that is missing from the existing literature: as was evident in my student’s insistence on the structure of his writing, students use gestures to insist on their more active role in the tutoring process. Future iterations of this training will put even more emphasis on student gestures—trainers may offer more directive analysis prompts, for example—but this training already demonstrates the crucial roles students’ gestures play in tutoring settings.<sup>1</sup>

Gestural paraphrasing still has plenty of room to grow, especially with respect to culturally diverse approaches to both gesture and composition. This, however, does not mean we should limit our use of gestural paraphrasing. Given its ability to affirm students’ intended meanings, center students’ goals at the center, and welcome students’ insistence on their role in the writing process, we tutors ought to hone gestural paraphrasing through more frequent practice.

## NOTES

1. Many thanks to Dr. Alex Ocasio, Savannah Warners, Caitie Wisniewski, and many other staff members of Saint Louis University's University Writing Services for their participation and input in this training.

## WORKS CITED

- Blalock, Susan. "Negotiating Authority through One-to-One Collaboration in the Multicultural Writing Center." *Writing in Multicultural Settings*, edited by Carol Severino et al., The Modern Language Association of America, 1997, pp. 79-93.
- Brooks, Jeff. "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work." *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*, edited by Robert W. Barnett and Jacob S. Blumner, Allyn and Bacon, 2001, pp. 219-24.
- Cassell, Justine. "A Framework for Gesture Generation and Interpretation." *Computer Vision in Human-Machine Interaction*, edited by Roberto Cipolla and Alex Pentland, Cambridge UP, 1998, pp. 191-215. MIT Media Lab, [https://www.media.mit.edu/gnl/publications/gesture\\_wkshop.pdf](https://www.media.mit.edu/gnl/publications/gesture_wkshop.pdf).
- Glover, Carl. "Kairos and the Writing Center: Modern Perspectives on an Ancient Idea." *The Writing Center Director's Resource Book*, edited by Christina Murphy and Byron Stay, Routledge, 2006, pp. 13-20.
- Mackiewicz, Jo, and Isabelle Thompson. *Talk about Writing: The Tutoring Strategies of Experienced Writing Center Tutors*. Routledge, 2015.
- Matsumoto, David, and Hysung C. Hwang. "Culture and Nonverbal Communication." *Nonverbal Communication*, edited by Judith A. Hall and Mark L. Knapp, De Gruyter Mouton, 2013, pp. 697-727.
- Thompson, Isabelle. "Scaffolding in the Writing Center: A Microanalysis of an Experienced Tutor's Verbal and Nonverbal Tutoring Strategies." *Written Communication*, vol. 26, no. 4, Oct. 2009, pp. 417-53.



## Announcements

### **CANADIAN WRITING CENTRES ASSOCIATION**

**May 24-26, 2023**

Virtual

“Unwriting the Centre”

For conference information and proposals, contact  
cwcaconference@gmail.com; conference website:  
<https://cwcaaccr.com/2023-cwca-accr-conference/>.

### **MID-ATLANTIC WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION**

**March 3-4, 2023**

Bryn Mawr College: Bryn Mawr, PA

“The Global Writing Center”

For conference information, please contact the chair, Jenn  
Callaghan: [jcallaghan@brynmawr.edu](mailto:jcallaghan@brynmawr.edu); conference website:  
<https://mawca.org/2023-Conference>.

### **INTERNATIONAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION**

**October 11-14, 2023**

Baltimore, MD

“Embracing the Multi-Verse”

Conference Co-Chairs: Mairin Barney and Holly Ryan:  
[IWCAConferenceChair@gmail.com](mailto:IWCAConferenceChair@gmail.com).

### **NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PEER TUTORING IN WRITING**

**November 2-5, 2023**

Pittsburgh, PA

“Building Bridges and Breaking Cliches”

The conference can be attended both in person and virtually. The  
proposal deadline is April 14, 2023. Contact the conference chairs,  
Jim Purdy and Renee Brown at: [ncptw2023@yahoo.com](mailto:ncptw2023@yahoo.com):  
conference website: [www.thencptw.org](http://www.thencptw.org).

## Conference Calendar

**Mar. 2-4, 2023: South Central Writing Centers Association, Lubbock, TX**

Contact: Kristin Messuri (kristin.messuri@ttu.edu) or Jennifer Marciniak (jennifer.marciniak@ttu.edu); conference website: <https://scwca.net/conferences/scwca2023conference>.

**Mar. 3-4, 2023: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Assoc., Bryn Mawr, PA**

Contact: Jen Callaghan: [jcallaghan@brynmawr.edu](mailto:jcallaghan@brynmawr.edu); conference website: <https://mawca.org/2023-Conference>.

**Mar. 17-18, 2023: Secondary School Writing Center Assoc., Arlington, VA**

Contact: Jenny Goransson: [conference@sswca.org](mailto:conference@sswca.org); conference website: <http://sswca.org/conference/sswca-2023/>

**Apr. 1-2, 2023: Northeast Writing Centers Association, Durham, NH**

Contact: Cyndi Roll and Meaghan Dittrich: [newcaconference@gmail.com](mailto:newcaconference@gmail.com); conference website: <https://newcaconference.org/conference/2023-2/>

**Apr. 13-14, 2023: Online Writing Centers Association, virtual**

Contact: Kim Fahle and Erika Maikish: [owca-conference@onlinewritingcenters.org](mailto:owca-conference@onlinewritingcenters.org); conference website: <https://www.onlinewritingcenters.org/conference>.

**May 24-26, 2023: Canadian Writing Centre Association, virtual**

Contact: [cwcaconference@gmail.com](mailto:cwcaconference@gmail.com); conference website: <https://cwcaaccr.com/2023-cwca-accr-conference/>.

**Oct. 11-14, 2023: International Writing Centers Assoc., Baltimore, MD**

Contact: Mairin Barney and Holly Ryan: [IWCAConferenceChair@gmail.com](mailto:IWCAConferenceChair@gmail.com)

**Nov. 2-5, 2023: National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing**

Contact: James Purdue and Renee Brown: [ncptw2023@yahoo.com](mailto:ncptw2023@yahoo.com); conference website: <https://www.thencptw.org/index.php/ncptw-2023-pittsburgh/>



## ***WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship***

***WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship***, published quarterly, from September to June, is a peer-reviewed publication of the International Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779. All Rights and Title reserved unless permission is granted by TWENTY SIX DESIGN LLC. Material can not be reproduced in any form without express written permission. However, up to 50 copies of an article may be reproduced under fair use policy for educational, non-commercial use in classes or course packets. Proper acknowledgement of title, author, and publication date should be included.

**Editor:** Muriel Harris (harrism@purdue.edu)

**Blog Editor:** Anna Sophia Habib (ahabib@gmu.edu)

### **Subscriptions, Archives, Resources, and Submissions:**

Visit [www.wlnjournal.org](http://www.wlnjournal.org) for subscription information, free archive access, resources, and manuscript submission guidelines.



A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship  
TWENTY SIX DESIGN LLC  
52 Riley Road #380  
Celebration, FL 34747

PRSR STD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
ORLANDO, FL  
PERMIT 3172



winjournal



WLNJournal