

48:3 SPRING 2024

WJCS

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

WISNIEWSKI & BLACKMON | HERB

DEVET, BOWMAN, & TATE-MOFFO | LESTER



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Editor's Note	
Julia Bleakney.....	1
2. From the Blog Editors of Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders	
Anna Habib, Esther Namubiru, Weijia Li.....	2
3. Awareness, Active Learning, and Student Faculty Engagement: The Extended Orientation Model in the Writing Center	
Caitie Wisniewski and Elizabeth Busekrus Blackmon.....	3
4. Building Knowledge across Institutional Roles: When Peer and Professional Tutors Work Side-by-Side	
Maggie M. Herb.....	9
5. The Psychological Disadvantages of Drop-in Online Consultations	
Bonnie Devet, Mollie Bowman, and Alex Tate-Moffo.....	15
6. Tutors' Column: GenAI in the Writing Center	
Dani Lester.....	21
Announcements and Conference Calendar	

Editor's Note

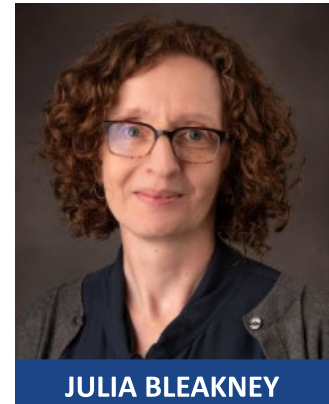
Julia Bleakney
Elon University

This issue of *WLN* brings together articles that explore, in different ways, the human exchange that is at the heart of writing center work: Catie Wisniewski and Elizabeth Buskerus Blackmon by examining writing center introductions that bring writers and tutors together; Maggie M. Herb by discussing how peer and professional tutors respect each other; Bonnie Devet, Mollie Bowman, and Alex Tate-Moffo by proposing ways to humanize online tutoring sessions; and Dani Lester by reminding us of the human work that GenAI cannot do. We are excited to bring you an issue filled with reminders of the human value of our work.

Catie Wisniewski and Elizabeth Busekrus Blackmon, in “Awareness, Active Learning, and Student and Faculty Engagement: The Extended Orientation Model in the Writing Center,” discuss their model of “extended orientations” to their community college writing center. Unlike more typical writing center orientations, in which a tutor or a staff member introduces the writing center to students in a presentation format, Wisniewski and Blackmon’s writing center offers an extended orientation: a 10-15 minute presentation-style introduction followed by a 30-minute interactive element, during which time students divide into small groups, with a tutor, to work on some aspect of a writing assignment. Student survey responses showed that extended orientations helped students learn specific writing techniques. The article ends with some recommendations for how to adapt their model of extended orientations for your own writing centers.

Maggie M. Herb discusses the results of her study in which she set out to understand how peer and professional tutors work together in a writing center with a mixed staffing model. As she reports in “Building Knowledge Across Institutional Roles: When Peer and Professional Tutors Work Side-by-Side,” Herb’s interview-based study found that: peer and professional tutors have mutual respect for each other’s work, both peers and professional tutors felt they learned from each other, and a mixed-staff model is beneficial for student writers. This mutually-respectful relationship was enhanced by peer and professional tutors working together in an open writing center space.

In “The Psychological Disadvantages of Drop-in Online Consultations,” Bonnie Devet, Mollie Bowman, and Alex Tate-Moffo examine the impact on consultants of moving to online appointments during Covid. The authors explore what they term the “psychological factors” that consultants faced in online, synchronous sessions, particularly isolation and fatigue. Describing small adjustments to how online sessions were held—for example, sitting further back from the screen so that writers could see the hands and gestures of consultants, helping to minimize the intensity of consultant and writer staring directly into each other’s faces—the authors propose strategies to ensure both consultants and writers feel supported.



Finally, in our Tutors' Column, Dani Lester deftly explores the nuances of generative AI applications such as ChatGPT in "GenAI in the Writing Center." Lester examines how GenAI may problematically diminish authorial ownership, which in turn has the potential to dismantle diversity in voice and language and reinforce a standard form of written English. On a more positive note, however, Lester considers how tutors can always bring writers back to what they know and think, thereby potentially mitigating these dangers of homogeneity in writing.



From the Blog Editors of *Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders*

Dear readers,

Have you visited the new URL of the journal's blog: <https://wlnconnect.org/>? Lots of great content like resources, writing center profiles, job and conference announcements, and scholars' ongoing reflections are posted weekly on the blog. The blog offers an opportunity to engage with the global writing center's public audience. Therefore, please share the blog's URL with your consultants and invite them to write an article sharing their ongoing observations and reflections about tutoring and writing center theories. You too can send us an article! We welcome directors and scholars' emerging thoughts on current questions/issues affecting writing center praxis. If you are not sure how to format your article or you would like to run your idea by us before you start writing, please email us at wlnblog.editors@gmail.com. Articles can also be submitted to the same email.

We can't wait to collaborate with you!



ANNA SOPHIA HABIB
EDITOR



ESTHER NAMUBIRU
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



WEIJIA LI
ASSISTANT EDITOR



Awareness, Active Learning, and Student and Faculty Engagement: The Extended Orientation Model in the Writing Center

Caitie Wisniewski & Elizabeth Busekrus Blackmon

St. Louis Community College, Meramec

Many writing centers host orientations for students new to the college or college composition classes to inform them of services and familiarize them with the writing center space. Often, these are presentation-style, as a tutor explains the center's purpose and details of using the center. By nature, these orientations inform rather than actively engage students in the processes of the writing center. Students do not ask many questions or have conversations with tutors, and we do not know if students return to the writing center of their own volition or because of the initial orientation. These observations led our community college writing center to consider another orientation strategy that amalgamated tutoring and the orientation, bringing students into the writing center in a non-threatening, engaging, and organic manner.

The College Writing Center (CWC) at St. Louis Community College, Meramec campus, is comprised of around 10 professional tutors who conduct in-person, synchronous online, and asynchronous online tutoring sessions. Out of the over 14,000 students enrolled at this college (four campuses and one satellite location), about 1,500 unique students use this campus's writing center services each year; the number of student appointments vary between 4,500 and 5,500 annually. One of the oldest writing centers in Missouri (founded in 1965), the CWC has been operating with a traditional orientation model since its inception. In this model, an instructor brings their class to the writing center during their normally scheduled class time, though some take place in the classroom, and a tutor presents the main principles and policies of the CWC, the process of scheduling an appointment, and the framework of a typical session. Introducing students to the space lasts 10-15 minutes. In Spring 2019, the CWC was inspired by the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) Writing Center to expand this structure. The UMSL Writing Center hosts each First Year Composition class during the early drafting stages of their first major essay. During this session, tutors work in small groups with students, sharing outlines or drafts. When implementing this model, UMSL's writing center tutors and supervisor anecdotally noticed increased traffic and visits for higher-order concerns. Based on UMSL's model, the CWC designed what we now call extended orientations. After conducting a pilot of this program at our institution, we discovered—based on some informal quantitative data and anecdotal data—this model increases student and instructor engagement, fosters awareness of the center, and incorporates methods of active learning into the CWC.



CAITIE WISNIEWSKI



ELIZABETH BUSEKRUS
BLACKMON

Through extended orientations, our focus is threefold: awareness, engagement, and active learning. We aim for students and faculty to know *what* we do as a center, not just that the center exists. Extended orientations establish this awareness, showing instructors and students what the writing center does, rather than telling them in a traditional, presentation-style orientation. Additionally, our efforts move toward student and faculty engagement. Students ask questions of tutors and their instructor, give feedback to their peers, and remember the utility and benefits of writing center sessions. Faculty also learn about the writing center and interact with tutors and students during the session. Lastly, students develop active learning; students' participation and group work offer hands-on, unique instruction through conversation with peers and tutors.

WHAT IS AN EXTENDED ORIENTATION?

During extended orientations, instructors bring a class to the writing center for most of the class period. Most orientations are offered to English Composition I and II classes, often occurring during the first few weeks of the semester when students are starting their first essay. However, these sessions can occur later in the semester, depending on instructor needs. The extended orientations are composed of two parts: the introduction (10-15 minutes), or presentation-style traditional orientation, and the interactive portion (30 minutes for a 50-minute class period). During the interactive portion, students divide into groups of five or six with a tutor facilitating that group. Groups work on the current writing assignment in the class: brainstorming, creating an outline, or receiving feedback on a draft. For example, for a class starting a narrative essay, the tutor has students state topic ideas and provides time to brainstorm, using the "Narrative Essay Topic Checklist" (College Writing Center Staff). The tutor dialogues with students, giving feedback on their topics and helping them reflect on the conflict and significance of their stories. While the group session focuses on conversing with other students and does not allow for as much in-depth exploration as a one-to-one session, students experience a snapshot of the structure of writing center sessions, elements tutors focus on, and handouts and other supplementary materials. The tutor addresses questions to each student and to the group, and instructors are present to float around the space and listen in, answering questions that arise. Peers also offer feedback on each others' ideas or writing thus far.

The CWC Supervisor collaborates with the instructor regarding scheduling, the purpose of the extended orientation, and expectations. Based on the assignment and stage in the writing process, the CWC Supervisor and the tutors craft a worksheet for students to complete during the orientation, which acts as a guide for the group and a conversation facilitator. As we started implementing extended orientations, tutors noticed that though they require additional work and planning, they are worth the time and resources: extra staffing, time devoted to preparing materials and the space, and fewer hours for walk-ins or appointments.

THE BENEFITS OF EXTENDED ORIENTATIONS

As we reflected on the pilot phase of extended orientations, we turned to writing center scholarship. Lori Salem contests "the idea that all (or the primary) pedagogical interactions in the writing center should take the form of tutoring sessions. Learners need instruction that is fully differentiated and we should seek to embody that in the writing center" (164). Differentiated instruction can include extended orientations that incorporate active learning, engagement, and greater awareness of the center. Harry Denny, John Nordlof, and Salem argue for this diversification to better serve varied student populations (88). Especially at a community college

like ours, these populations include nontraditional students, international students, and first-generation college students. Extended orientations increase awareness of the center for students who need these services most, such as those with tight schedules and who are not already aware of academic support systems. Since our students are diverse, we must creatively think of strategies to reach and engage them in their writing.

Extended orientations provide this more active approach. Holly Ryan and Danielle Kane reinforce this through their study comparing three different types of classroom orientations. The authors hoped to learn which method of orientation resulted in the most visits to the writing center. Participating students either listened to a podcast about the writing center, watched and listened to a presentation, or saw a student volunteer and a tutor engage in a mock session. This study found that students shown the demonstration “had the highest likelihood” to visit the writing center (Ryan and Kane 158). Extended orientations are similar to the demonstration, as they also include students participating in a session and giving feedback to peers. Also, like classroom demonstrations, extended orientations engage students in active learning, and Ryan and Kane found that “classroom demonstrations that use active learning techniques are most likely to change student perceptions of the writing center and alter the students’ indicated likelihood of making a visit to the writing center” (145). We hoped students participating in an extended orientation would also indicate that they were likely to return to the CWC in the future, altering their “perceptions of the writing center” (Ryan and Kane 145). The survey results discussed below indicate this likelihood. Instead of coming to the writing center on their own, students become a captive audience as part of class time, thus receiving the benefits of a session. Tutors model the writing process for students, with the aim of helping students understand and replicate the process later and increasing students’ confidence in their abilities.

SURVEY RESPONSES AND ADDITIONAL DATA

To determine the effectiveness of this model, we have been collecting usage data and gathering feedback from students to ascertain if extended orientations resulted in increased engagement and visits to the writing center. Between the Fall 2019 and Spring 2023 semesters, we generally increased the number of extended orientations: 17 in Fall 2019, 19 in Spring 2020, 44 in Fall 2021, 33 in Spring 2022, 39 in Fall 2022, and 35 in Spring 2023. Fewer extended orientations took place in the spring semesters due to fewer classes and lower enrollment in the spring. After each extended orientation, students completed a survey that asked about the benefits and disadvantages of this model, possible areas of improvement, and students’ likelihood of returning to the writing center. During the spring 2023 semester, 282 students who attended extended orientations were surveyed. These students commented on the strategies they learned and the most valuable aspects of the orientation:

- “Using a visual organizer when structuring your argument and finding research, making your thesis easy to argue against”
- “Learned that even good writers use the writing center”
- “I learned to use the quotation ‘sandwich’ when referencing another source”
- “How to be more comfortable letting others read my papers and ways I can get help at the center”
- “A better way to develop a thesis statement and that I have more support with my future here at Meramec than I realized”

While traditional and extended orientations both inform students of the CWC services, these responses indicate that extended orientations are unique in helping students learn specific writing techniques. From these classes, 48.3% of the students surveyed said they were likely to return to the CWC sometime in the next week or in the next month, and 44.2% said they were likely to return to the CWC sometime later that semester. These data mirror Ryan and Kane's study that found students who received the demonstration indicated they are likely to return to the writing center. Our return rate data reiterates the efficacy of extended orientations.

While we did not collect data on return rates of students receiving traditional orientations, the CWC has noticed students attending traditional orientations (i.e., a 10-15-minute presentation of the CWC's services) have fewer opportunities to interact with tutors and have a less engaging experience than those who come in for an extended orientation. In the 2019-2020 academic year, our overall usage numbers showed that we reached 1,642 unique students (27.8% from extended orientations); in 2021-2022, 1,746 unique students (56.5% from extended orientations); and in 2022-2023, 1,556 unique students (24.1% from extended orientations). We interpret these data positively; despite decreasing enrollment in our community college system, the number of students reached by the CWC has increased. In the 2019-2020 academic year, 47% of students returned for a one-to-one writing center tutoring session after attending an extended orientation earlier in the academic year; this return rate was 39.5% in 2021-2022, and 39.8% in 2022-2023. Additionally, by spring 2023, we were conducting extended orientation sessions with 36 instructors across the disciplines, including history, horticulture, graphic communications, and education, allowing us to interact with departments we previously had no connection with.

However, this model has several limitations to consider. Group dynamics vary in terms of ability level, personality, and engagement. Some students might not want to share their ideas or their writing in a group setting, and other students may be apathetic to writing. Others may be behind in their understanding of the course material or the assignment. We navigate this by making the orientation more individualized; the tutor can break up the group further, encouraging half of the group to work on one aspect of their writing and the other half to work on another. Overall, tutors must be adaptable to the changing circumstances of the orientations, considering where students are in their process.

APPLICATIONS OF THIS MODEL: HOW TO ADAPT TO YOUR INSTITUTION

While extended orientations have worked effectively for our writing center, they might need to be adapted to fit another writing center's institutional mission, values, and resources. Listed below are a few strategies to consider during the implementation process.

1. Determine writing center's resources.

Our CWC has the workforce to allocate four tutors per extended orientation, but other writing centers may not have that many tutors available at one time. They may not be able to take resources and tutors away from walk-in student sessions and appointments. When planning an orientation, consider ideal days, times, and tutors for a session. Though we did find that smaller group sizes allowed for better collaboration, perhaps it is only possible to have larger groups of students with fewer tutors. For larger group sizes, consider conducting these sessions at the

brainstorming stage. It is a formative part of the writing process, and it is more manageable to brainstorm with several students than to read entire drafts.

2. Decide which instructors to collaborate with.

Typically, our writing center selects instructors and contacts them, but at times, we receive requests from the instructor. Especially in the pilot phase, writing centers should partner with faculty who already show buy-in with the writing center. That way, the instructor will be amenable to the expectations of the orientation. Productive buy-in centers on an understanding of the purpose of the writing center, in that we focus on the development of writers and the writing process.

3. Create a clear, focused plan of action before the orientation.

The instructor should provide the assignment guidelines and pertinent information to the CWC well in advance. With this information in hand, a team of tutors will construct a handout for students to complete during the orientation. For example, if students are brainstorming a literacy narrative, the handout could ask pre-writing questions to guide students toward considering different topics for this type of essay. Discussing this plan of action with the instructor helps to engage the instructor in the process and to see what the writing center does. After the pilot phase, it is important to bring in more instructors who do not know as much about the writing center because the extended orientation model can help these instructors to learn about what the writing center does. Receiving instructor buy-in demonstrates to students the benefits of the writing center and the writing center's inclusivity.

4. Communicate goals in a transparent manner to the students.

Students should understand the purpose of the interactive portion decided by the instructor and CWC. Perhaps the goal is to learn how to construct a thesis statement or to understand summarizing strategies. Clearly communicating the focus sets the students up for success because it allows students to be more metacognitive about a particular writing skill. Identifying this goal also allows the tutor to gauge where students are in their writing process and divide the groups accordingly. If students are working on transitioning their outlines into body paragraphs but half of the class have unfinished outlines, the most productive use of time would be to divide into groups that are at the same stage. Additionally, tutors should be specific about the goal of peer feedback in the session. The tutor provides expert assistance but should clarify that the students can also help one another.

5. Collect data on relevant statistics and conduct a post-orientation survey.

A post-orientation survey allows writing centers to see what students thought of the extended orientation and how they perceive the writing center after the orientation. Additional data establishes the importance of conducting these orientations to administrators. Data could include the total number of students from extended orientations, unique student visits, and return rate.

CONCLUSION

Despite decreasing enrollment, the CWC is reaching more unique students. We attribute extended orientations to part of this increase; we are interacting with students in a more intentional way. Through our satisfaction surveys, return rate statistics, and discussions with

students, we know we are engaging students more than prior to implementing this model; more students are scheduling follow-up appointments.

Overall, are the extra resources needed to conduct extended orientations “worth it”? As writing centers, do we seek to be data driven, or student driven, giving more weight to one or the other in making decisions about the center and its services? How can we balance the two? Do we give more weight to return percentages than individual student feedback? Would the student who said that through the extended orientation they “learned that even good writers use the writing center” have responded the same way if they had received a traditional orientation? We continue to explore the questions presented here and propose them for future research. We are striving to fill a gap in research on the topic of active learning, student engagement, and awareness of writing centers, as called for in writing center scholarship.¹

NOTE

1. Special thanks to the entire CWC staff and to one of our former writing center tutors, Niara Jackson.

WORKS CITED

- College Writing Center Staff. “Narrative Essay Topic Checklist.” *St. Louis Community College Writing Center—Meramec*, 2022, <https://stlcc.edu/student-support/academic-success-and-tutoring/writing-center/writing-resources/narrative-essay-topic-checklist.aspx>.
- Denny, Harry, et al. “‘Tell Me Exactly What It Was That I Was Doing That Was So Bad’: Understanding the Needs and Expectations of Working-Class Students in Writing Centers.” *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2018, pp. 67 – 98.
- Ryan, Holly, and Danielle Kane. “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Writing Center Classroom Visits: An Evidence-Based Approach.” *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 34, no. 2, Spring/Summer 2015, pp. 145–72.
- Salem, Lori. “Decisions ... Decisions: Who Chooses to Use the Writing Center?” *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 35. no. 2, Spring/Summer 2016, pp. 147-71.

Building Knowledge across Institutional Roles: When Peer and Professional Tutors Work Side-by-Side

Maggie M. Herb

SUNY Buffalo State University

For the last seven years, I have directed a writing center that employs equal numbers of peer tutors and professional tutors. These peer tutors consist of both undergraduate and graduate students, while the professional tutors are part-time employees who are not students or faculty at the institution, and whose primary role at the institution is that of writing tutor.¹

I am not alone in using this mixed-staffing model. According to the 2020-21 Writing Center Research Project (WCRP), 38% of those surveyed indicated that their writing center employs at least some professional staff.²

Early in my tenure at SUNY Buffalo State University, our writing center was temporarily relocated from a cluster of connected cubicles to one single room while we waited for a building-wide renovation to be completed. An unexpected benefit of this move was that peer and professional tutors were now working in closer proximity, and as I observed the everyday interactions between these tutors—often decades apart in age and with different kinds of work and life experiences—I became particularly curious about how their relationships with each other shaped their work. Upon starting my investigation, I was surprised by how little scholarship examined the dynamics of peer and professional tutors working together. Despite the significant number of writing centers that employ professional tutors, scholarship overwhelmingly focuses on peer tutors, with Rebecca Babcock and Therese Thonus suggesting that “undergraduate...tutors have and will always be the most researched topic in writing center scholarship” (99).

The limited scholarship that does investigate professional tutors tends to focus exclusively on their concerns, such as Elizabeth Chilbert’s exploration of how her professional identity shifted as she moved between the writing center and the classroom or Alison Bright’s study of a training program for professional tutors. The scholarship that considers both professional tutors and peer tutors most often compares or contrasts them, rather than examining the relationships between them. For example, James H. Bell’s study compared the performance of professional tutors to peer tutors, tracking the kinds of suggestions each made and the students’ subsequent revisions, ultimately concluding that students who worked with professional tutors were more likely to make significant revisions to their work. Similarly, Steven Strang argues that professional tutors bring more professionalism and credibility to the reputation of a writing center and posits that “much more can be accomplished” (293) with a professional tutor staff than a peer tutor staff. Megan Swihart Jewell and Joseph Cheatle’s edited collection, *Redefining Roles: The Professional, Faculty, and Graduate Consultant’s Guide to Writing Centers*, is a notable exception to the scholarship that considers professional and peer tutors in isolation or in contrast. Rather, in this



collection, several contributors—most notably Catherine Siemann and Arundhati Sanyal and Kelly A. Shea—delve into peer and professional tutor interactions, with Siemann describing positive mentoring relationships between the two groups and Sanyal and Shea finding a lack of connection between peer and faculty tutors; however, the topic of peer and professional tutor relationships is not the primary focus of either chapter.

After noting this gap in the scholarship, I developed my study to explore how peer and professional tutors working together in a writing center with a mixed staffing model experience and understand their work as colleagues.

METHODS

To explore this topic, I conducted an IRB-approved study, centered on structured interviews with peer and professional tutors who were employed at the Buffalo State University Writing Center. I conducted in-person interviews of 15-20 minutes in October of 2018. The same set of questions was used for each group; participants were asked to describe their perception of their own role as a tutor, their perception of their peer or professional tutor colleagues' role, and the ways they interact and/or collaborate with their colleagues. Participation was optional, and the choice of whether to participate held no benefits or consequences. Fourteen out of fifteen tutors participated—seven professional tutors and seven peer tutors.

The peer tutors consisted of five undergraduate students and two graduate students, whose majors included English, political science, speech-language pathology, and hospitality administration. Their length of employment in the Center ranged from several months to three years, and their ages ranged from 19 to 26. All professional tutors were part-time employees working between 10 and 20 hours per week at the Center with their length of employment varying from 6 months to 10 years. Their ages spanned a wide range: two in their 30s, two in their 40s, one in their 50s, and two in their 70s. Holding advanced degrees, all had significant teaching and/or tutoring experience prior to being hired at the center. Two were retired from careers in academia, two had full-time academic jobs at other local institutions, and three worked part-time as adjuncts at other local institutions.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. I coded the transcriptions, and then focused the codes into “tighter and more conceptual categories” (Saldaña 116). Next, I counted, compared, and analyzed these categories as they appeared in the peer tutors' interviews and in the professional tutors' interviews to notice areas of thematic overlap or contrast. I focus here on three of the themes that best address my research question of how peer and professional tutors perceive each other as colleagues.

Theme 1: Peer and professional tutors have mutual respect for each others' work.

When reflecting on their perceptions of their peer or professional tutor colleagues' roles, all fourteen participants noted that, overall, the peer and professional tutor roles are more similar than different. As one peer tutor explained, “When it comes down to it, we all have the same goals.” Professional tutors made similar comments, with one noting, “We bring to the roles different experiences, but we basically all do the same thing . . . help people improve their writing.”

Despite this shared belief that their work is the same at its core, six out of the seven peer tutors asserted that professional tutors were better at helping students. As one peer tutor stated,

“[Professional tutors] have got all their tools on their toolbelt compared to peer tutors who are still adding.” Another noted that professional tutors are “better at doing all those things you find in writing guidebooks.” While none of the professional tutors stated that they were “better” tutors, several of them did acknowledge that because of lack of experience, peer tutors face different challenges, having to do more “learning on their feet.” One professional tutor noted that “the struggles are...different for peer tutors” and described the contrast between her approach and theirs:

[I think] it's easier for me to only go through a few corrections and then instruct it and say, 'Oh, so what you want to do for the rest of your paper is look for these certain errors,' whereas I think that . . . there's a real tension where the peer tutors want to be very helpful and get through the entire paper and also don't want to be off-putting and may not have had as much teaching experience, whereas I'll say, 'These are the things that I'd like for you to work on, this is what you should do.'

While this comment acknowledges that lack of experience can make peer tutors' work more difficult, professional tutors stopped short of suggesting that peer tutors' work is of lesser quality or lacks value. These observations contrast with the findings from Sanyal and Shea's survey of faculty tutors about their experiences working in a writing center that also employs peer tutors.³ Their study found a disconnect between the two groups, with faculty tutors expressing “veiled and explicit critiques” (95) of their peer tutor colleagues and the opinion that the nature and quality of the work they do is different. While a number of factors might account for this difference, one may lie in approaches to tutor training. The faculty tutors in Sanyal and Shea's study were not required to complete any tutor training. On the other hand, all the Buffalo State Writing Center's staff meetings and training sessions are required for both peer and professional tutors, providing them with opportunities to learn and talk together about their tutoring experiences. This shared professional development gives professional tutors a useful window into peer tutors' challenges and successes with their work, perhaps contributing to their framing of peer tutors' lack of experience as a challenge rather than a deficit.

Theme 2: Both peer and professional tutors learned from each other.

Peer tutors reported learning from the professional tutors' expertise. Some described being able to ask questions or seek second opinions from professional tutors, while others learned from simply working in the same space. As one peer tutor described, “If I like how they approach something, I'm comfortable . . . asking why they did it that way or how I should do it in the future.” This learning from colleagues operated in both directions; all seven professional tutors discussed learning from their peer tutor colleagues, with five of the seven specifically citing the importance of peer tutors' perspectives and intellectual energy as students. One professional tutor noted how much she enjoys chatting with peer tutors during downtime in the center: “We tend to talk about what they're doing in their classes . . . it's fun to hear about all these things that everyone is working on, and I think, 'oh! I need to look up that author' or 'I need to reconsider what I thought about this issue.’” Another said that because peer tutors are “right there in the trenches, taking their own classes right now and tutoring all at once,” they “have an energy and freshness they bring to the Writing Center.”

Three of the seven professional tutors also described learning specific tutoring approaches from peer tutors, with a professional noting “peer tutors tend to take more time” at the beginning of a tutoring session to get to know the student, in contrast to her tendency to move through the paper quickly. Observing peer tutors, then, reminds her to “slow down, which is something that

[she] need[s] to work on.” Similar to the peer tutors’ observations, professional tutors also mentioned the benefits of overhearing their peer tutor colleagues: “The majority of [my learning from peer tutors] comes from working side by side and then absorbing that as we go.” Another noted that she learns from peer tutors “all the time” through “listen[ing] to a wonderful way that someone is asking a question trying to get a response or trying to work on a more creative level.”

This mutual learning that participants described evokes the community of practice learning model, developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in which groups with similar goals improve their practice as a result of regular collaboration. While this lens is often applied to the peer-to-peer aspects of writing center work, R. Mark Hall argues that it is particularly apt for “the context . . . where experienced consultants . . . play a central role in educating novices” and is “useful for understanding teaching and learning among old-timers and newcomers” (94). The comments from participants in this study about their reciprocal learning support Hall’s assertion and suggest possibilities for further study of communities of practice comprised of both peer and professional tutors.

To complicate matters, however, only two peer tutor participants expressed an awareness that their professional tutor colleagues also learned from them. This lack of awareness—paired with the fact that most peer tutors perceived professional tutors as “better” at the job—suggests that prioritizing knowledge sharing between both groups would be beneficial. Since much of the learning participants described seems to have occurred informally, offering both peer and professional tutors the opportunity to more formally present on an area of expertise (such as particular genres, styles, or assignments) might help *all* tutors better appreciate the important role they play in the writing center’s ecosystem.

Theme 3: A mixed staff model is best for students.

All fourteen tutors expressed a belief that employing both peer and professional tutors makes a writing center stronger overall. As a professional tutor noted:

It is good for peer tutors to work with professional tutors to watch [them] explain . . . concepts and . . . think, ‘so that’s another way that I can get this idea across.’ But in the reverse, I’ll hear a peer tutor . . . say something that’s a little bit fresher because [we professional tutors] tend to get stuck in our ways.

As a result of these informal observations each group of tutors reported expanding their own repertoires, becoming more well-rounded and skilled in their work with students.

Both groups also cited the benefit of students having options.⁴ One professional tutor noted, “A student may feel more comfortable working with a student” because it feels “less intimidating” and they have “a shared kind of place...they’re coming from.” On the other hand, a peer tutor noted that “plenty of students...need the...teacherly kind of structured session that a professional tutor could offer.”

Another benefit that both groups discussed was the way peer tutors provide professional tutors with a student perspective, better positioning them to work with the students they tutor. As one professional tutor stated, “[working alongside peer tutors] keeps me more in step with the institution and [students’] relationships and feelings to the institution.” Another mentioned that peer tutors often share with professional tutors their “familiarity with assignments” and other direct experiences with particular courses or professors, helping professional tutors be better prepared to help students in those courses. These findings echo Siemann’s experiences at a STEM-

focused institution employing both peer and professional tutors. There, professional tutors mentored peer tutors who shadowed the professionals as part of their training; at the same time, Siemann found that the peer tutors—through sharing their experiences as STEM students—provided important insights to their professional tutor colleagues. She concludes that “a mixed model incorporating both professional and peer tutoring staff is ideal” at an institution like hers (113). The findings in my study indicate that the benefits of this mixed model are not limited to STEM schools. While scholars (Mackiewicz; Dinitz and Harrington) have highlighted the benefits of tutors having disciplinary expertise, Siemann’s study—and this one—suggest that the kind of institutional expertise that peer tutors can provide may be just as important.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that peer and professional tutors can establish mutual respect while working to meet shared goals, that reciprocal learning occurs between both groups, and that a combination of peer and professional tutors strengthens the center as a whole. It also suggests that peer and professional tutors engaging in shared professional development may play a role in creating this environment. And though external factors initially influenced our tutors sharing the same space, this study helped us to recognize the benefits of this proximity. As such, our newly remodeled space contains no cubicles, but instead offers an open workspace where both peer and professional tutors conduct their sessions. Future research should explore these and other factors that may help create successful communities of practice comprised of both peer and professional tutors.

NOTES

1. Megan Swihart Jewell and Joseph Cheatle use a similar definition in their edited collection, *Redefining Roles: The Professional, Faculty, and Graduate Consultant’s Guide to Writing Centers*, describing professional writing consultants as those “who are not primarily teaching and who are not enrolled as graduate or undergraduate students...those hired to work exclusively (or near exclusively) in the writing center” (3).
2. Based on the survey question’s other categories, the WCRP defines professional staff by default as a writing center worker who is not a student, faculty member, or volunteer.
3. Although Sanyal and Shea’s study participants were faculty tutors (whose primary responsibility was teaching and secondary assignment was tutoring) as opposed to the professional tutors in this study (who were only employed by the institution as tutors), their findings are relevant in that they portray perceptions of peer tutors by more experienced academic professionals in a mixed model writing center.
4. Our appointment system software lists tutors’ roles and allows students to select their tutor accordingly.

WORKS CITED

- Babcock, Rebecca Day, and Terese Thonus. *Researching the Writing Center: Towards an Evidence-Based Practice*. 2nd ed., Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2018.
- Bell, James H. "Better Writers: Writing Center Tutoring and the Revision of Rough Drafts." *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2002, pp. 5-20. *Taylor and Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10790195.2002.10850133>.

- Bright, Alison. "Cultivating Professional Writing Tutor Identities at a Two-year College." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2017, pp. 12-14.
<https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/62927>.
- Chilbert, Elizabeth. "When Roles Collide: On Being a Writing Center Tutor and Composition Instructor." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2008,
<http://www.praxisuwc.com/chilbert-52>.
- Dinitz, Sue, and Susanmarie Harrington. "The Role of Disciplinary Expertise in Shaping Writing Tutorials." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2014, pp. 73-98,
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43443372>.
- Hall, R. Mark. "Theory in/to Practice: Using Dialogic Reflection to Develop a Writing Center Community of Practice." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2011, pp. 82-105.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43442358>.
- Jewell, Megan Swihart, and Joseph Cheatle, editors. *Redefining Roles: The Professional, Faculty, and Graduate Consultant's Guide to Writing Centers*. UP of Colorado, 2021.
- Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge UP, 1991.
- Mackiewicz, Jo. "The Effects of Tutor Expertise in Engineering Writing: A Linguistic Analysis of Writing Tutors' Comments." *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, vol. 47, no. 4, Dec. 2004, pp. 316-28, DOI: 10.1109/TPC.2004.840485.
- Saldaña, Johnny. *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research: Understanding Qualitative Research*. Oxford UP, 2011.
- Sanyal, Arundhati, and Kelly A. Shea. "Teachers Versus Tutors: Is There a Place for Faculty Tutors in a University Writing Center?" *Redefining Roles: The Professional, Faculty, and Graduate Consultant's Guide to Writing Centers*, edited by Megan Swihart Jewell and Joseph Cheatle, UP of Colorado, pp. 86-100.
- Siemann, Catherine. "Faculty and Professional Consultants, the Writing Center, and STEM." *Redefining Roles: The Professional, Faculty, and Graduate Consultant's Guide to Writing Centers*, edited by Megan Swihart Jewell and Joseph Cheatle, UP of Colorado, pp. 111-22.
- Strang, Steven. "Staffing a Writing Center with Professional Tutors." *The Writing Center Director's Resource Book*, edited by Christina Murphy and Byron Stay, Routledge, 2006, pp. 291-99.
- "Writing Centers Research Project Survey." (2020-21 data set). *Purdue Writing Lab Research*. Purdue University,
https://owl.purdue.edu/research/writing_centers_research_project_survey.html.

The Psychological Disadvantages of Drop-in Online Consultations

Bonnie Devet, College of Charleston

Mollie Bowman, Pennsylvania State University

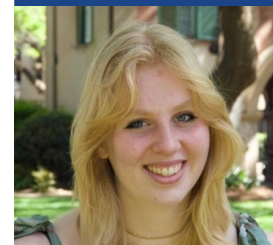
Alex Tate-Moffo, College of Charleston

Prior to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, our writing center, which is part of a learning commons, offered only limited online, synchronous assistance through Zoom. We called it “The Writing Center After Dark.” Consultants, all undergraduate peers, met virtually with clients on a drop-in basis each weeknight after regular writing center hours. We were eager to dip a toe into using Zoom, especially since synchronous sessions offer many advantages. For instance, virtual support fosters inclusion (Westfall), such as accommodating students with off-campus jobs, those with disabilities, or those who might not feel comfortable in a classroom or center because of anxiety (Claman). Consultants can also see on the screen what part of the essay clients are laboring over so that they can zero in on that part (Summers). Clients are also more likely to write during the sessions (Fitzgerald and lanetta 179). Then, too, online sessions help shy consultants. An experienced consultant from our center explains: “If being one-on-one with someone can make you a bit anxious, then I think Zoom can really help with that since you are more separated.” With light usage, we took the first step towards providing full online service, should it ever be needed.

Of course, this service became vital when the pandemic required that writing centers shift to assisting all writers online, in our case using Zoom’s chat feature, breakout rooms, annotation capacity, and whiteboard. Because the physical writing center offered only drop-in service to students before COVID, the learning commons wanted the center to continue providing such assistance as much as possible to maintain usage. Thus, on the learning commons’ website, students would select the writing center link and, next, click on the management tool (TutorTrac) to choose when they would work with consultants. Then, students were automatically assigned a day and time with a specific consultant. Because students were accustomed to merely dropping into the physical writing center (with papers due in just an hour or less!), many sought immediate online help the moment they visited the center’s website to schedule. If consultants were already conducting an online session, they placed newly arrived clients in one of Zoom’s breakout rooms. When a third or fourth writer chose the same time, they, too, were placed in breakout rooms. With three or more clients waiting, consultants moved among the rooms, table-jumping, so to speak, as in our face-to-face consultations. With the website established and Zoom ready to go, our writing center appeared equipped to assist students online.



BONNIE DEVET



MOLLIE BOWMAN



ALEX TATE-MOFFO

Because our center was just venturing into this service when COVID descended, consultants began to express concerns about working online, sending me, the director, comments, such as “My client was playing with her dog the entire session” or “Because of a three-second delay before my client heard me, it was hard to talk without speaking over each other or without generating an echo.” Their noticeable sense of dissatisfaction meant I needed to help them understand the potential psychological impacts of synchronous work (Worm 249). With COVID forcing services to move online (thus ending all in-person socializing in small or large groups), consultants began to experience two psychological factors during consultations: isolation and fatigue. Learning how to address these factors can help centers anticipate possible effects of online sessions and offer strategies to those already online.

ISOLATION: “I FEEL SO ALONE.”

Zoom congratulates itself for its ability to “connect” (with its website using the tagline “Thank you for keeping us together”). Yet, virtual sessions may generate a sense of isolation, which peer consultants experienced during their COVID consultations. This isolation took several forms. Although consultants were accustomed to seeking help from fellow consultants in a face-to-face center, during synchronous sessions, consultants could not physically turn to other workers for assistance. They depended on their Googling abilities to answer clients’ questions or relied on the digital copies of handouts from other online labs, such as the Purdue Owl. As a result, the consultants often felt alone. To cope with such isolation, consultants created a group chat (GroupMe) to use during Zoom sessions so that other consultants could provide advice, if they were available, or consultants met online through Microsoft Teams for what Genie Giaimo, discussing wellness, describes as “discussions about the emotional challenges tutors are currently facing with their work (and in their broader lives)” (6).

Consultants experienced another more complex form of isolation. When conducting face-to-face sessions, consultants and clients engage in a natural flow of conversation called “synchrony” or “the rhythmic coordination of speech and movement that occurs unconsciously both in and between individuals during communication” (“Synchrony”). Typically, one speaker nods, and so does the other; one speaker hesitates while the other sweeps in to fill the silence so listeners and speakers coordinate their speech and movements. In fact, “[h]umans use a range of precisely timed vocalizations, gestures, and movements to communicate, and they rely on precise responses from others to determine if they are being understood,” explains psychologist Brenda Wiederhold (437). Unfortunately, the limitations of online sessions affected this communication. When working in person, consultants employ silence, waiting for students to process a question and apply it to their writings. Online, however, consultants’ silences might appear as if consultants are uninterested or detached. Then, too, “synchronous” is not truly synchronous because of a mechanical issue. Inherent to all online sessions is a brief technological lag of only a few milliseconds, a lag interfering with the natural flow of human communication (Feibush 35; Wiederhold). That all-so-brief but subtle lag may portray consultants as aloof or uncaring. So, at the start of the session, consultants explained they would be asking questions and then waiting (Feibush 42), or if using silence did not work for students, consultants described how they would be typing responses, utilizing Zoom’s chat feature (Feibush 40).

Using Zoom’s breakout rooms affected how consultants began their sessions, emphasizing, again, the potential sense of isolation inherent in online consultations. Unlike in-person sessions, there was no sitting down at a table, no opportunity for consultants to watch clients fire up laptops, no adapting to the other person sitting next to them. These small acts used in face-to-face rituals establish that two humans will be working together (Devet). Being online and placing clients in

breakout rooms eliminated this ritual. When consultants popped up on the screen, clients thought it was the signal to move to their texts immediately. As a consultant told me, “It is hard to make introductions.” Without the initial in-person rituals, consultants and clients alike often felt separated and isolated. Consultants needed to take time to establish the first contact ritual by saying, “Hello. I am so and so, and I’m happy to work with you today! Is this your first time using Zoom for help with your writing? Let’s talk about how you and I will work together.” Using a few such sentences helped create the necessary rapport and minimized the “need for speed” where clients believed they should dash ahead to work on their texts.

The physical screen itself also created isolation. A consultant reported, “I never had too much of a hard time connecting with my clients when we were face-to-face, but connecting with people through a screen is much harder.” Although the screen displays a client, it presents only a frame of a face so that consultants were less able to read a student’s incline of the head, a shrug of a shoulder (Feibush), actions central for helping consultants adjust to students’ needs. When seeing a client’s face—if it was shown at all—consultants received limited signals about the student’s emotions and attitudes, vital concerns that helped determine whether a client was absorbing information (Feibush 37). A consultant reported: “Zoom eliminates the ability to read body language and adjust accordingly to make the client more comfortable.” To handle this inability to see the entire body, consultants sat back from the camera to reveal hands and face, engaging in Laura Feibush’s “gestural listening” (35), where listening reveals itself through bodily movements. In this way, consultants showed their clients they were truly engaged in listening.

Zoom’s breakout rooms also fostered isolation. In our physical center, while working with multiple writers, consultants could always give a quick, searching glance to see if a client was ready for assistance and then move over to the student’s table. To replicate this in-person experience online, consultants would drop into a Zoom room and ask the client to complete some writing for ten minutes or so while the consultant jumped into another breakout room to help a second student; then, the consultant moved back to the first writer so all students had received some assistance. This method was not always satisfactory, with clients frequently feeling stressed or just exiting Zoom before receiving help. One consultant described such a session: “The client was so stressed it was difficult for her to focus on her paper. Yet, I had to leave her in a breakout room to assist two other clients. I have always felt leaving her alone only made her more stressed out.” To minimize clients feeling stressed or departing breakout rooms, consultants tried to check in with waiting clients more regularly. I also asked computer support to limit the number of clients allowed into any Zoom session and to space them out at 15-minute intervals. While not necessarily ideal, these methods meant clients in breakout rooms felt less abandoned.

FATIGUE: “AFTER MY ONLINE SESSIONS, I FEEL SO TIRED.”

Isolation was not the only potential complication. Emotional fatigue, a key component of burnout, also arose. According to Christina Maslach, founder of the field of study on burnout, “[T]he emotional demands of the work can exhaust a service provider’s capacity to be invested with, and responsive to, the needs of the recipients” (403). As a result, service providers may distance themselves “emotionally and cognitively from [their] work” (403). They can even display other key factors of burnout, namely, cynicism and a lack of self-efficacy (feeling effective in their work) (Sanchez-Reilly et al.). In fact, a consultant told me, “I don’t feel like I’m able to help clients.” To counter this feeling, consultants asked online clients what they believed was helpful during the session or said, “Is there anything else I can help with?” Consultants also encouraged transfer of learning by ending consultations with “What did you learn about your writing that you could apply

to your next assignments?” In this way, both clients and consultants tried to see the efficacy of their work in order to avoid emotional burnout.

Multitasking, central to synchronous work, drained energy, too. While analyzing their clients’ needs, consultants were constantly switching among chat, screen share, breakout rooms, and other Zoom functions. As they shifted, consultants worked hard to turn off one part of their brains (Fosslien and Duffy) to use another Zoom tool. Because the brain is not designed to multitask efficiently, this work depleted their attention spans (Lee), costing the consultants productive time and making them feel exhausted. To minimize the effect of multitasking, consultants needed familiarity with Zoom’s functions. So that they could move fluidly through chat, annotation, et al., they practiced with each other or with friends, using the various items in Zoom’s toolbox.

Another prime cause of fatigue was the video itself. In face-to-face sessions, consultants can look away from clients, glancing over the clients’ heads to see another student coming through the center’s doors or scanning the room while clients write. Online, however, consultants’ and clients’ faces were riveted together, making the synchronous experience more intense and fatiguing than texting or using social media (Denworth). The screen, completely filled with the speaker’s face, triggered, at some level, exhaustion. “Even though we know we are safe, subconsciously, this large appearance and prolonged eye contact can register as intimidation, flooding our bodies with stress hormones,” Wiederhold reports (437). If it wasn’t the speaker’s view that tired the consultants, it could be the constant viewing of one’s self on the screen, an effect now commonly called “constant gaze” (Fosslien and Duffy). Feeling they are continuously being viewed, consultants and clients did not always relax. In an all-too-human way, they were thinking about how they appeared to their fellow video conferencers. Because this self-consciousness is “arousing and disconcerting” (Denworth), it drained focus and energy. A consultant explained how she handled this exhausting experience. “Look at me through the camera,” she told the client, “so you are not always looking at yourself.” She also shifted the focus from the riveted faces by using Zoom’s chat feature. The client shared her screen, highlighting the places in the paper the client was worried about. The consultant, then, typed in comments via chat (Devet). The chat comments were saved and sent to the client for review. Using Google Docs was useful, too. Both consultants and clients looked at the paper, typing comments that clients saw instantly. To avoid feeling fatigued, consultants also moved their own video to the side to be less direct, switched to a phone or email to break the view mode (Fosslien and Duffy), or just eliminated self-view.

Adjusting to an online workplace environment also drained energy. In the physical center, clients were entering a space of desks and books and fellow writers, sensing this area was devoted to scholarly work. In fact, clients often came to the in-person center just to write because they “liked the atmosphere.” In such an environment, it was easy to create rapport, sometimes simply by complimenting clients on the stickers on their laptops before getting to work with the writers. In online sessions, though, consultants and clients were not necessarily sharing a space associated with writing. Both consultants and clients could be Zooming from home (with a beloved pet in the room), from a coffee shop (with a customer ordering a latte), or from a dorm room (with posters on the walls and lights strung over a bed). Such elements may be “unwanted” and may “degrade the intimacy of the session” (Nadler 10) that is intended to be scholarly. Without this scholarly environment, consultants labored to help writers concentrate on the writing process. Working hard to establish rapport, consultants asked about the client’s dog barking in the background or about a Beyoncé poster adorning a dorm room. Once they set up a bond with clients, consultants advised them to designate, if possible, one area as “Zoom central,” a place to

do work only. In this way, consultants and clients found a way to charge a space for writing, thus minimizing the impact of the space on their synchronous sessions.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt Zoom allowed our writing center to assist student writers under trying COVID conditions. Using synchronous sessions even helped to underscore what it meant to work in a writing center: “I liked to do the screen sharing on Zoom so I could see the student’s work without actually being able to change it, and that helps to maintain the role of consultant and client,” a consultant told me. Also, unlike in a face-to-face center where new clients keep coming in the door, the online space meant consultants could focus on just one client on the Zoom screen: “I found it quite nice to have that genuine one-on-one time with the client,” stated a consultant. Although there were frustrating and isolating moments, consultants decreased the potential psychological failings of feeling alone and being tired by using various coping strategies. Even though online writing centers cannot, as Lisa Bell argues, replicate the “look and feel” of face-to-face sessions, centers can preserve “the way we value and support learners through tutoring.”

WORKS CITED

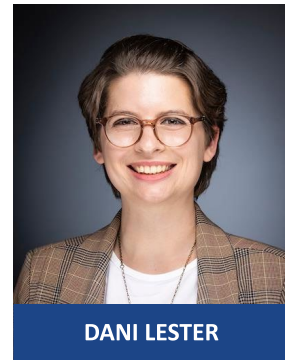
- Bell, Lisa. “Rethinking What to Preserve as Writing Centers Move Online.” *Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders*, 20 Jul. 2020, <https://www.wlnjournal.org/blog/2020/07/rethinking-what-to-preserve-as-writing-centers-move-online/>.
- Claman, Alex, et al. “Sheltering in Place, Working in Space: Reflections on an Online Writing Center at Home.” *The Peer Review*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2021, <https://thepeerreview-iwca.org/issues/issue-5-2/sheltering-in-place-working-in-space-reflections-on-an-online-writing-center-at-home/>.
- Denworth, Lydia. “Why Zoom Fatigue is Real and What You Can Do About It: New Research Suggests the Best Ways to Strengthen Relationships Via Technology.” *Psychology Today*, 31 Jul. 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/brain-waves/202007/why-zoom-fatigue-is-real-and-what-you-can-do-about-it>.
- Devet, Bonnie. “Sweetness and Light, It Isn’t: Overcoming Zoom Problems When Conducting Writing Lab Consultations.” *Palmetto State Writing Center Association Newsletter*, 30 Nov. 2020, <https://palmettostatewca.wordpress.com/2020/11/30/sweetness-and-light-it-isnt-overcoming-zoom-problems-when-conducting-writing-lab-consultations/>.
- Feibush, Laura. “Gestural Listening and the Writing Center’s Virtual Boundaries.” *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2018, pp. 34-43, <https://www.praxisuwc.com/feibush-152>.
- Fitzgerald, Lauren, and Melissa Ianetta. *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors Practice and Research*. Oxford UP, 2016.
- Fosslien, Liz, and Mollie West Duffy. “How to Combat Zoom Fatigue.” *Harvard Business Review*, 29 Apr. 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue>.
- Gaiimo, Genie N. “Laboring in a Time of Crisis: The Entanglement of Wellness and Work in Writing Centers.” *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2020, pp. 3-16, <https://praxisuwc.com/173-gaiimo>.

- Lee, Jena. "A Neuropsychological Exploration of Zoom Fatigue." *Psychiatric Times*, 27 Nov. 2020, <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/psychological-exploration-zoom-fatigue>.
- Maslach, Christina, et al. "Job Burnout." *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 52, Feb. 2001, pp. 397-42, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397>.
- Nadler, Robby. "Understanding 'Zoom Fatigue': Theorizing Spatial Dynamics as Third Skins in Computer-Mediated Communication." *Computers and Composition*, vol. 58, Dec. 2020, pp. 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2020.102613>.
- Sanchez-Reilly, Sandra, et al. "Caring for Oneself to Care for Others: Physicians and Their Self-Care." *The Journal of Supportive Oncology*, vol. 11, no. 2, Jun. 2013, pp. 75-81, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.12788/j.suonc.0003>.
- Summers, Sarah. "Delivering Distance Consultations with Skype and Google Docs." *Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 37, no. 7-8, 2013, p. 10-13, <https://www.onlinewritingcenters.org/scholarship/summers-2013/>.
- "Synchrony." *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2023, American Psychological Association, <https://dictionary.apa.org/synchrony>.
- Westfall, Kennedy. *Transitioning to an Online Writing Center: Encouraging Inclusivity and Accessibility throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond*. 2021. James Carroll U, Masters Theses. Carroll Collected, <https://collected.jcu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1141&context=mastersessays>.
- Wiederhold, Brenda K. "Connecting through Technology during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic: 'Avoiding Zoom Fatigue'." *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, vol. 23, no. 7, 2020, pp. 437-38, <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2020.29188.bkw>.
- Worm, Anna. "Believing in the Online Writing Center." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1-2, Spring/Winter 2020, pp. 231-58, <https://doi.org/10.7771/2832-9414.1926>.
- Zoom. *Zoom.us*, 2021, <https://zoom.us/>.

Tutors' Column: GenAI in the Writing Center

Dani Lester
Utah Valley University

As a millennial, I clearly remember the launch of CleverBot in 2008—how my friends and I crowded around my mom's iMac trying to make the rudimentary AI curse. Ten years after CleverBot's launch, I downloaded the chatbot Replika and spoke with it daily (until its responses got too repetitive). From Siri to Alexa, AI has become ubiquitous enough to ignore. However, ChatGPT and similar Generative AI (GenAI) seems more troubling than past AI. The issue with GenAI is not just its potential for plagiarism or its ability to mimic humans with fidelity. In fact, the false idea that it can replace human writers is itself an issue because GenAI may diminish authorial ownership, which could dismantle diversity in voice and language. Luckily, writing centers are potentially poised to mitigate these issues, and perhaps, with widespread action, this could be an opportunity for systemic change.



To understand GenAI's possible impact, I asked one program, ChatGPT, to analyze Siegfried Sassoon's poem "Glory of Women." I gave ChatGPT my professor's assignment parameters and watched with surprise as paragraphs began to populate rapidly. I was used to chatbots needing time to 'think' and only providing a few sentences at most. My brief panic subsided when, to my great relief, ChatGPT's poetry analysis was demonstrably wrong. ChatGPT 'believed' the poem to be sincere in its adulation of women and mothers, completely missing Sassoon's irony and thinly veiled, arguably misogynistic, disgust. Case closed: ChatGPT couldn't replace me. I again felt confident dismissing the bot, until I remembered I'm both an English major and a writing tutor. Would someone less interested in serious literary analysis care that ChatGPT's analysis was so lacking?

If a student lacks interest in literary analysis, then ChatGPT's incompetence hardly matters. If a student doesn't read "Glory of Women" and copy/pastes ChatGPT's analysis, they may still get a passing grade if they followed the rubric—one area where ChatGPT excels. In fact, ChatGPT's analysis followed, to the letter, my professor's instructions, including word count and format. In my experience as both student and tutor, precisely following rubrics can sometimes be as important as the content of the writing itself. Whatever the reason, some students will use GenAI's ability to write confidently and sound academic to get passing grades. This trust in and use of AI drastically changes the landscape of contemporary writing, both in classrooms and writing centers.

When students feel writing assignments are high-stakes and fear failure and humiliation, GenAI may seem like an easy solution. These same feelings have previously motivated students to risk cheating and plagiarizing; however, GenAI uniquely aggravates the problem. Returning to the example of ChatGPT's analysis of "Glory of Women," if a student brought me a similarly misguided

analysis, I could engage in conversation with them about the poem and nonjudgmentally bring up GenAI. I could then explain that the bot amounts to nothing more than several Google searches wearing an academic trench coat, warn them of overly relying on AI, and collaborate with the student to develop a deeper understanding of the poem. But this is not a panacea. Given the range of texts and topics students bring into the writing center, I will be faced with content written by GenAI as problematic as what it provided about “Glory of Women,” but on a subject unfamiliar to me. In such a situation, how can I assist that writer if I can’t tell they’ve used GenAI? Further, with no foolproof tools to detect AI, my toolkit is relegated to current writing center practices that have yet to adapt to current AI capabilities. Limiting as that may sound, strategies already used in writing centers can be surprisingly effective.

A proactive effort is needed to understand GenAI as technology requiring guidance for effective and ethical use by informed teachers and tutors. Recently, when tutoring a student with writer’s block, I asked ChatGPT for reasons to pursue an English degree. ChatGPT provided five answers, almost all of which I disagreed with. The AI focused on career preparedness, whereas I believe studying literature is worthwhile for its own sake. The student seemed surprised at how I used ChatGPT. They used GenAI to get (seemingly) accurate answers, whereas I used it to generate a disagreeable answer that inspired me to respond.

This interaction reveals a common misconception of GenAI that writing centers must combat to effectively use GenAI in tutorials. Writers may feel reluctant to disagree with GenAI because advertising often personifies GenAI as intelligent and objective. However, it is simply amalgamations riddled with biases: GenAI creators and owners restrict topics deemed offensive or dangerous, decided not democratically or publicly but by individuals and business owners who may be incentivized primarily to monetize rather than inform AI users. Understanding this about GenAI is crucial to understanding its limitations and the danger it poses to writing. GenAI, by nature of its creation and monetization, obfuscates authentic positional perspective and limits diversity in authorial voices.

Writers relying on GenAI filter their authentic voices through a sieve that removes diversity and personal flair in favor of language partial to its creators, who are disproportionately white men. This is the threat of GenAI I am most concerned about, particularly within writing centers. Director of Canisius University’s writing center, Graham Stowe, notes GenAI’s potential for perpetuating systemic injustice by diminishing authorial voice and diverse communication. Stowe warns that “hegemonic and dominant linguistic systems are bound to be embedded in the systems that make the bots function.” One of the ‘benefits’ often touted for GenAI is that it can produce “clean,” “error-free” prose. But our field knows that the language and positions considered ‘neutral’ and ‘correct’ are those of groups with social power (Baker-Bell). GenAI defaults to white mainstream American English, limiting linguistic variation that naturally results from students’ diverse experiences and perspectives.

When working with fearful or less motivated writers, tutors have many tools at their disposal. Writing Center researchers Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson have written extensively about motivating writers, including reinforcing student ownership. This tactic is effective for tutoring whether or not students have used GenAI because the goal is to reinforce “the student’s ownership... [and] emphasize students’ responsibility for their writing” (Mackiewicz and Thompson 67). Rather than trying to suss out whether a student used GenAI, tutors can reach for existent best practices to support writers.

Recently, I worked with a student whose writing style seemed inconsistent, and I suspected she had used GenAI. After speaking with her about her research topic, mass incarceration, it became

clear she felt disconnected from her writing. She expressed a hatred of writing, said she was bad at it, and explained she felt like a parrot regurgitating other people's points. I asked her why she picked this topic. She immediately spoke passionately about the inhumanity of mass incarceration. I quickly wrote down her words and read them back to her, and she seemed genuinely surprised at what she had said. I modeled how to turn speech into writing, and she excitedly took over. Whether or not she used GenAI, she was capable of writing the paper and had something worthwhile to say. I hope, with a renewed sense of ownership, she now feels capable.

While GenAI may be a new threat, writing centers have long been concerned with student ownership and honoring diverse positionalities, voice, and linguistic variation. After all, academic writing was exclusionary and homogenous long before GenAI. Non-white, non-male positional perspectives have historically been limited and silenced (Baker-Bell). While tutors have some tools to combat linguistic racism, GenAI exacerbates the core, systemic issues within writing, intensifying the need for more radical, community-wide changes in writing centers and classrooms.

Educators, tutors, and writers of all kinds have advocated for such changes for longer than I have been alive, and I'm not suggesting there is a magic bullet to fix systemic linguistic injustice. However, if there is a potential advantage to GenAI's proficiency and adherence to white mainstream American English (and its deleterious effect on voice and language), it's that GenAI has made material and visible the otherwise slippery linguistic slope toward white patriarchy. This problem creates an opportunity to implement more innovative and radical practices to address systemic injustice, building off current practices regarding technology literacy and encouraging ownership. As a tutor I can and will advise writers to ditch GenAI's analysis on Sassoon and tell me what they *really* think—I'd rather hear that the poem *slapped* or *sucked* than see AI proclaim that it's for the glory of women.

WORKS CITED

Baker-Bell, April. *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*. Routledge, 2020.

Mackiewicz, Jo, and Isabelle Thompson. "Motivational Scaffolding, Politeness, and Writing Center Tutoring." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2013, pp. 38-73. - JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/43442403.

Sassoon, Siegfried. "The Glory of Women." *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*, Dutton Publishing, 1919.

Stowe, Graham. "Dear CWCAB, February 2023: Thoughts on ChatGPT." *Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders: A Blog of WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, 15 Mar. 2023, <https://wlnconnect.org/2023/02/28/dear-cwcab-fed-2023/>.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Call for Nominations 2024 Muriel Harris Outstanding Service Award

Named after its first recipient and given at every other International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) conference, the Muriel Harris Outstanding Service Award recognizes outstanding service that has benefited the international writing center community in significant and broad-based ways.

Nominations should be sent electronically to Michael Pemberton, Chair of the committee, at michaelp@georgiasouthern.edu. They should be sent as a single PDF document with pages numbered, and should include the following materials:

- A letter of nomination that includes the name and institution of the nominee, your personal knowledge of or experience with the nominee's service contributions to the writing center community, and your name, institutional affiliation, and email address.
- Detailed support documents (maximum of 5 pages). These may include excerpts from a curriculum vitae, workshop or published material, stories or anecdotes, or original work by the nominee.
- Other letters of support (optional but limited to 2)

All materials must be received by Michael Pemberton by July 1, 2024. The winner of the Award will be announced at the 2024 IWCA/NCPTW Conference, to be held virtually in October.

Readers of the online version of *WLN* can learn more about the history of the MHOSA in [Writing Lab Newsletter 34.7, pp. 6-7](#).

Canadian Writing Centres Association/ACCR, May 22-24, 2024 (Virtual) *"The Future of Writing Centres"*

Conference information: cwcaconference@gmail.com

Conference website: <https://cwcaaccr.com/2023-cwca-accr-conference/>

International Writing Centers Association, October 21-27, 2024 *"The Technology-Enhanced Writing Center"*

The conference will be fully online, via Whova app.

Conference chair: Tingjia Wang, Hiroshima University. Conference website: <https://writingcenters.org/events/2022-iwca-annual-conference/>



CONFERENCE CALENDAR

March 15-16, 2024: Secondary School Writing Centers Association, Boston, MA and virtual

Conference information: conference@sswca.org

Conference website: <https://sswca.org/conference/>

March 22-23, 2024: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, Fairfax, VA

Conference website: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX1vRYt7Kp1opy_iRWSeB1 - HVvvo9M2ttQCZtzB5t_w-2yJbPCzraHs7usgtTSUAPh_I0I3LOYNuljW5/pub](https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX1vRYt7Kp1opy_iRWSeB1-HVvvo9M2ttQCZtzB5t_w-2yJbPCzraHs7usgtTSUAPh_I0I3LOYNuljW5/pub)

April 11-12, 2024: Online Writing Centers Association, virtual

Contact: Erika Maikish and Spencer Harris: owca-conference@onlinewritingcenters.org;
conference website: <https://www.onlinewritingcenters.org/conference-info/>.

May 22-24, 2024: Canadian Writing Centers Association, virtual

Conference information: cwcaconference@gmail.com

Conference website: <https://cwcaaccr.com/2023-cwca-accr-conference/>

June 11-14, 2024: European Writing Centers Association, Limerick, Ireland

Conference website: <https://europeanwritingcenters.eu/conference>



WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship

WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship is an open-access, peer-review scholarly journal, published on the WAC Clearinghouse and supported by Colorado State University. Copyright © for the journal is held by its editorial staff. Articles are published under a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs).

Editorial Team

Muriel Harris (harrism@purdue.edu), Editor-in-Chief

Julia Bleakney (jbleakney@elon.edu)

Andrea Efthymiou (Andrea.Efthymiou@qc.cuny.edu)

Lee Ann Glowzenski (leeannglowzenski@atsu.edu)

Karen Gabrielle Johnson (KGJohnson@ship.edu)

Ted Roggenbuck (troggenb@commonwealthu.edu)

Omar Yacoub (omaryacooub@gmail.com)

Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders

Anna Sophia Habib (ahabib@gmu.edu)

Esther Namubiru (enamubir@gmu.edu)

Weijia Li (wli014@bucknell.edu)

Archives, Resources, and Submissions:

Visit <https://wac.colostate.edu/wln> for archive access, Digital Edited Collections, resources, and manuscript submission guidelines.

Copyright © for *WLN* is held by its editorial staff. Articles are published under a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs).

WLN

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

wac.colostate.edu/wln/