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HOWARD | DOBSON | LEE AND SABATINO | TZANEV

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Editor's Note

Karen Gabrielle Johnson

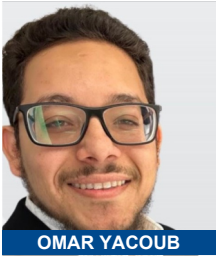
The arrival of the fall semester signals fresh beginnings. New tutor staff, re-imagined ideas for tutor education programs, and redesigned marketing materials wafting the scent of wet ink can energize us to take on the new academic year with vigor. This spirit of enthusiasm has also captured the *WLN* editorial team as we begin this volume with the welcome addition of a new Assistant Editor, Omar Yacoub. As a seasoned writing center tutor, former writing center coordinator, the new assistant writing center director at West Virginia University, and a recipient of the Association for Writing Across the Curriculum and WAC Clearinghouse's "Best WAC Article or Chapter Focused on Research Award," Omar joins the *WLN* editors with unique experiences to contribute to our team. Welcome, Omar!



KAREN GABRIELLE JOHNSON

In our first issue of volume 48, Jeffrey Howard explains how he encourages reflective practice and cultivates empathy in consultants. By requiring his consultants to compose online literacy narratives, Howard has found that consultants' public sharing of their literacy experiences has encouraged them to be more reflective about their work and helped to create a pedagogy of empathy in their writing center.

Graduate writers' unique needs can be met through various institutional supports. In Canada, Joe Dobson developed a new graduate Success Centre that was designed as a discipline-specific writing center for education majors. His center embodied two purposes—to support graduate writers, especially the high number of international multilingual writers—and to create a sense of belongingness among those who frequented the center. Dobson explains how providing effective support and workshops that are followed up with social events helped develop a thriving center where graduate students experience belongingness and a safe place to access writing support.



OMAR YACOUB

In the U.S., Yvonne Lee and Lindsay Sabatino argue that writing center/faculty collaborations benefit both faculty and graduate students. They describe how their two-year partnership with a public health education department organically arose as a result of Sabatino's campus-wide faculty development workshop. Lee and Sabatino share how ongoing discussions with faculty led to synergistic benefits for faculty, graduate students, and the writing center as faculty received support in developing new writing projects, tutors grew in their professional development and disciplinary knowledge, and graduate students improved their writing and digital design skills.

In our Tutors' Column, Lillian Tzanev reveals how she mistakenly perceived her consultant role as one that corrected all errors on a writer's paper. Acknowledging her bent toward perfectionism, Tzanev unpacks how her original conceptions were transformed as she delved into literature on writing pedagogy. Through her readings, she discovered that the diversity of academic writing does not allow consultants to rely on a "single correct formula for writing." She shares how this revelation influenced her to put aside her perfectionist tendencies and focus instead on nurturing the writer's growth.

WLN is Now Open-Access on a New Website!

The editorial team of *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* is excited to announce that the journal is now an open-access publication on the WAC-Clearinghouse website! For over 26 years, The Clearinghouse has published cost-free scholarly works, including our own Digital Edited Collections, and their mission, values, and vision align with ours. After carefully considering the benefits of transitioning to an open-access publication, we are confident that The Clearinghouse, a non-profit publishing collaborative, is the ideal home for the journal, blog, and our many resources.

Print copies will be available to subscribers until June 2024 or until a subscription expires. All current and past issues, Digital Edited Collections, webinars, and guidelines for submitting manuscripts can be found at <https://wac.colostate.edu/wln>. *The Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders* blog can be accessed from <https://wlnconnect.org>.

Changing web hosts, URLs, and publication modes is a monumental task. The editorial team would like to thank Richard Hay for his many years of supporting *WLN* and to Mike Palmquist and Michael Pemberton for their extensive work in transitioning *WLN* to its new home.

Fostering Reflection and Empathy: Narratives as Pedagogical Tools in Writing Consultation Preparation

Jeffrey G. Howard
Converse University

Many of us are not necessarily conscious of the extent to which our experiences with literacy impact us. However, if we are paying attention, we see evidence of their cumulative impact. Because of the nature of writing center work, I argue that writing center staff members should 1) attend to the experiences that have shaped their own literacies and 2) learn to articulate the ways in which those experiences inform their pedagogical approaches and relationships to clients and their learning.



JEFFREY G. HOWARD

That is, through constructing meaning from our own often difficult acquisition of literacies, we situate ourselves to more effectively serve those who frequent our centers. In this article, I suggest that literacy narratives, which J. Blake Scott defines as “a history or account of a person’s development or accumulation of literacy” (109), are a powerful method for helping our consultants accomplish the intellectual work of attending to and articulating their experiences. In addition, literacy narratives can help consultants become more reflective about their approaches to writing center work and develop empathy that “builds trust,” “motivate[s] learning,” and extends their ability to “cultivate the understanding, connection, and agency writers—and tutors—need to grow” (Lape 6). This article focuses specifically on the manner in which writing center directors, by having writing center staff members write literacy narratives, can promote impactful reflective practice and empathy in their staff.

LITERACY NARRATIVES

Literacy narratives are frequently written—although they can be multimodal and multimedia—autobiographical compositions detailing experiences of the author’s life that pertain to their development as a reader, writer, designer, and other areas of literacy. Literacy narratives are highly individualized and variable, potentially reflecting on anything from listening to someone read from a favorite children’s book to overcoming the fear of public

speaking. In the process of reflecting on such experiences, authors ideally raise their own consciousness about the influence and impact of such experiences on the present, while also constructing meaning through form, syntax, image, and metaphor. In addition to their use in English composition courses, literacy narratives frequently appear in curricula that prepare future educators for careers in K-12 instruction because they “help teachers to look critically at their knowledge and the places/locations where that knowledge was constructed.” In the process, literacy narratives aid in the learning and growth of writers/teachers as they “craft” or “construct” meaning with the raw material of personal experience (Clark and Medina 68).

THE NARWOL PROJECT

In 2019, our writing center, the Naugle CommLab, launched the NARWOL (Narratives of Reading, Writing, and Other Literacies archive), a public-facing online repository of 1000-1500-word literacy narratives composed by our staff members. Like traditional literacy narratives, these compositions help staff members reflect on and construct meaning from their literacy experiences with the additional expectation that writers will also connect those experiences in some way to writing center work. The intent is to help them discover and draw specific conclusions about how their own experiences have transformed into tools and skills they deploy in writing center consultations, and thus inform their approach, methods, or overarching philosophy of tutoring.

Staff members need only compose one literacy narrative during the time they work in our center, and they set their own deadlines for completing it, so some of them may finish in a month, while others take up to 1-2 years of intermittent writing and revising. Most of our consultants have never written a literacy narrative before (only one consultant has ever claimed to have composed one), so to support their foray into this genre, I provide our staff members with prompting questions and instructions on how to begin drafting their narratives, including definitions of both “literacy” and “literacy narrative,” the conventions of autobiographical writing, and potential topics. To begin these conversations, I ask my consultants about favorite books, events that made them like writing or reading, or influential people (family members, friends, teachers, etc. who have been a part of their literacy journey). Starting with a single focus the writer deems important or a collection of experiences, I invite them to freewrite and then draft, encouraging them to

share their work with me once it starts coming together so we can talk about organization, the “So what?,” or other considerations. I also recommend they use archived narratives as models or inspiration (found online in the NARWOL archive for their own writing), because reading those narratives can help writers decide what they do or do not want to write about. Once they discover their main ideas, they write about experiences that range from early childhood to the present day; the topics (including music, performance, literature, and biology) can vary. For example, Sol Pea wrote about telling stories and translating for their Spanish-speaking Abuela, who “came to the United States seeking asylum in the wake of the El Salvadoran civil war” but “spoke little English,” while Jae Pujols’s narrative focuses on their love of the Harry Potter series, the often- fraught relationship between texts and authorship, and the author’s trans identity. Ultimately, whatever our staff members choose to write about is generally located, implicitly or explicitly, within the literacy mission, purpose, and practices of the writing center.

Because I consider the literacy narrative project part of staff professionalization and training, staff members receive time on the schedule to write their narratives, so whenever they are on shift but do not have appointments, they can use that time to write or meet with other writing center consultants or me to discuss their drafts. When they meet with me, I try to provide validation, praise, and other feedback intended to help the writer emphasize emerging themes and through lines; finetune concrete descriptions; and discover, articulate, and situate the significance of their story in relation to their work in the center. By engaging in this process with me and their writing center community, our staff members put themselves in a position to practice critical self-reflection and heighten their empathy.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Wherever it takes place, whether in a classroom or a writing center, reflection impacts learning. Indeed, Renata Fitzpatrick et al. state, “As we work collaboratively with students to facilitate their development as writers, our task is, like teaching, full of moments about which reflection can be useful” (2). Ben Rafoth too has written about the ways reflection improves writing center practice. He references John Dewey’s definition of reflection, namely “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge” that deliberately grounds that belief in “evidence and rationality” (qtd. in Rafoth 8). According to Rafoth, reflection should connect “decisions and

actions in teaching or tutoring with the larger effort to create a better world," thus [expanding] the possibilities for helping students" (10). Importantly, reflection prompts re-evaluation of assumptions and strategies, and consultants and administrators who frequently re-evaluate themselves are likely more open to modifying approaches and habits to suit diverse situations and learners. They argue that critical reflection is essential to training peer consultants because it allows consultants to identify and understand the perspectives and experiences they bring to the session and how those can impact their work with students (43). At the same time, Okawa et al. place the responsibility for promoting reflection in writing center work squarely on administrators' shoulders.

In our center, literacy narratives are one means by which we foster a culture of critical reflection. For example, one consultant connected their lifelong love for reading with their current efforts to learn how to better explain "grammar and language issues without being prescriptive but while still giving useful information and context" ("Words...and Words...and Words"). Referring to the preparation of K-12 educators, Cheryl H. Almeda calls literacy narratives a "vehicle for reflection" (31). We have found that literacy narratives provide our writing center consultants with opportunities for meaningful reflection that, to borrow a concept from Julie Lindquist and Bump Halbritter, are "informed" by the framework of writing center theory and genre conventions and "scaffolded" by meeting with me or fellow consultants to discuss their experiences and processes within the context of the project and the conventions of the literacy narrative (416). Consequently, this reflection helps consultants take their writing center practice to another level.

Because everyone in our center is involved in this initiative of reflection, the project creates opportunities for each of us to make reflective practice more central to our writing center environment and culture. For example, in a presentation at SWCA 2021, Emily Nguyen discussed how the reflective aspect of the literacy narrative "helps consultants...understand where they come from and how it influences who they are today." Her narrative prompted her to think about her identity as both reader and writer and the evolution of that identity. Emily went from the second-grader and eventual Accelerated Reading Champion whose dad, in

her words, decided that Emily was never “going to be a math protege” to the high school student who “lost time and motivation to write and read for pleasure” while remaining a “stickler for grammar and mechanics.” Eventually, Emily became a business major who works in a writing center and loves “talking to people earnestly and expressing interest in what they have to say” (“NGUY 6262”). It encouraged her to think critically about her classmates, many of whom:

do not love reading and writing nearly as much as I do. Despite this, even people who dislike writing choose to come to the [writing center] because they want to get better, and that’s what’s important. We accept people whether they are lovers or haters of writing, and we work with them to improve their communication skills. (“The Literacy Narrative”)

On the same panel, Rocio Soto shared how composing the literacy narrative led her to discover new ideas about writing center work and, importantly, about herself:

As a result of this project, I’ve discovered I am an eager sharer. Someone who looks to share the wonders of literacy and all the joy they can bring.... This job is something I love to do, not because I am naturally gifted at it or have been working in communication since the beginning of time, but because I am passionate about the journey and how we choose to share that with our students.

These are just two of many discoveries our consultants have made while composing their narratives and reflecting on the impact their experiences have had on their work.

EMPATHY

In general, writing center work attracts empathetic individuals who want to use what they know to help others learn. Their empathy can be activated or cultivated through reading and daily interactions with student writers. Composing literacy narratives, as well, can cultivate consultant empathy. Clients want to work in a safe environment free of judgment and to receive feedback that responds to the client’s specific situation. What writing center administrators generally want and seek to cultivate is a staff of communication specialists trained in what Noreen Lape calls “a pedagogy of empathy” to help students respond to the situation in which and for which they are composing (1). If empathy, as Lape suggests, is “a teachable tutoring skill,” administrators can foster the empathy that many consultants

already possess. For example, consultants can develop their “pedagogy of empathy” through receiving ample opportunities to meet with diverse clients of many backgrounds, identities, and degrees of communicative competence. Likewise, the reflections stemming from our staff members’ literacy narratives indicate that these compositions can also be useful for developing a “pedagogy of empathy.”

By reflecting on their experiences and struggles with expressive and receptive communication in their literacy narratives, our empathetic consultants consider how they have to deal with these challenges. For example, Nguyen writes about how her weaknesses with oral communication led her to become a more adept listener, which helps her greatly in consultations:

I’ve never been a strong speaker, choosing instead to sit on the sidelines and listen to the conversation or ditch my surroundings in favor of fantasy worlds. But I’ve learned that talking to people earnestly and expressing interest in what they have to say can bring out the best stories. And when that magic moment happens, I love to listen. (“NGUY 6262”)

Cassidy Reese also writes about listening by drawing on her experiences with performance and drama in high school. She writes that her high aptitude with oral communication proved a barrier to developing as an active listener. The literacy narrative led her to key insights on the importance of listening and the power of silence in consultations:

In the context of literacy in speech, tutoring requires just as much listening as it does actually talking.... As a performer, there is just as much (and sometimes more) power in the pauses between lines of dialogue or right after the climax of a song as there is in the words or notes themselves. The pauses are the moments when you can see a character at their most vulnerable, taking the moment to process and grow internally before your very eyes.

Examining the claims made in these narratives, I would argue that composing literacy narratives helps our consultants turn inward toward their weaknesses, struggles, and vulnerabilities, which ultimately can season their attitudes and behaviors in their consultations and help them connect their own literacy development with the challenges their clients face.

Further, by composing these narratives, consultants can develop a greater understanding of the relationship between empathy and literacy and ways in which that relationship plays out in work. In her literacy narrative, Sophia Tone wrote, "Compassion, not perfection, is the true destination of literacy." In other words, growing as a communicator (like being a consultant) is less about linguistic rules and more about human connection. Sophia's comment, and the pedagogy of empathy it implies, applies particularly well to our work with multilingual clients. While sessions with multilingual clients can present additional layers of linguistic and cultural complexity that our consultants learn to navigate, it is also important to recall that outside of the center multilingual clients frequently face abundant prejudice, both explicit and implicit. For our multilingual clients, who may make up 25%–35% of consultations, the empathy that consultants like Tone possess contributes to an environment in which multilingual clients can learn, grow, and succeed. Multilingual students need empathetic individuals like Peña who wrote about helping their Spanish-speaking Abuela (Abby) prepare for her U.S. citizenship exam, which was entirely in English:

The skills my Abby unknowingly imparted to me have made me cherish my experiences at [our writing center]. Some of my most memorable appointments have been with international students. I will never forget the student from South Korea with whom I spent our appointment analyzing the intricacies of American humor through memes or the international PhD student who met with me to practice for their Three Minute Thesis competition and ended up winning the competition.

Empathetic consultants can transform the writing center into a refuge for multilingual clients who often cannot find the academic and emotional support they require elsewhere. I would argue that the pedagogy of empathy promoted by literacy narratives is a highly effective tool in helping our consultants cultivate that space.

CONCLUSION

Each writing center consultant possesses a unique set of literacy experiences that contribute to who they are, what they do, and why they do it. By using narrative to harness the power of these experiences, we prepare consultants to be more

reflective about their work and cultivate their empathy. If writing centers are to continue playing a key role in “the larger effort to create a better world” (Rafoth 10), then self-reflection that leads to change and increased awareness that allows each of us to foster more meaningful connections with our clients will be crucial in helping us achieve the impact we wish to have and see in our academic communities.



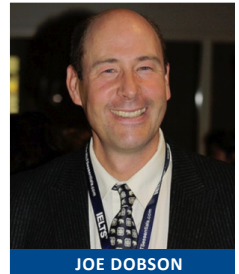
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Fostering a Sense of Belonging in a Graduate Writing Center

Joe Dobson
Thompson Rivers University

Graduate students, like their undergraduate counterparts, often struggle with writing and benefit from support and guidance (Okuda and Anderson 392). They need to adapt to the demands of graduate studies as they transition from consumers to producers of knowledge while juggling study, work, family, and other commitments. Heather Vorhies notes that as graduate student enrollment at universities has grown, “writing centers are called to aid and adapt for this underserved population” (6).



JOE DOBSON

Models for providing support vary, and some institutions have campus-wide centers that provide cross-campus support to all graduate and undergraduate students whereas others have graduate writing centers that support graduate students across a range of disciplines. Graduate writing centers are positioned to help writers adjust to the rigors of graduate-level writing compared to campus-wide centers that often focus on the needs of undergraduate writers. Another approach is that of discipline-specific centers—stand-alone centers connected with a specific academic unit—that only support students in a specific discipline. At the graduate level, a discipline-specific graduate center approach may benefit writers and programs as such centers are connected to a specific academic unit. For example, tutors in the same discipline as the writers they support can draw on their familiarity with discourse in the genre and their knowledge of courses, assignments, and instructor expectations. Importantly, discipline-specific centers may also help foster a sense of belonging and community.

At Thompson Rivers University the Graduate Student Success Centre (Success Centre), a stand-alone writing center specifically created for graduate students in education, opened in September 2018 at my institution, which is primarily an undergraduate teaching-focused university in Canada. Our student enrollment in the graduate certificate and Master of Education programs has

tripled over the past several years to approximately 400 students.

U and graduate international students at many institutions (Anderson 172). Supporting the distinct needs of international students, primarily multilingual graduate writers (MGWs), as they adapt to life and study in a new context, presents challenges and opportunities. For these reasons, graduate education faculty advocated for discipline-specific writing support for graduate students in education programs. Faculty felt that this approach could support the growing number of MGWs as well as other writers in their programs, create a sense of belonging, and provide meaningful student employment opportunities. As a result, the Success Centre was approved in July 2018 and opened less than two months later. The Centre hires graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) who are senior students in the Master of Education program to support writers, deliver workshops, and provide opportunities for students to connect through various events. I will highlight some of the challenges, opportunities, and initiatives we experienced with our Centre and then explain how our supports have incrementally worked to cultivate a sense of belonging for students.

GETTING STARTED

The transition to graduate studies is challenging for many, and at the graduate level, students are often assumed to be strong writers (Brooks-Gillies et al. 2). Accordingly, Laura Micciche notes that it is not common to teach writing to graduate students (W47). For MGWs, the lack of writing instruction can result in challenges when they work on completing writing assignments. MGWs need support with writing in aspects such as use of language, vocabulary, and genre knowledge as they develop their disciplinary expertise (Phillips 41). MGWs need time and support to adapt to new ways of expressing learning and knowledge in nuanced discipline-specific language. Talinn Phillips argues that writing centers need to adapt and move toward offering supports that are more disciplinarily-informed (41). Given the demands of graduate-level writing, discipline-specific support may be of particular benefit for MGWs as they adapt to graduate discourse in a new context.

Helping writers feel comfortable and establishing a trusting relationship is also critical: writers need to feel confident and at ease in writing center interactions. Beyond a center's physical attributes such as furniture and décor, a welcoming space should be inclusive. To this end, it may be helpful to have tutors who

reflect the diversity of writers they support. In one graduate writing center, Chuck Radke comments that the tutors drive its success as they “share many demographic and psychological characteristics of the students they serve” (15). MGWs may feel a closer connection with a tutor from a similar cultural and linguistic background.

With less than two months to plan and open the Success Centre, a key initial focus was hiring GTAs and helping them gain the skills and confidence to provide one-to-one tutorial writing support. Approximately half of the writers in our graduate programs in education take courses on campus (primarily MGWs), and about half complete coursework online (primarily domestic students who are working professionals). Since opening, over 90% of writers accessing support and attending events have been MGWs. With the new discipline-specific approach in a stand-alone center for graduate students in education, it was unclear how much demand for support there might be. However, we had 251 appointments in our first semester and 890 appointments during the first year. After our inaugural year, we have had 700-1100 appointments each year. Our high number of appointments for a small student body has been a clear indication of writers’ desire for support, confidence in tutors’ ability to help writers, and faculty buy-in and support of the Centre. Each semester, we typically hire three to six GTAs, most of whom are MGWs and who reflect the diversity of writers in the programs in aspects such as country of origin. In addition to providing writing support, we provide workshops, writing resources, support events for specific courses, and social opportunities for writers.

In the Success Centre, orientation and training for our GTAs includes a focus on creating a welcoming and safe space for writers and building a sense of belonging. We use strategies and approaches focused on creating a welcoming, inclusive, and open space for dialogue that provide our tutors with both the skills and confidence to support students. For example, the team watches and discusses videos such as *Writing Across Borders* (Robertson) to understand the challenges multilingual writers face, discusses scholarship on writing centers as welcoming spaces, and brainstorms approaches to help engage students and cultivate a sense of belonging. Our discussions provide an opportunity for the GTAs to reflect on their experience and observations as tutors, understand the multidimensional challenges MGWs face, and consider strategies and ideas. Additionally, the GTAs, through writing consultations and interactions with writers, gain critical insight into how the Centre can serve writers. The GTAs’ input

about their observations has culminated into actions that have shaped the Centre, including offering various initiatives and opportunities that resonate with writers.

FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING

Discipline-specific graduate writing centers can help cultivate a sense of belonging; however, there is limited discussion of this aspect of graduate writing centers in the literature. For MGWs, the challenges in adapting to graduate studies are multifaceted and include socio-cultural adjustment to a new academic context (Cheng et al. 66). On campus, one's sense of belonging includes a feeling of being cared about, respected, accepted, and valued, as well as feeling socially supported and connected (Strayhorn 3). Belongingness may be particularly important for MGWs as they transition to living and studying in a new context. Candace Cooper argues, "Building community within a writing center should be a priority for all writing centers, particularly new/emerging writing centers" (1-2). Community building is important for both tutors and writers, and for MGWs, feeling that they belong and are supported and welcomed may help them adapt and be successful. Discipline-specific centers can be a natural space for writers to gather and connect; even so, cultivating a sense of belonging needs to be intentional. Activities, such as writing center social events and workshops, can help graduate writers feel a sense of community if opportunities for socializing are part of the programming (Summers 208). Graduate students are typically connected to a specific department, and unlike undergraduate centers with broader campus-wide support mandates, our discipline-specific writing center provides a natural hub for writers to connect with peers, GTAs, and faculty.

Our events and workshops through the Success Centre, both academic and social, have been effective in drawing in writers to attend and connect with others. We first offered a small number of workshops in winter 2019, our second semester of operation, and then in fall 2019, increased these to include both academic workshops and other more social opportunities for students to connect. Our GTAs both organize and deliver our workshops as well as lead social events, and our workshops on topics such as writing in APA style and developing thesis statements have been well-attended with participation frequently exceeding forty attendees. Our GTAs' leadership may benefit writer engagement as GTAs are also peers in their programs. The GTAs promote workshops and events through announcements and class visits, and brainstorm ideas for methods to best engage attendees. For example, GTAs now host our first event each semester, a

welcome/tips for academic success, and we offer food, time for writers to interact and mingle, and games. Over fifty writers attended a welcome/tips for academic success event in September 2022. Events are also an opportunity for writers to meet and get to know the GTAs in a non-evaluative and welcoming environment. If an event is purely social, writers who are busy with work, family, and other commitments may not attend; however, when combined with a purposeful event they feel is of value, they are more likely to come. Writers “vote with their feet” in attending events which are optional, and many writers have attended multiple events.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, attendance at events dipped, in part as our support and events were all online. After on-campus activities resumed in September 2021, attendance rebounded and grew to record participation. Part of the success may be attributed to a few factors: instructor buy-in and their promotion of events, refreshments/food, prizes, games, and time for social interaction. Notably, our experience is that events can be held economically, and when we have offered light refreshments such as a slice of pizza or games (with small prizes), attendance has increased. By combining academic events with social opportunities, we have observed that attendees, many of whom have relocated to study internationally, often linger and take advantage of the opportunity to connect with others. In turn, they may also be more confident and willing to book appointments or access other supports. Event topics and their timing have been critical, and we sequence these in careful order starting with the broadest needs, such as how to write references and cite sources. Lastly, we try to schedule workshops at times that align with gaps in on-campus course schedules. As a result, writers can often simply head to the event prior to or after class when they are already on campus.

SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES

In the Success Centre, three approaches have been effective in engaging writers: course-specific support events, conversation circles, and events not typically associated with writing centers such as career workshops. First, we have offered course-specific capstone support events which have been well-attended. Capstone support events, typically three hours long, bring writers together as a community of learners using a binge-writing approach at which students can access support multiple times during the event. At these events, where food and refreshments are served, between ten to fifteen writers who are at the final stage of their program come for support to help finish their

project. During these events, writers can receive writing support two to three times, and between consultations, they work on their writing, which is often accomplished collaboratively with peers. Additional benefits for our course-specific events are that instructors provide GTAs with guidance and suggestions for students to focus on. This course-specific approach also helps us manage overall demand by clustering support for a specific course on one day. Tutors also benefit from working with multiple writers on a similar assignment, and writers feel less lonely in working through major assignments and meeting deadlines.

Secondly, our weekly GTA-facilitated conversation circles focus less on academic topics and instead on adjusting to life and study in a new context, or opportunities and resources on campus. With snacks and games, coupled with some time on topics such as thesis statements or citations, conversation circles provide space for writers to connect. Attendance at the conversation circles is typically between five to ten writers, except during the pandemic when attendance was lower for the online meetings. Additionally, writers bring a variety of questions and concerns, many unrelated to academic needs, and often conversations focus on simply adjusting to living and studying in Canada. Because writers appreciate these opportunities, they often return multiple times.

Lastly, some of our other non-academic initiatives have been well-attended. These initiatives may help position the Success Centre as a hub for graduate-student interactions and learning beyond coursework and assignments. For example, we have offered events on topics not typically associated with writing centers such workshops on careers and wellness, and career-focused workshops are particularly popular. Further, we have also offered some seasonal or holiday events (sometimes combined with workshops) as well as ones on baking and nature walks to provide opportunity for students to interact more informally. In summary, these distinct approaches create space for students to interact with others in meaningful ways and develop relationships that augment the heart of our mission of providing writing support.

Our activities and initiatives are constantly evaluated. Our weekly GTA meetings provide opportunities for the team to assess what is working and how we can best engage writers. We can often make changes quickly if initiatives do not work and this ability to pivot is critical. Lastly, the GTAs, students themselves, are our “ears on the ground” and frequently hear suggestions on things the center can do or change. The GTA voice is critical in helping the center both support writers and create a sense of belonging.

The center cannot address all the challenges writers face, but it may help them feel connected to others.

LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Developing a clear vision for our Success Centre, avoiding over-promising, and taking incremental steps toward our goals have helped make tasks manageable. Embedded in nearly all aspects of our success have been the GTAs, mostly MGWs, having the voice to help shape the Centre, and their insight in aspects such as events and social opportunities has been critical. Furthermore, combining academic events with social opportunities, hosting a range of non-academic opportunities, and being intentional in identifying ways for writers to connect with peers have helped the Centre cultivate a sense of belonging.

The shift to online delivery and support during the COVID-19 pandemic likely led to writers feeling less connected with peers, faculty, and the institution. However, a benefit of the switch to the online modality provided insight into how the Centre can be more flexible and inclusive of all writers. Our experience is that events that bring writers together provide opportunities for them to feel a stronger sense of belonging, and offering food, games, and door prizes have been effective. More importantly, students have found it valuable to connect through our varied opportunities that include combined workshops/social events, special events, and conversation circles. Though we have faced the significant challenges of starting up in a condensed timeline, having to pivot to online support in our second year, and supporting a rapidly growing number of writers, primarily MGWs, with limited resources, the Success Centre has filled a gap in providing writers with both writing support and opportunities to connect with others. In the future, the Centre will continue to evolve and require continual rethinking about how to provide meaningful academic writing support while simultaneously fostering a sense of belonging.



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Building More Purposeful Partnerships among Writing Centers, Graduate Writers, and Faculty

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Objects and experiences are always surrounded by and situated in a context that is both present and absent, which necessarily affects the meaning of what we see (Zahavi). When we perceive an object, for example the screen you are likely looking at right now, we always experience more than what is visually present. You know that what your sense of sight is experiencing is not all that is available to be perceived, such as the back panel or inner workings of the device. Writing centers' experiences with graduate students are much the same. We actually see the graduate students — the struggles and concerns they bring into our centers. If the writer is positioned in a particular way, the writing center can see their recurring or repeated concerns. However, what the writing center often is aware of, but in many ways might not be addressing, is what is absent from the scene, i.e., the faculty member on the other side of that writing project. By creating close collaboration with faculty and graduate students, writing centers can further advance their current practices in order to provide targeted and meaningful support for graduate writers.



YVONNE R. LEE



LINDSAY A. SABATINO

While it is undeniable that most writing center scholarship and many practices across the decades have been focused on undergraduate writers and their needs, there is a growing conversation regarding the unique needs of graduate writers and writing center approaches to meeting those needs. The problem is that the literature on graduate students and writing centers has been focused almost exclusively on the writing center space as a separate entity providing writing-center-centric writing support. When, in fact, we know that graduate students receive writing support from multiple entities. Thus, it makes sense for writing center conversations and practices to continue to grow toward providing writer-centered, team-based writing support, where writing centers and faculty work in tandem.

The argument for increased collaboration between writing centers and other campus entities is not new. Judith Powers introduced the concept of the “trialogue approach” in 1993. Other practitioner-scholars have discussed collaborations with campus librarians (Ferer; Phillips; Herb and Sabatino). Writing center scholars have also written about their own forays into aligning their writing centers with their campus WAC/WID programs (Brady and Singh-Corcoran; Brady, et al.). Truthfully, many writing center practitioners are likely already engaged in joint collaborations with graduate students and faculty. We are just not having that conversation often enough in our scholarship.

Through this article, we discuss the mutual benefits of centers collaborating with faculty and graduate students collectively and making these benefits more visible. Our goal is not only to provide an argument for the need for writing center-faculty collaboration at the graduate level, but to provide a concrete example of how one author accomplished this at a prior institution. To this end, we briefly provide the scholarly conversation regarding writing centers, graduate writers, and graduate faculty. We share a concrete example of Lindsay creating a partnership with a public health education department in order to demonstrate how these types of collaborations can aid graduate student writers, and we offer our thoughts on how such a collaboration can be beneficial for all involved.

SCHOLARLY CONVERSATION

Writing centers have a rich history of working with graduate writers and developing pedagogical practices that are unique to their needs and experiences. Such practices include offering extended tutoring sessions (Phillips; Cross and Catchings), being more accepting of what would traditionally be considered directive approaches (Phillips; Denny et al.), and hosting targeted writing events such as dissertation bootcamps (Reardon et al.). One area where graduate-focused support can continue to develop is in writing center interactions and collaborations with faculty. By folding faculty into the conversation, we embrace the robust and dynamic nature of the graduate writer’s experience.

One suggestion present in the literature is for writing center practitioners to “explore the structures of graduate programs at their university, and read samples of graduate writing [that] have the potential to promote relationships between the writing center and academic departments” (Mannon 64). We want to take that suggestion one step further and argue that writing centers can do more than just become peripherally familiar with the genres of all the disciplines across their campuses. A more efficient approach

would be to tap into the source of that field’s scholarship: i.e., the faculty who work within it every day and who also support the graduate writers learning to navigate it. These collaborations can be a winning situation for all involved. Brady and Singh-Corcoran write, “[F]aculty know what counts as evidence in their own fields, how research is conducted, who receives credit, and so forth; but they sometimes have a difficult time conveying this knowledge to students. The Writing Studio can help graduate writers navigate as they learn these disciplinary conventions” (3). With more tightly bound relationships between faculty and writing centers, graduate writers benefit the most because they receive discipline-specific and generalized writing assistance. The faculty win because they know and trust the support the writer receives from the writing center. Writing centers win because they are better able to meet their mission of helping any writer at any stage of the writing process.

Writing centers can be active and strategic when creating connections between graduate writers, their professors, and the center. As Steve Simpson states, “Graduate-level writing programs must be strategic, balancing students’ short-term needs while building infrastructure within campus departments for sustainable graduate support” (1). These cross-campus collaborations allow graduate writers to receive more focused support. Directors can purposefully reach out to departments to gain an understanding of their graduate students’ needs. In some cases, this level of support can manifest itself organically. In the next section, we offer Lindsay’s first-hand experience facilitating a collaboration between a center she previously directed and faculty in the graduate Public Health (MPH) education department.¹

COLLABORATION IN PRACTICE

Purposeful collaborations can help writing centers develop more intentional support for graduate students. After a professor from the MPH program attended a faculty development workshop on creating and assessing digital projects conducted by Lindsay and a graduate student, the chair of the program reached out to Lindsay to discuss a possible collaboration. The MPH department was in the beginning stages of developing an eportfolio requirement for their master’s students as a part of their program assessment. While the main purpose of the eportfolios was curriculum assessment, students had the added advantage of using them to market themselves when applying for jobs and internships. To offer the necessary support, the MPH department partnered with Lindsay and the Center to offer a series of workshops for their faculty, staff, and students. Faculty and staff participated in two

department workshops that focused on incorporating digital composing in their curriculum and assessing multimodal assignments.² The student workshops focused on the new assessment, where students would be required to upload artifacts and written reflections that represented their progress and covered five competencies in Community Health Education. Students were required to compose artifacts to demonstrate these competencies, which ranged from written reflections, quantitative data, and research to videos, images, slide presentations, and posters. The goal was for students to demonstrate their mastery and ability to synthesize knowledge and learning experiences through written reflections and evidence. To provide effective assistance for graduate students, sustained support over the two-year project was needed for students and faculty.

Through meetings and discussions, Lindsay actively collaborated with the department as they made decisions about what the eportfolios would entail; she provided feedback for how faculty would introduce this new assessment to students and offered guidance on what assessments would address both content and aesthetic design. Discussions also focused on addressing concerns of time management and effectively scaffolding this project into the already existing curriculum. As a result, the eportfolio was a project that students worked on through their whole two years in the program where multiple classes addressed different components of the eportfolio.

Due to Lindsay's support of faculty development and the creation of the eportfolio project, the natural next step was to have the Center provide assistance to graduate students. As part of this collaboration, all the Center's undergraduate and graduate tutors had access to the materials given to MPH students so that they were well-informed about this eportfolio project. Lindsay held practicum workshops with the tutors to dissect the components of eportfolios and provide a refresher on aesthetic and rhetorical design. Tutors created handouts for the graduate students on design elements, which helped the tutors better understand the project as they examined the main components of the eportfolio. Through staff training, they also addressed the different needs these students may have had when completing the project— for example, longer sessions, moments of direct instruction, and instruction on how to address both an academic and professional audience; as Bethany Mannon advises, "Preparing tutors for appointments with graduate students, therefore, means addressing differences between graduate and undergraduate education, and differences in writers' goals" (63). Additionally,

workshops designed for graduate student writers can also be conducted for tutors as a way for tutors to become more familiar with key assignments in other departments. Through this process, the tutors gained the experience of preparing and conducting workshops on their own. Therefore, the tutors received training to support the MPH students and develop their own marketable skills.

In the fall semester, all graduate students in the new cohort participated in a joint workshop with the Center and faculty to discuss the requirements of the eportfolio. During this workshop, Lindsay and the tutors discussed the portfolios as a whole, the organization and layout of eportfolios, and designing and using media, taking into consideration audience, purpose, context, and visual elements (font, color, images, etc.). Students learned the importance of choosing artifacts that best represented their progress in the program and showcased their goals while also ensuring the eportfolios were aesthetically appealing and rhetorically compelling.

To provide continuity and ongoing support, Lindsay also conducted a workshop on designing eportfolios for all second year MPH students as a refresher and opportunity for students to ask questions. All workshops were interactive and focused on planning and designing eportfolios. Because tutors were actively involved in each part of the process, MPH students became familiar with them. As a result of this multilayered approach to supporting the MPH program, the graduate students regularly visited the Center as they prepared their eportfolios. Given the complexity of the two-year project, tutors provided ongoing support to graduate students as they continued working on their extended eportfolio project and moved on to have other professors.

During this collaboration, graduate students requested assistance as they composed their eportfolios throughout their program and as they created effectively designed artifacts communicating their goals and experiences. Graduate students requested assistance on a range of eportfolio aspects, from the layout and design to composing a consistent narrative. Others wanted support with clearly communicating their experiences and representing their research in a concise manner to colleagues in their fields. Toward the end of their programs, students asked for assistance with crafting their reflective statements and finding images to complement their expressed journey.

Throughout this process, faculty shared with Lindsay that as a result of working with the Center, they noticed students could

more effectively communicate research findings and more clearly articulate their experiences while identifying appropriate design elements for their professional audience. They also noticed a change in the students' design creativity after participating in the workshops.

CONCLUSION

To grow the fairly new center and offer support for students, Lindsay regularly collaborated with departments, such as the MPH department discussed here, and conducted faculty development workshops. She also created strong cross-campus connections supporting graduate and undergraduate students. As this example hopefully shows, a willingness to purposefully perceive what is absent from the writing center space—i.e., faculty—and, as Michael Pemberton argues, see writing centers as “co-sponsors of graduate students’ disciplinary enculturation” (43) opens up a space of development for tutors, graduate students, and faculty alike. Because graduate level writing support must find a balance between helping graduate writers with their immediate writing goals and building a structure to support long-term, sustainable writing support, a solid working relationship between writing centers and graduate faculty members, particularly across time, is a necessity.

Some highlights that can be taken away from this brief example are the origins of the collaboration and the sustained support of graduate students throughout a two-year project. What is noticeable is that Lindsay’s collaboration began not with an approach that tried to target any specific MPH need, but with a general move to assist with faculty development campus-wide. During this generalized faculty outreach program, a member of the MPH department received a practical demonstration of Lindsay’s expertise and recognized an overlap with the work the MPH department was beginning.

Another aspect worth highlighting is that the MPH administrator approached Lindsay to request her assistance. The collaboration formed organically as the MPH program saw a natural partnership and benefit of working with the center. While this particular partnership formed through the MPH’s initiative, another approach may be for center directors to reach out to departments to see how they could better support their graduate students with a focus on sharing expertise.

Furthermore, all workshops offered across the two-year time span focused on the same project but from multiple perspectives—faculty, student, and tutor. Both Lindsay and the MPH department

recognized a need for continued collaboration because the project itself was multi-year. Such a department-focused approach could be a win for everyone. The building and sustaining of relationships within a target department can help students more effectively communicate their ideas and can contribute to supporting a more general overall vision for graduate students. Faculty no longer have to undertake the burden of being the sole writing support providers, and they may learn some new strategies for providing feedback and assessment skills. For writing centers, these relationships could help to alleviate what seems to currently be the ever-present sense that “faculty just don’t understand what we do.” Writing centers also do not have to assume that they need to be familiar with all of the genres of all of the disciplines for which graduate writers come for help. They can continue to support graduate writers with generalist writing feedback while also including disciplinary-informed strategies.

NOTES

1. In order to maintain institutional research integrity and because this was a previous employer, specific data cannot be shared in this article. However, we believe that benefit can be gained from learning the general hows and whys of this long-term collaboration to support graduate students.

2. For more information about these faculty development workshops, see Lindsay Sabatino and Brenta Blevins’s chapter “Initiating Multimodal Training: Faculty Development for Creating & Assessing Assignments.”



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Tutors' Column: A "Wise Moron" Reflects on Academic Writing and Consultancy

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I love Sudoku. Adrenaline shoots through my veins as I approach the daunting grid. The extensive note-taking, the domino effect of an “aha” moment, and the ultimate satisfaction of completing such a meticulous task; all of it thrills me. This “type-A” behavior shows up in other parts of my life. Before I took my university’s Writing Consultant training course, I had convinced myself that my neurotic perfectionism was my greatest tool. I tried to correct everything and anything or else I felt I was doing the writer a disservice. I had acquired a level of self-assurance in my writing abilities, questioning why my university had a semester-long training course for consultants. As I would come to find out, writing theory instructs consultants to do just the opposite. My exposure to pedagogy taught me that both the nature of the writing and our positions as “consultants” is incompatible with an overconfident, perfectionist attitude. Writing consists of a myriad of styles and voices, and consultants are responsible for working with writers to encourage their growth as individuals rather than simply improving writers’ papers to the consultant’s own arbitrary, and perhaps misinformed, standards.

As student writing consultants, our own “specialties” may limit our knowledge of different writing styles, restricting our abilities to review all of the types of writing we might see in the writing center. I am a religious studies major. Though I have likely accrued an understanding of “academic writing” similar to any history or English major, my writing would certainly deviate from that of a STEM major or even a political science major. In “Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions,” Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle describe this diversity in academic writing, explaining that “shared features are realized differently within different academic disciplines, courses, and even assignments” (556). Many members of the university community might expect consultants to understand some arbitrary and transcendent idea of “good”



LILLIAN TZANEV

academic writing even though at least twenty years of research proves that it does not really exist (Downs and Wardle 556). Consultants themselves might also fall into that trap, especially a type-A perfectionist, such as myself.

In the past, when I copy-edited friends' papers, I recommended changing certain words in their papers simply because I just "didn't like it." Who was I to pass judgment on these discipline-dependent stylistic choices? The notion that standard "academic writing" does not really exist contradicts the attitude of a perfectionist who tries to purify writing based on this very standard. In "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae describes how university curricula forces student writers to adopt and appropriate a variety of specialized discourse (4). Bartholomae points out how student writers must write "as though they were members of the academy, or historians or anthropologists or economists" (5). As consultants we face this issue as well. Each writer might challenge us to adopt the lens of a field we are not accustomed to. Wardle and Downs call "academic writing" a "dangerously misleading term" (556). With this in mind, I realized that despite obstacles such as specialized discourse, I could still effectively help writers with the "big picture" issues without unfairly boxing all academic writing into one checklist. Guided by the intrinsic diversity of academic writing and an understanding that true writing pedagogy is not prescriptive, writing consultants can catalyze a writer's growth without forcing the consultant's own voice on the writer.

Writing is not simply a skill but rather a discipline that includes consultants as much as it includes writers and in order to thoughtfully participate, consultants must reflect on their own overconfidence. Before I began my training as a Writing Consultant, writing was merely a skill that I, in sophomoric fashion, presumed I had. Yet, Downs and Wardle remind me that undergraduate writing instruction must move "from acting as if writing is a basic, universal skill to acting as if writing studies is a discipline with content knowledge" (553). This notion that the study of writing is its own discipline contextualizes our positions as writing consultants. We are not individuals who have successfully mastered a skill; we are students of a discipline engaging in ongoing scholarship. The advice we offer students in conferences may evolve as our own understanding of writing evolves. Mara Holt, in "The Value of Written Peer Criticism," describes the flaws of hastily written peer-commentary explaining that "much peer criticism focuses either on the subjective experience of the critic... or objectified standard criteria" (384). Because not only our own perspectives but also the "objectified standard criteria" can be

under

counterproductive to a writer's growth, we consultants cannot forget that every time we have a conference, there is a learning opportunity for all parties involved. Understanding this and the singularity of writers and their writing, might calm the overzealousness of the "cocky" consultant and foster stronger commentary.

Not only is the diversity within academic writing incompatible with the approach of an overconfident writing consultant, but the very concept of what it means to consult contradicts this approach as well. Prior to my Writing Consultant training course, I certainly went about the position of "Writing Consultant" as one synonymous with "writing tutor," bringing to it my preconceived notions about what it means to be a "tutor." In "Writing Centers and the Idea of Consultancy," William McCall describes the shortcomings of a tutor and examines John Trimbur's support for the role of peer tutors in universities, explaining that "tutors are likely to see themselves, at least initially, as 'little teachers'" (165). Because I approached the position of "consultant" as if it were a "tutor" position, I also approached the position with a certain level of unhelpful nonchalance. McCall writes that:

Whereas tutors are expected to know the correct answers and to prescribe the proper and rigid structures into which the students' [sic] thought must fit, consultants are perceived as supportive listeners who work flexibly with clients to help them achieve what they have identified as their goal. (167)

The notion of tutorship works with the understanding of writing as a skill on par with algebra; however, if we understand the diversity of academic writing, then consultants could not possibly succeed in the role of "little teachers" because there is no single correct formula for writing. A consultant, by the very nature of the position, must take on a less authoritative role in a writing conference, helping the writer grow in their own right.

I finally saw the power of consultancy in action when I went home for the Thanksgiving break and my father asked me to help my 8th grade sister with an English paper on *Of Mice and Men*. I faced a challenge with this task: my sister is a sarcastic 13-year-old who could not care less about *Of Mice and Men*. Despite all of her attempts to change the topic of conversation, I could see that while she did not care about the content, she cared about being right—about proving her arguments. McCall calls consultants "supportive listeners," and in that moment with my stubborn sister, I employed my training as a listener. I remembered reading

Tracy Santa's piece, "Listening in/to the Writing Center: Backchannel and Gaze," which instructed consultants to take note of our physical posture and our style of communication with other students (4). Using "backchanneling," I repeated what he said to remind my sister of her ownership. If I had tried to dominate our "conference" process with sophomoric overconfidence, I would take away her agency from her writing process. My job was not to turn her 8th grade report into a college level literary analysis. As Stephen North, in "The Idea of a Writing Center" asserts, "what we want to do in a writing center is fit into—observe and participate in this ordinarily solo ritual of writing" (439). I embodied the participant-observer role of "consultant," helping her clarify her own voice and strengthen her claims and evidence.

While re-reading North's "The Idea of a Writing Center," I encountered his axiom, "Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing" (438). North's principle was probably the single most transformative notion I learned because North framed consultancy in such a simple yet insightful way. Considering the ambiguity that is "academic writing," producing better writing is impractical as there is no uniformity in this diverse field (Downs and Wardle 556). I, like many other "wise morons," fell into the trap of this constricting term. Of course, I am still learning; when I consult with students, I battle my inner control-freak. However, I am comfortable not knowing how to navigate everything yet. Writing is not simply a skill or a meticulous process like solving a Sudoku grid, and neither is writing pedagogy. I will constantly find new, more effective methods, and I am eager to embark on the writing consultant journey.



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Blog Editors' Note

Hello from *Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders*! It has been three years since the pandemic, and we are curious about what these three years have brought for you as you manage your writing centers. So, writing center directors, please email us (wlnblog.editors@gmail.com) the ongoing reflections, questions, and other programmatic efforts you are trying out. We can't wait to read your reflections (1000-1500 words)!

In the upcoming months, we will explore how European writing centers adapt the North American writing center philosophy, the role language plays in writing center journals, the pitfalls of wellness constructs in writing center programming and administration, and disability justice for writing center praxis.

Please visit the blog by using our new URL www.WLNConnect.org. Subscribe to our newsletter to connect with all things writing centers!



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Announcements

Sep. 25-28, 2023: National Collegiate Learning Centers, Portland, OR

Contact: Dana Talbert (pres@nclca.org)

Website: <https://nclca.wildapricot.org/conference>

Oct. 2-5, 2023: National Tutoring Association, Virtual

Contact: Dr. Carmen Wade (see website for general inquiries)

Website: <https://www.ntatutor.com/2023-conference-page>

Oct. 4-7, 2023: National Academic Advising Association, Orlando, FL

Contact: NACADA Executive Office (nacada@ksu.edu)

Website: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Events/Annual-Conference>

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

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

Website: <https://writingcenters.org/events/2022-iwca-annual-conference/2023-annual-conference-registration/>

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

Contact: James Purdy and Renee Brown (ncptw2023@yahoo.com)

Website: <https://www.thencptw.org/index.php/ncptw-2023-pittsburgh/>

Nov. 8-11, 2023: College Reading and Learning Assoc., Baltimore, MD

Website: <https://2023conference.crla.net/>

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