

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 38, Number 9-10

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing

May/June 2014

– FROM THE EDITOR –

With this issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, we bring Volume 38 to a close and will spend time this summer thinking about moving WLN forward. We'll be looking at clarifying standards for submissions and for additional opportunities to interact on social media. If you have suggestions for any of this, send them on to me (harrism@purdue.edu).

This issue starts with Danielle Cordaro's article about making session reports more productive. She outlines opportunities to engage multiple audiences so that the reports can draw in teachers, increase student involvement, and help guide tutorials. On a lighter note, Bonnie Devet focuses on the importance of humor in the writing center, describing how tension and burnout can be alleviated by asking tutors to come up with humorous captions for cartoons, much like the *New Yorker* magazine's weekly contests do.

And for those who have d/Deaf (this term is explained in the review) students attending tutorials, LeAnn Nash reviews Rebecca Babcock's book on working on language skills with these and other students. For tutors preparing their resumes for summer jobs and future employment, Lindsay Sabatino and Jessica Showalter offer a guide for quantifying and explicating the work tutors do so that employers will understand the complexity and extent of their tutorial work. And finally, for all of us, emphatic wishes for a leisurely summer, filled with good books to read and enough quiet time to do just that.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

INSIDE

Practical Uses for Session Reports among Faculty: A Case Study

◆ Danielle Cordaro ◆

Page 1



Humor in the Writing Center: Fostering Creativity through a Cartoon Caption Contest

◆ Bonnie Devet ◆

Page 7



Review of Tell Me How it Reads: Tutoring Deaf and Hearing Students in the Writing Center, by Rebecca Babcock

◆ Reviewed by LeAnn Nash ◆

Page 12



Tutor's Column: "Strategies for Defining and Marketing Our Tutoring Experiences."

◆ Lindsay Sabatino and Jessica Showalter ◆

Page 14



Calendar for Writing Center Associations

Page 16



PRACTICAL USES FOR SESSION REPORTS AMONG FACULTY: A CASE STUDY

◆ Danielle Cordaro
University of Mount Union
Alliance, OH

Session reports, short narratives recorded after consultations, can act as a vital link between writing centers and classrooms. It is possible for faculty to use session reports to enhance one-to-one conferences, to enrich classroom discussions, and to act as source material in reflective assignments aimed at helping students understand themselves as writers. Of course, none of this happens by magic, and sharing session reports with faculty, even with student consent, is not without controversy. In this case study, I describe an effort to encourage faculty at my institution to use session reports to support student writers. I begin with a brief discussion of the legal, philosophical, and political issues associated with sharing session reports with faculty, give details about the context of the research, and conclude with the results of a survey aimed at understanding how faculty at my institution use session reports now and how they plan to use them in the future.

SUSPICION AND TRUST: THE LEGALITY AND ETHICS OF SHARING SESSION REPORTS

Since maintaining session report data became normal practice at many colleges and universities over thirty years ago, directors and consultants have expressed concern about how this sensitive information should be treated. Under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), reports maintained

continued on page 2

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

Editor:

Muriel Harris
(harrism@purdue.edu)

Associate Editor:

Janet Auten
(jauten@american.edu)

Development Editor:

Alan Benson
(bensonat@uwec.edu)

Associate Development Editor:

Lee Ann Glowzenski
(glowzenskil@duq.edu)

Book Review Editor:

Kim Ballard
(kim.ballard@wmich.edu)

Managed and Produced by

TWENTY SIX LLC
1835 E. Hallandale Beach Blvd #178
Hallandale Beach, FL 33009
(866) 556-1743
<www.writinglabnewsletter.org>
support@writinglabnewsletter.org

Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures but can issue invoices through the website. Yearly payments of \$25 (U.S. \$30 in Canada) by credit card are accepted through the website or sent by check, made payable to the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, to the address above. Prepayment is requested for all subscriptions. For international *WLN* subscriptions, please contact support@writinglabnewsletter.org. For IWCA membership and *WCJ* and *WLN* subscriptions, see <writingcenters.org>.

Manuscripts: Before sending in submissions, please consult the guidelines and suggestions for prospective authors on the *WLN* website. Recommended length for articles is 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format (including Works Cited). Please send files through the *WLN* website.

internally by writing centers are considered education records, and thus require special handling: Data can be shared internally for operational and record-keeping purposes, with clients, and, according to section 9931 of FERPA, with their instructors. The Department of Education (DOA) affirms that students' instructors have a "legitimate educational interest" in the work students do and the progress students make in tutoring centers (personal communication, Department of Education Support). What this means in practice is that writing centers can legally provide session reports to students' instructors, with or without their permission. A review of the WCenter listerv on the topic of FERPA and session reports dating back to 2008 suggests that sharing information with students' instructors without student consent is not a common practice; still, many directors are troubled by the ethical implications of sending reports to instructors, even with student permission.

Michael Pemberton's 1995 article "Sharers and Seclusionists" separates directors into two philosophical camps: sharers, who believe it is acceptable to release reports so that instructors can use the information to support students' writing development, and seclusionists, who believe that in order to respect student privacy, reports should never be shared with faculty. Seclusionists see writing centers as functionally and politically distinct from classrooms; writing centers are spaces where students should feel safe expressing themselves, making mistakes, and working at whatever pace they feel comfortable. Sending reports to faculty can threaten students' privacy and, by extension, writing centers' potential as sites of resistance against traditional academic culture. Sharers, on the other hand, see writing centers as connected to the learning students do in classrooms. For sharers, writing centers exist at least in part to assist students in completing difficult work assigned by instructors; sharing session reports with instructors allows them to gain insight into their students' development and into the type of work that happens in writing centers. The intended outcome for students is better integration of two sources of writing support—instructors and consultants.

The central concerns of seclusionists are threats to students' privacy and the potential for instructor misuse of session reports. Glenda Conway's 1998 article, "Reporting Writing Center Sessions to Faculty: Pedagogical and Ethical Concerns," outlines the potential rewards and dangers of releasing information on students' activities in writing centers. Several hypothetical scenarios show instructors doing everything from giving credit and intervening positively with students to lowering their grades for receiving "outside help on their papers" (9). Another concern is students seeking to fulfill a requirement or comply with a referral from an instructor. If a center offers to send reports to instructors, students making required visits may feel pressured to comply, thereby invalidating the center's attempts to give students control of their own records.

These concerns are certainly realistic, and experienced directors can most likely point to cases where faculty used reports in ways that were not consistent with their centers' values. However, directors can pursue strategies that can help protect students and their centers short of banning the release of session reports to faculty. First, directors can follow the advice of Conway and Margaret Weaver and train staff to include clients in constructing reports. Allowing clients in on the report writing process helps to emphasize to both consultants and clients that they are peer collaborators, not teacher and student, and also demonstrates to clients that they have some agency over what goes into educational records they may choose to share with instructors.

Another way to protect both consultants and students is to design report forms that result in useful, unbiased descriptions of sessions. At my center at a small, private, mostly undergraduate liberal arts university, reports consist of two open-ended questions: 1) What did the client accomplish during this session? and 2) What is the client's revision plan? Clients and consultants decide what details to include in the report together, and consultants input the information into our secure online database.

Consultants are trained to ensure that the reports do not include their own or clients' judgments of the quality of clients' work. Copies of the report are then e-mailed to clients, but are only forwarded to instructors when students check a box indicating that this is what they would like us to do. Our policies and report forms are designed to get clients involved in creating their own records while maximizing the usefulness of the information as internal data and as data for instructors, should clients choose to share the information, for instructors.

HOW DO FACULTY USE SESSION REPORTS?

The concerns and expectations of both sharers and seclusionists are predicated on the supposition that faculty actually use session reports. Jane Cogie's 1998 case study, "In Defense of Conference Summaries: Widening the Reach of Writing Center Work," begins to answer the question, What do faculty actually do with session reports? Her results show that a modest percentage of respondents at her institution used reports to measure students' efforts to improve their writing (13%), to adjust materials or discussions in their classes (10%), or to conduct one-to-one conferences with students (28%). Cogie's study suggests that some faculty do indeed use session reports to support students' growth as writers.

In 2011, to see if Cogie's findings held true at my own institution, I surveyed both students and faculty who had received at least one session report the previous semester about what both groups did with the information in the reports. The results of this preliminary survey were encouraging. Thirty-three percent of faculty who had received session reports that semester (28 of 86) and 17% of students who visited the writing center (54 of 327) responded. Sixty-four percent of student respondents said they had used the reports to recall what they had done in a session, and 50% said they used reports to remind themselves of their plans for revision. These results were reassuring because they showed some of our clients were benefitting from receiving and reading session reports.

Faculty responses were also positive. Fifty percent of faculty respondents said that they used reports to intervene with individual students. Forty six percent indicated that they used reports to try to understand what students in their courses were struggling with outside of class, allowing them to make adjustments to their teaching. These results, in line with Cogie's 2001 findings, suggested that faculty at my institution were ready to hear about more specific ways of using session reports to improve their students' engagement with writing tasks.

“ Our policies and report forms are designed to get clients involved in creating their own records while maximizing the usefulness of the information as internal data. ”

EDUCATING FACULTY ABOUT POTENTIAL USES FOR SESSION REPORTS

The following semester (Spring, 2012) seemed the ideal time to introduce faculty to new uses for session reports. My institution was in the process of radically redesigning its general education program; the new curriculum is a major departure from what had been in place since the 1960s. The old general education program required all first year students to take a one-semester composition course followed by writing intensive courses in upper division courses. A new curriculum, adopted in Fall 2012, integrates writing vertically through the general education program, with a mid-career portfolio and senior general education capstone. Teaching writing is now the responsibility of most faculty at my institution.

In May 2012, three months before the launch of the new general education program, faculty at my institution were nervous. Although they had been assigning writing for years, many were uncomfortable with the idea that they would be responsible for teaching writing developmentally, scaffolding assign-

ments, and assessing the products for evidence of progress. In preparation for the change, they participated in a series of workshops and structured collaborative work periods to develop assignments, assessments, and syllabi for the inaugural year of the program. Many were searching for new assignments and ways they could help students meet the developmental writing goals of the new curriculum.

My staff, undergraduate consultants from across the curriculum, developed a live demonstration of a typical consultation to present at faculty workshops. The goal of the demonstration was to help instructors understand both consultants' and instructors' roles in supporting student success in individual sessions. The consultants put special emphasis on the importance of faculty-provided resources, like clear assignment sheets and syllabi. After their demonstration, I distributed the following list of ways faculty might use session reports to support student learning:

- *Session reports as “just-in-time” data for course revision*

Session reports can help faculty understand what individual students' strengths and challenges are, what students are actively working on, and how they are progressing in specific areas. If enough of an instructor's students visit the writing center, session reports can also give that instructor clues about where, in general, students in his or her course may be struggling. By using the reports as “just-in-time data,” instructors can decide whether they should spend more time on particular concepts in class. Some issues might easily be addressed by clarifying directions in an assignment; other concepts may need to be retaught or emphasized again in a later assignment.

- *Session reports as a way to make conferences more productive*

If faculty meet regularly with students for conferences, they can print reports that students have chosen to share with them and use them as a jumping off point for one-to-one conversations. The instructor might say, “I see that you've been working on organization in the Writing Center this semester. I notice improvements in this area, so let's talk about your current paper and how you plan to organize it.” The conversation can proceed from there, and faculty can end the conversation with specific suggestions on how students can continue their development as writers.

- *Session reports as source material for extra credit*

Faculty can offer extra credit to students who choose to visit the writing center and follow up with a short reflection in which students describe what they hoped to get out of the session, what actually happened, whether they plan to use the writing center in the future, and if so, how they plan to use the writing center. Faculty can ask students to use their session reports as source material in their reflections, although whether students ultimately share the entire report should be up to them.

- *Session reports as a catalyst for frank in-class discussions about writing*

Faculty can start the semester by asking students to reflect honestly on their habits, techniques, and standards for good writing. Toward the end of the semester, if enough of their students have chosen to make writing center appointments, instructors can ask students to review their session reports and draw some conclusions about their development as writers. Then, instructors can follow up with a frank whole-class discussion of the effects of different writing strategies, including peer consultations in the writing center.

- *Session reports as source material for a course wiki on writing development.*

At the end of the semester, faculty can ask students to review their session reports and describe one or two techniques they learned over the course of the semester that significantly improved their writing. Then, using a free online tool like Google Drive, students can collaboratively create and edit a wiki that brings these techniques together for the next group of students who will take the course. The next generation of students can add suggestions or delete those that no longer seem relevant. In a survey distributed by the workshop

coordinators, faculty ranked the Writing Center presentation among the most useful they attended. Of course, I was curious about whether faculty would be willing to try the techniques we suggested.

AFTER THE PRESENTATION: SURVEY RESULTS

At the conclusion of the Fall 2012 semester, the first semester of the new general education curriculum, I surveyed the entire faculty to find out whether they were using the techniques we had suggested during the Spring 2012 faculty workshops and whether they were considering using the techniques in the future. The survey was sent to 128 faculty and 36 responded, a 28% response rate. The first half of the survey asked whether faculty used or planned to use session reports as just-in-time data for course revision or to intervene with specific students during conferences. Thirty-eight percent of respondents said that they used session reports as just-in-time data for course revision, and 56% said they would consider using the technique in the future. Six percent of faculty said that they used reports in conferences with students, and 82% said they would consider trying it in the future. I should note here that one-to-one conferencing specifically for writing concerns was likely new to many in the population I surveyed, which may account for the low number who reported using session reports in this way.

The latter half of the survey sought data on whether faculty were using or planning to use session reports in preparation for assignments suggested during the workshops: as preparation for an extra-credit reflection, as preparation for a class discussion of writing strategies or as source material for a course wiki on writing development. Twelve percent of respondents said they had asked students to visit the writing center and then follow up with a reflection, while 59% said they would consider using this assignment in the future. Twenty-eight percent said they would not use this assignment, with many stating that they did not want to give extra credit or require students to make appointments.

Thirteen percent said they used session reports as a catalyst for frank, in-class discussions about writing, and 62% said they would be willing to try it in the future. Twenty-five percent said they would not use this technique, but only one respondent provided a reason for the reticence, stating that the respondent was not certain enough students would visit in time for the planned discussion. Only nine percent of respondents said they used session reports as source material for a wiki assignment; however, 53% said they would try the technique, while 38% said they would not. Several respondents commented that they felt this assignment would take too much time or would not be used by future students.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My preliminary research suggests that faculty may be receptive to using session reports more actively in their courses but will likely need demonstrations and supportive materials to see how these techniques can work before they will commit to making use of them. I was encouraged that 53 (82%) of those surveyed said they would consider trying the techniques in the future. It is likely that faculty need time and support to work through practical aspects of employing these techniques in their own classrooms. To this end, I created a page on our OWL designed specifically to support faculty as they seek to implement these and other strategies.

Using session reports for classroom-based activities will likely work best when many or most students in an instructor's course have at least one session with a writing center consultant. Because some instructors and directors are not comfortable with offering extra credit or requiring students to make writing center visits, more thought should be directed to the question of how to encourage students to visit without these incentives. It may be that some of my suggestions are most appropriate for students in small enrollment, introductory courses, where learning about institutional resources is most pressing and instructors and directors may feel less conflicted about offering credit-based incentives. It might also be true that these

ANNOUNCEMENT

Writing Center Specialist, Parttime Curry College

Curry College's Writing Center is inviting applications for a casual/part time staff Writing Specialist for our Writing Center, working between 5–10 hours weekly. This role is an hourly position which will be scheduled to work several shifts per week, (Mon. and Thurs. afternoons/evenings from 4 p.m.–8:30 p.m. for the remainder of the Spring Semester and for potential continuation in the Fall Semester) in order to accommodate our students' needs. The successful candidate for the Writing Center Specialist must be able to work collaboratively with a wide range of student writers, from students with developmental / ESOL writing needs to those who are in the honors program, to help them to improve their written expression. The Writing Center Specialist will be working with traditional college students, adult learners, graduate students as well as students who are second language speakers.

Requirements: A Master's Degree is required; knowledge of various citation styles, including MLA and APA is essential; prior experience and knowledge of writing center pedagogy is preferred; ability to work Monday and Thursday afternoons/evenings between 4-8:30 p.m.

Please submit a Resume/CV, cover letter, and a list of three professional references including complete contact information. Apply online at <www.curry.edu/about-curry/employment/job-opportunities.html>.

strategies are more practical at small colleges and universities where directors may have more direct contact with instructors.

In each of the assignments above, students ultimately make the choice about what they will share from their reports—reports that they should have had a hand in constructing—and should not be compelled to share the entire report with anyone, including instructors, except in extraordinary circumstances. Before taking any of the suggestions listed in this article, directors should review their current policies and practices and ensure that their staff is trained in how to include clients in writing session reports. The main objective of the suggested activities is to create links between writing centers, students, and faculty. An added benefit is that the role of the writing center becomes clearer to faculty, raising awareness of centers as key sites for the intellectual work of writing: inventing ideas, organizing, and revising. Embarking on such an effort requires directors to educate and then trust faculty and their own staff, but doing so may help build bridges between the support offered in classrooms and in writing centers. ♦

Works Cited

- Cogie, Jane. "In Defense of Conference Summaries: Widening the Reach of Writing Center Work." *Writing Center Journal* 18.2 (1998): 47-70. Print.
- Conway, Glenda. "Reporting Writing Center Sessions to Faculty: Pedagogical and Ethical Concerns." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 22.8 (1998): 9-12. Print.
- Department of Education Support, Personal Communication. June 10, 2013.
- Pemberton, Michael, A. "Writing Center Ethics: Sharers and Seclusionists." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 20.3 (1995): 13-14. Print.
- Weaver, Margaret. "Resistance is Anything but Futile: Some More Thoughts on Writing Conference Summaries." *Writing Center Journal* 21.2 (2001):15-56. Print.



HUMOR IN THE WRITING CENTER: FOSTERING CREATIVITY THROUGH A CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

◆ *Bonnie Devet*
College of Charleston
Charleston, SC

Most writing centers recognize this all-too-familiar scenario: it's only three or four weeks before a term ends. The center reeks of anxiety, tension, and white-out, with students tapping pencils on the desks, impatient for the consultants' help. Like a scene from the classic movie *High Noon*, clients are constantly eyeing the wall clock ticking away the deadlines for their essays. Under such pressures, consultants often absorb the students' tension, finishing with one student, taking a deep sustaining breath, and walking over to the next, secretly hoping the new client has an "easy" question. The tension is palpable.

Writing center scholarship has shown that in such situations, depending on the clients' moods, humor can be a valuable tool. As Kelly Grady et al. argue, "We in the writing center essentially need to employ humor as a means to a more comfortable and open space for learning" (15). Humor creates, for example, a collaborative environment to "facilitate interactive learning" (Sherwood 49); when both clients and consultants laugh together, they can usually work together (Grady et al. 15). It also sets up a comfortable tone where writers can share with each other and make self-discoveries about their writing (Farrell-Childers). Self-deprecating humor used by consultants can even forge a bond between clients and consultants (Jordan): consultants who can make fun of themselves often connect better to their clients, with the "status differential" between consultants and clients vanishing (Vartabedian and Vartabedian 9). Both *Noise from the Writing Center* by Elizabeth Boquet and "Incorporating Plays and Toys into the Writing Center" by Chad Verbais have even emphasized the value of toys, such as having students play with plastic dinosaurs and *Star Wars* action figures so that by returning to childhood activities, clients relax, allowing their brains to be creative.

What has not been often discussed is the way directors can use humor as a management technique as they supervise their consultants. Of course, as any corporate trainer from the business world knows, humor can lighten the mood for workers, as it can for consultants when each term reaches "crunch" time. However, I have found humor can do much more: it fosters camaraderie, friendly competition, and what writing center scholar Scott L. Miller describes as "the low-stakes, high-yield magic of play" (40) so that consultants discover their own creativity and flexibility.

To engage the consultants' sense of humor at our center, I used what I called the "Cartoon Caption Contest." Borrowing from the long-running contest found weekly in *The New Yorker*, I gave the stressed consultants an un-captioned *New Yorker* cartoon by Drew Dernavich.¹ It shows a professionally dressed man carrying a briefcase and holding a sheaf of papers; he is offering the papers to a menacing-looking operator of a guillotine used to chop papers that fall into a basket. Then, I asked consultants who were majoring in a variety of fields—including history, psychology, English, and political science—to do the following:

Enter the Writing Lab's Cartoon Caption Contest
 Show your stuff as a writer!
 Show your stuff as a Writing Lab consultant!
 Write a caption for the attached cartoon, focusing on grammar, editing, or writing.
 What might the gentleman with the papers be saying?
 Don't be shy. The best caption will receive a prize.²

ANNOUNCEMENT

IWCA MURIEL HARRIS OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD: CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Named after its first recipient and given at every other 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. All nominations should be submitted electronically to Leigh Ryan, chair of the IWCA Muriel Harris Outstanding Service Award Committee, at <LR@umd.edu>.

Nominations 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 e-mail 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 Leigh Ryan by **June 30, 2014**. The winner will be announced at the IWCA/NCPTW Conference in Orlando, FL, Oct. 30–Nov. 1, 2014.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Writing Center Journal

The editors of *The Writing Center Journal*—Michele Eodice, Kerri Jordan, and Steve Price—invite article submissions of original empirical research and theoretical scholarship on topics of interest to the writing center community. We are also interested in book reviews and review essays; however, please query regarding potential reviews. *The Writing Center Journal* aims to reflect the diversity of writing center contexts and encourages submissions related to a wide variety of institution types and other environments. The journal seeks to build a stronger research community for writing centers. For information on submissions, subscriptions, and professional development events and resources, please see our website: <writingcenterjournal.org>.

A single-panel cartoon (officially called a “gag cartoon”) is a good fit with today’s students. In an age when Internet surfers zip from one website to another and when tweets contain a measly 140 characters, gag cartoons are fast, too, usually with only seven seconds to make their point (Ingalls), thereby meshing “the literary and visual arts” to create what *The New Yorker* cartoonist Gahan Wilson calls “one lit moment” (132-3). Besides resembling the speedy Internet-surfing world that consultants inhabit, gag cartoons are also appropriate because they let consultants practice their linguistic expertise: being concise, using appropriate diction, and displaying insight into idiom (Jacobs ii), important features found in all writing. So, consultants can do what they are good at—working and playing with the language.

Consultants’ captions did, indeed, demonstrate their linguistic sleight-of-hand. One consultant entitled the cartoon: “The Great Guillotine of Strunk and White”; then, she provided this caption: “So, this is the penalty for too many comma splices, eh?”³ Another consultant used the contest to unload her own anxieties about writing: “As the professor handed the shredder a student’s 75-page Bachelor’s Essay, he said, ‘I found a comma splice—you know what to do.’” Another emphasized the gag quality of the single-panel cartoon: “I can’t believe they spelled guillotine wrong again. . . .” One consultant used the contest to underscore punctuation problems: “Slice this dangling participle!” while another ambitiously submitted two captions: “I’ll never get ahead if this doesn’t make the cut” and “This is too choppy,” revealing her ability to pun. So, consultants made connections between the cartoon’s content and the writing and editing process.

Engaging in humor or play is exactly what directors should encourage because it fosters consultants’ creativity. As Fergus P. Hughes argues in *Play, Creativity, and Problem Solving*, the creative process needs “divergent problem solving skills,” that is, “the ability to branch out and consider a variety of possible solutions.” The classic example is trying to discover how many ways to use a paper clip other than for holding pages together: there is no one correct use, only multiple options (Fergus). When the consultants crafted their varied captions, they were engaging in such creativity. The different captions all worked, with each consultant bringing to the contest his or her background and knowledge. “Discovery consists of looking at the same thing as everyone else [like the contest’s cartoon] and thinking something different,” as Albert Szent-Györgyi, a Nobel Prize winner, has said. In fact, using divergent problem solving is just what consultants should do since no one tutoring strategy works with every client entering a center’s doors. Consultants must call upon their own diverse experiences to help clients learn.

The contest, with its humor and play, emphasized another part of creativity so fundamental to a center: the value of lateral thinking. According to Steven Gillman, author of *Secrets of Lucky People*, creating or even understanding a joke involves “attacking a problem from other angles, as opposed to the more traditional linear and logical ways.” The brain may prefer to follow routine pathways, but central to being creative is “cutting across patterns,” argues physician Edward de Bono, an authority on conceptual thinking. This lateral thinking is evident in the now famous joke “If at first you don’t succeed, skydiving may not be for you.” The joke leads the listener down one path of the proverb or traditional saying “If at first . . .,” only to be surprised (and pleased) when the main clause works against expectations (Gillam). Whether one uses the corporate world’s clichéd label of this creativity as “thinking outside the box” or whether one calls it “lateral thinking,” humor does demand a shift from the usual way of examining problems, a stretching of the mind. Such lateral thinking was evident in the humor found in the consultants’ captions, especially “I’ll never get ahead if this doesn’t make the cut” and “This is too choppy.” Consultants used lateral cognition to be innovative, a quality so necessary to consultations.

Besides divergent problem solving and lateral thinking, the consultants’ humor exhibited another feature of being creative. Their captions engaged the right side of the brain where connections are made, links forged, and metaphors or analogies revealed (Vartabedian and Vartabedian 9) as when the dire

ANNOUNCEMENT

Tutors: A Multiliteracy Journal for Students

Tutors, an online publication, will launch in the fall of 2014. Our mandate is to publish student work about tutoring in the student's preferred mode of expression. Photographers, videographers, graphic designers, essayists, creative writers and game developers are all welcome (our list is not exhaustive). However, please send a short inquiry to Thomas Halford <thalf001@plattsburgh.edu> to see if we can accommodate your form, and include information about the length of your submission at this time as well.

- The only compensation we offer is online publication in our journal.
- We are not going to do a printed copy.
- Submissions should include some kind of explication.
- Submissions from writing tutors and content tutors in math, biology, and other disciplines are all welcome.
- No longer a student? Please inquire anyway.
- E-mail submissions by July 1st, 2014.

nature of the cartoon's scenario—a massive guillotine and a grave-looking executioner—reminded a consultant of the formidable pronouncements found in *Elements of Style*. Forming such associations, a key intellectual skill of creativity, is seminal to writing center work: “[W]e want our tutors to step around or step outside of how they usually see. We want them to see *connections*” (Geller et al. 48, emphasis added). Thus, humor and creativity are “great companions, each a perfect compliment for the other in nourishing thinking,” as argues Mary Kay Morrison, educator and Board Director for the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor. When writing the captions, consultants were being what they should be—flexible, inventive, imaginative—key qualities for helping a variety of students with an infinite number of diverse writing concerns.

Writing the captions did even more for the consultants: they were learning. Prior to creating their engaging captions, consultants reviewed different facets of writing, grammar, and editing in order to decide what to emphasize. The consultant who submitted the caption “I can’t believe they spelled guillotine wrong again. . . .” explained: “I tried to think of errors that are common when editing, and making mistakes in spelling is clearly one we see all the time, even when they are accidental.” As good rhetors, the consultants also analyzed their audience. As the linguistic anthropologist William O. Beeman explains, a joke must “use the audience’s taken-for-granted knowledge effectively” (105). The consultant who wrote the spelling caption determined whether or not readers (her fellow consultants) would have enough background to understand the joke: “I believe I had the writing consultants in mind as an audience because I think we all have that one mistake we see over and over or one that stands out to us as funny.” Like all experienced cartoonists, the consultants even tried to capture the salient features of the cartoon’s moment, or as a consultant said, “My caption was inspired by the parts that caught my eye the most. The guillotine is a quite a harsh punishment for a spelling error, so that was the best comical aspect I could come up with for the picture.” So, engaging in humor allowed the consultants to work with the concepts of audience and genre. As a result, consultants learned as well as laughed, or as the playwright Tom Stoppard has said, “I think of laughter as the sound of comprehension” (qtd. in Singer 27).

As a director, I, too, learned. The consultants’ captions revealed what the corporate world labels as “organizational thinking or culture” (Lynch 440). Specifically, these captions unmasked the consultants’ anxieties: an advisor’s possibly rejecting a Bachelor’s Essay or a student’s enduring the burden of Strunk and White’s commandments about style. As the actor Peter Ustinov once said, “Comedy is simply a funny way of being serious” (qtd. in Morrison 9). The captions were, indeed, a window into the serious concerns of the center’s workers.

In addition to highlighting organizational thinking, the exercise encouraged other features vital to supervision: the caption contest fostered enthusiasm and competition. One consultant confessed to being completely focused on the contest: “Once I saw the cartoon, it was all I could think about!” Another consultant, eager “to get it right,” and desperately trying to win, asked, “How specific about grammar do I get? Do I name an error? Can I just refer to all types of editing?” The contest also encouraged group cohesiveness (Vartabedian and Vartabedian 9). As consultants were toying with possible captions, they tried them out on their fellow workers, analyzing the captions as they laughed together and reflected on the diction and content. All consultants, even those who did not participate, wanted to read the collection of captions, congratulating their fellow consultants on their linguistic flare.⁴ The contest, then, built a community of camaraderie among the consultants. And while the consultants did not specifically report that writing the captions relieved their end-of-year stress, most scholarly literature on humor in the workplace emphasizes that humor does lighten the workplace load (Morrison; McGhee). As Morrison explains, “Humor elevates [one’s] mood and has been known to be a deterrent to depression. Stress reduction is considered to be one of the most important benefits of humor.” Certainly, the consultants’ laughing together contributed to a more relaxed atmosphere for both the center and its clients.

ANNOUNCEMENT

LATIN AMERICA WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATION

The Latin America Writing Center Association was recently launched to unite writing centers/programs from the region. There are about 20 universities in Latin America that are working together to strengthen or create their writing centers and/or programs. Educators from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Argentina, and Colombia gathered last year in Cali, Colombia, to get to know each other and to share experiences based on the work we have been doing in our centers. We have a Blackboard site with links, documents, references, forums, and collaborative meetings where we discuss different topics.

Currently, I am the coordinator and I would appreciate any suggestions on how to start, strengthen, and maintain a regional association. Any ideas will be welcome!

Violeta Molina Natera
Please send to <vmolina@javerianacali.edu.co>.

The next time the center fosters a sense of play, I might, though, conduct the contest a little differently. The prompt could be more open-ended, asking consultants to caption the cartoon as they see fit, without listing criteria, such as “grammar or editing or writing.” Selecting the right cartoon is also essential. While a quick search of the Internet using “writing + cartoons + free” or “images + writing centers + humor” yields a harvest of cartoons with and without captions, directors could use other situations as well in order to let consultants stretch their imaginations. Another option is to ask the Art Department students to draw the cartoon so that the contest would connect the center with another part of the college. Certainly, I would ask clients to participate, though many of them might not bother to enter the contest, being more concerned about dashing off to class with papers in hand. I would also consider holding the contest at other times in the semester, tied possibly to a campus-wide celebration of National Punctuation Day (September 24—see <www.nationalpunctuationday.com>), National Day on Writing (October 20—see <www.ncte.org>), or National Grammar Day (March 4—see <www.nationalgrammarday.com>). Using one of these occasions would help generate campus-wide awareness of the center. While our center held the contest in a spring term when consultants seemed especially tired and stressed, it could also be conducted in the fall, calling on returning consultants to frame the directions and to select cartoons for the batch of newly hired consultants. By offering these suggestions and ideas, veteran consultants would be shaping the contest for the new ones.

Edward de Bono has said, “Humor is, by far, the most significant activity of the brain” (qtd. in Morrison 9). As such, directors should employ humor to help with supervising consultants. When the going seems especially Sisyphean in a center, directors can use a caption contest that becomes, for the consultants, an intermission in mirth. But, even more important than possibly relieving stress, writing captions reveals to consultants that humor—with its demand for linguistic flexibility and innovative thinking—is central to a center’s mission. As Elizabeth Boquet and Michele Eodice point out, “In fact, we would argue that the daily work in our writing centers (WCs) not only reveals creativity, it requires it” (4).



Endnotes

1. For the cartoon, please see <www.condenaststore.com/gallery.asp?cid=2CB55E6B6A034946BFFC51FEBC6DE074&STARTAT=/getthumb.asp&x=32&y=43&PAGE=5&Search=dernavich&CategoryID=146227>. *The New Yorker* contest appeared 28 March 2012, p. 118. *The New Yorker* announced the winner of its contest 25 April 2011, p. 90. If the reader has access to the digital *The New Yorker* archives, the cartoon can be found at <archives.newyorker.com>. 25 April 2012.
2. Each entrant received a key ring and pen featuring the distinctive logo of our state.
3. All entries are used with the consultants’ permissions.
4. For its own contest winner, *The New Yorker* chose the caption “The governor would like your help with the budget,” submitted by Katie Scheir, Los Angeles, California.



Works Cited

- Beeman, William O. “Humor.” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9.1-2 (1999):103-06. Print.
- Boquet, Elizabeth. *Noise from the Writing Center*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2002. Print.
- Boquet, Elizabeth, and Michele Eodice. “Creativity in the Writing Center: A Terrifying Conundrum.” Dvorak and Bruce 3-20. Print.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tweet *WLN*? “Like” *WLN*?

If your writing center and/or tutors have Twitter accounts and/or Facebook pages, we invite you to “follow,” “tweet,” “like,” and/or “post” on our Twitter account and Facebook wall. We invite you to post news of your writing center, photos, online resources, conference notices, other news you wish to share, and links other writing center folk would be interested in.



@WLNewsletter



Writing Lab Newsletter



International Writing Center Blog

CONNECTING WRITING CENTERS ACROSS BORDERS

“Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders” is a blog intended for those of you in writing centers around the world to share blog entries, photos, questions, resources, and comments about topics relevant to your work. There is a link on the *WLN* home page, or connect directly to it at <www.writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/>.

- de Bono, Edward. “Serious Creativity.” *Journal for Quality and Participation* 18.5 (1995): 12-18. Rpt. Web. 8 Aug. 2012.
- Dernavich, Drew. Cartoon #280 [weekly contest]. *The New Yorker*. 28 Mar. 2011. Print.
- Dvorak, Kevin, and Shanti Bruce, eds. *Creative Approaches to Writing Center Work*. New York: Hampton, 2008. Print.
- Farrell-Childers, Pam. “A Good Laugh is Sunshine in a House or a Writing Center.” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 18.4 (1993): 5-6. Print.
- Geller, Anne Ellen, Michele Eodice, Frankie Gordeon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth H. Boquet. *Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2007. Print.
- Gillman, Steven. “A Sense of Humor Increases Creativity.” *Ezinearticles*. n.p., n.d. Web. 7 Aug. 2012.
- Grady, Kelly, Carol Mattingly, Leslie Olsen, Connie Sirois, Katie Hupp Stahlnecker, and Sheryl Tschetter. “Connecting Through Humor: Collaboration at the Summer Institute.” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 28.7 (2004): 13-16. Print.
- Hughes, Fergus P. “Play, Creativity, and Problem Solving.” *Play, Creativity, and Problem Solving*. Boston: Pearson, 1999. *Education.com*. n.p. Updated 20 July 2010. Web. 12 Aug. 2012.
- Ingalls, Zoë. “Frog Princes and Fish as Business Executives: ‘You Have 7 Seconds To Make Someone Laugh.’” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 5. Aug. 1992. n.p. Rpt. in *Living Language. Reading, Thinking and Writing*. Ed. Alleen Pace Nilsen. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999. 229-33. Print.
- Jacobs, Mark. “Introduction.” *Jumping Up and Down on the Roof, Throwing Bags of Water on People*. Ed. Mark Jacobs. Garden City: Doubleday, 1980. i-ix. Print.
- Jordan, Gillian. “Humor in Tutorials.” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 15.9 (1991): 8, 10. Print.
- Lynch, Owen H. “Humorous Communication: Finding a Place for Humor in Communication Research.” *Communication Theory* 12.4 (2002): 423-45. Print.
- McGhee, Paul E. “Using Humor to Workplace Boosts Creativity.” *LaughterRemedy.com*. n.p. 21 Apr. 2011. Web. 12 Aug. 2012.
- Miller, Scott L. “Then Everybody Jumped for Joy! (But Joy Didn’t Like that, So She Left).” Kevin Dvorak and Shanti Bruce 21-47. Print.
- Morrison, Mary Kay. *Using Humor to Maximize Learning: The Links between Positive Emotions and Education*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Education, 2008. Web. 12 Aug. 2012.
- Sherwood, Steve. “Humor and the Serious Tutor.” *Writing Center Journal* 13.2 (1993): 3-12. Print.
- Singer, Mark. “Revivals Pacing It.” *The New Yorker*. 7 Mar. 2011. 24, 27. Print.
- Strunk, William, and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. New York: MacMillan, 1959. Print.
- Vartabedian, Robert A., and Laurel Klinger Vartabedian. “Humor in the Workplace: A Communication Challenge.” Miami, Speech Communication Association. Nov. 1993. Presentation. Web. 27 May 2012.
- Verbais, Chard. “Incorporating Play and Toys into the Writing Center.” Dvorak and Bruce 135-46. Print.
- Wilson, Gahan. “Something Smelling in the Basement.” Jacobs 123-34. Print.



BOOK REVIEW

Babcock, Rebecca Day. *Tell Me How it Reads: Tutoring Deaf and Hearing Students in the Writing Center*. Washington: Gallaudet UP, 2012. (\$39.95, 224 pp. paperback)

◆ LeAnn Nash
Waldorf College
Forest City, IA

Rebecca Day Babcock's book, *Tell Me How it Reads (TMHIR)*, is a useful text for writing centers because it not only offer insights about how to assist writers who are d/Deaf (a term I'll clarify later), but it also reminds us that working with a specific "different" group of writers can exemplify ways writing centers may work with all writers.

Babcock prefaces *TMHIR* with a "come clean" statement about her own "biased, human, and fallible" position as a researcher and writing center director (viii). She addresses assumptions about working with d/Deaf students she brought to her study and details, throughout the book, how the work challenged and changed her. As I review *TMHIR*, I must also "come clean" about my background: I worked for 25 years as a certified interpreter and taught American Sign Language in a public high school for four years before moving to directing a writing center. Having sat on both sides of the tutorial table—as an interpreter for and tutor with d/Deaf writers—I initially doubted the book would respect the intellect and ability of those considered "different" because of deafness. However, I was happily wrong, as the book offers much to help those new to working with d/Deaf writers. It also confirms the reality of d/Deaf knowledge-making for those of us who have worked in that field for years.

Babcock explains her use of "d/Deaf" (which she borrows from Deaf culture) in a footnote on page 2. Written with a capital letter, "Deaf" indicates the customs and social behaviors that form the culture of individuals who share the audiological difference of deafness, indicated by lower case "d." The term "d/Deaf" thus includes both auditory ("deaf") and cultural ("Deaf") aspects.

Babcock began her study "to raise awareness about providing quality tutoring services to all students who come to the writing center" (vii) and selected issues related to the tutoring of d/Deaf students to encourage those in writing centers to reconsider their tutoring practices with all clients. Researchers of all levels will connect with her description of her research process. Those new to such projects can learn about how messy and informative such projects can be, while experienced researchers may nod their heads in agreement with her choices. As her research goal, Babcock wanted to discover what happened in tutorials with d/Deaf students, to ascertain how such tutorials might differ from those with hearing students, and to determine factors which influenced differences in the tutorials. As the research progressed, she allowed her methods to evolve as needed, especially when she recognized the need to gather data appropriately from a widening variety of sources. For example, a d/Deaf tutee recommended Babcock videotape interviews rather than just audiotape them so d/Deaf tutees' expressions and movements could be captured to more fully represent their voices. Babcock also involved all stakeholders—tutors, tutees, interpreters, and directors—in her research. Plus, she used tutorial observations, interviews, and analysis of taped transcripts and related paperwork, which resulted in the development of a helpful resource for those interested in working with d/Deaf writers or with writers who process language differently from their tutors.

To explore similarities and differences in the tutoring of writers who are d/Deaf and writers who can hear, Babcock included three d/Deaf students and three hearing students in her study. Although she started by studying a range of tutorial activities, only one of the six tutees (who is d/Deaf) engaged in planning activities during tutorials, while the others all focused on revising drafts. The writer who planned also took charge of her tutorials and sometimes composed on a computer during tutorials before switching to pen and paper for reflective notes. One observation Babcock notes is that d/Deaf writers responded positively to directness and grew frustrated with non-directive questions. Perhaps because language for the d/Deaf exists through visual means such as signing or drawing, non-directive communication in tutorials can seem confusing and possibly rude to writers expecting the directness of the Deaf culture when seeking help with their work. Babcock hopes this insight can be extrapolated to tutorials with any individuals who do not share the same cultural expectation of communication strategies as their tutors, including those who are English Language Learners. She encourages tutors to trust students in such situations and to listen when writers articulate their needs.

Such an approach is better than continuing to use tutoring strategies developed for hearing or native speaker writers or for students who value learning via indirectness.

Babcock also addresses tutors' concerns about working with d/Deaf writers, such as confidentiality issues when working through interpreters. Tutors in her study became more comfortable with the three-person tutorials when they learned interpreter training involves a certification process and adherence to an ethical code that requires interpreters not to violate client confidentiality. Despite tutors' concerns for their clients, Babcock notes that one d/Deaf tutee became upset when her tutor attempted to learn about Deaf culture from her—making her, in essence, the representative of all who are Deaf and making her uncomfortable with the tutor's apparent curiosity when she had expected insights to help her improve as a writer. Babcock also suggests that tutors maintain eye contact with their tutees rather than converse only with interpreters during tutorial, something I also want to reinforce.

Babcock's understanding of an interpreter's role involved a learning curve, which she shares with readers and which I view as reasonable for a "non-insider" to Deaf culture. She learned that while interpreters facilitate communication with/for their clients, they can also help educate others (like tutors) about how to work effectively with their clients and how to add a third person into the interpersonal dynamic of a tutorial. Interpreters balance serving simply as a "communication device" (my term) and needing to ensure that their clients receive accurate information and that they share their clients' communication accurately. Interpreters often bridge communication gaps that can be challenging and easily mishandled, a point Babcock emphasizes for readers when she explains how interpreters in the study discussed potential misunderstanding when thoughts are translated through someone else's voice or hands. Writing center tutors value clarity because we always want to ensure that students understand what we are trying to communicate and accomplish. Similarly, we also need to understand what they want to communicate and accomplish. These interpreters' insights remind us both of the importance of clear communication with d/Deaf writers as well as how complicated that process can be with many writers.

Insights from the writing center directors in the study proved less compelling as Babcock spent less time with them, but those in the study did try to assign d/Deaf students to consultants specializing in helping students who are ESL or have learning disabilities. However, a survey of other writing center directors Babcock conducted before she started the study indicated not all directors feel their centers should serve d/Deaf writers.

TMHIR's final chapter emphasizes that writers who are d/Deaf and those who are hearing want the same thing: improvement in "writing, reading, and research skills" (165). But differences between students exist in terms of communication directness and the d/Deaf students' likely need for more time practicing and gaining grammar knowledge and "gathering and understanding information" (166). Babcock had read that those who are deaf could struggle with reading, but she "had to see it" (168) to realize how important reading is in d/Deaf student learning. Witnessing the time most d/Deaf students needed to spend on reading led Babcock to recommend that tutors provide time for reading comprehension when working with such writers.

Babcock's point is that those of us in writing centers, and maybe our students, must recognize how language barriers and cultural difference can shape how tutoring happens with any tutor and writer and especially with tutors and writers who engage in language differently and come from different cultures. Babcock's conclusions required her to follow not-so-simple paths, but her book can save readers from frustration and mistakes as they learn from her study and its results. *TMHIR* is a resource well worth using in all writing centers. It will serve a tutor training program/class or writing center administration course well, and it can be a guide for individuals designing their own research-based projects and practices. As one final suggestion Babcock recommends all tutors in centers that serve writers who are deaf "learn . . . fingerspelling," which she sees as "the only way to precisely represent written English on the hands" (178). I also offer one final recommendation: because all writing centers need, as Babcock suggests, "to open their doors to everyone," all writing centers should include this book in their professional library. The insights it offers will help centers better serve d/Deaf writers as well as other writers. ♦

CHICAGOLAND ORGANIZATION OF WRITING, LITERACY, AND LEARNING CENTERS: TUTOR LEADERS

**Tutor Leadership
Conference 2014**
Oct. 1, 2014
Aurora, IL
Illinois Mathematics and
Science Academy
"Learning from Each Other"

Contact: Erin Micklo: <emicklo@imsa.edu>. Conference website: <sites.google.com/site/chicagowllc/tutor-conference-2014>.

SOUTHEASTERN WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATION

Feb. 19-21, 2015
Nashville, TN
Lipscomb University
*"Identities in Consultation:
Diversity in the South and
Beyond"*

Conference chair: Stacia Watkins <stacia.watkins@lipscomb.edu>. Conference website: <www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html>. CFP will be posted soon.

TUTOR'S COLUMN

STRATEGIES FOR DEFINING AND MARKETING OUR TUTORING EXPERIENCES

◆ *Lindsay Sabatino and Jessica Showalter*
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA

Many writing tutors have had sessions that began with a writer asking, “Will you edit my paper?” This question offers tutors the opportunity to explain the instructional spirit of the work we do in writing centers and address any misunderstandings about our mission and tutors’ roles. However, many tutors forget these misperceptions of their role when they send cover letters and résumés to prospective employers, who may also be unaware of the multi-faceted nature of writing center experience. We observed through our discourse analysis of tutors’ professional documents that about a quarter of them simply listed their job title and dates of employment. Since not all employers are familiar with the types of jobs tutors engage in, tutors must explain their role more explicitly and find ways to relate it to their future employment. We here offer some suggestions for ways to qualify and quantify the skills tutors obtain from working in a writing center as they seek academic and nonacademic employment. Unlike more generalized advice for résumés and CVs, our suggestions are specifically geared to help tutors make themselves marketable for potential employers.

A few recent studies demonstrate the diverse kinds of professional development offered in writing centers. Sue Dinitz and Jean Kiedasich quote peer tutors who describe the multiple interpersonal, writing, mentoring/teaching, thinking, and professional-insights gained from writing center experience. Their work builds on the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project by Bradley Hughes, Paula Gillespie, and Harvey Kail, which surveyed over a hundred former tutors to gauge their level of professional development in writing centers. Their responses provide inspiration in the form of real-life examples of writing center experience in action that tutors could translate into lines on their CVs or résumés. While working as tutors, we thought about the best ways to represent our work to employers on professional documents. We were also curious about the ways in which other tutors represent (or, in some cases, do not represent) the various pedagogical, administrative, and technological skills they learn. To conduct our discourse analysis, we collected nineteen résumés, curriculum vitae, and cover letters composed by undergraduate and graduate writing center tutors from around the country. We solicited these participants through emailing writing center directors as well as posting on listservs. We worked out a coding system and recorded the ways participants labeled their role as well as the people they tutor, the activities they included, and the types of verbs they used. Our coding also noted whether or not they explained these activities and if/how they quantified their role. Our results revealed several areas in which tutors could represent their roles more effectively.

USE APPROPRIATE LABELS

Based on the professional documents we analyzed, the most common labels tutors used to define themselves were “tutor” and “consultant.” Sometimes these tags were coupled with modifying words such as “peer,” “ESL,” or “writing.” While we do not endorse one label over another—for consistency we use the label “tutor” in this article—we do encourage tutors to reflect before deciding which label to use on their résumés or CVs. While “consultant” may carry a more professional connotation, for prospective employers in some fields, the word “consultant” may bring to mind a temporary worker contracted for an outsourced job. Applicants should also consider the standard label at their writing center. At the Fashion Institute of Technology, Lindsay was labeled a “writing consultant,” whereas Jessica was called a “peer tutor” at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Be consistent with what the director calls you and what you call yourself on your résumé in order to avoid confusion for prospective employers.

Tutors should also consider if and how they label the people they tutor. Our discourse analysis revealed that many tutors omit any reference to the people they tutor in professional documents. Labeling people with whom we collaborate provides an opportunity to highlight our interpersonal skills. Some professional documents we reviewed used descriptive qualifiers including “undergraduate,” “graduate,” “international,” “first-year,” “ESL,” “student-athletes,” “from multiple disciplines” and “learning disabilities” to better emphasize the diverse background of the people they tutor. Using “clients” may heighten the sense of professionalism and link writing center work to customer service. Using “students” may be a suitable label for the education field, but it may not express the mutual collaboration that “writers” connotes. Tutors should use these labels carefully based on an analysis of the specific job description and create several versions of their résumé to address different employer’s expectations.

QUALIFY YOUR ROLE

Tutors should highlight their diverse skill sets in a cover letter, CV, or résumé to signal to future employers that they have the necessary experiences to meet the requirements of the job. For example, many corporations are supporting more collaboration and team writing skills. Tutors are well-versed in collaborative writing, understand that there are always various perspectives through which they can view a situation, and know how to communicate these new lenses to clients. Tutors are also used to dealing with difficult clients. Cover letters give tutors an opportunity to emphasize how these interpersonal skills relate to the potential job. In some writing centers, tutors have the opportunity to conduct workshops or make classroom visits. Tutors should include this information on their résumé to show how they have learned public speaking skills and determined effective ways to reach their audience. For example, a tutor can specifically state: “Conducted workshops with Exhibit Design students and facilitated discussions of exhibit design prototypes, thesis statements, and arguments of validity.” Tutors can also include information about how they designed PowerPoint presentations for the workshops, brainstormed related writing activities, and then conducted a workshop. Including these activities on résumés demonstrates professional development in the writing center.

QUANTIFY YOUR ROLE

The above suggestions describe some strategies for tutors to qualify their writing center experience in professional documents, but another important step is to quantify this experience. Based on our discourse analysis, few professional documents included any attempt to quantify writing center work. Those that did merely recorded the average number of hours worked per week. This method may demonstrate time management skills, but simply stating that a tutor worked ten hours a week may not be the most accurate way to communicate the fluctuating flow of traffic in the average writing center. During midterms or finals week, the writing center may be a hectic place with students lined up at the door waiting to work with a tutor. On the other hand, during the first week of the semester or summer session, tutors may find themselves waiting for students to walk-in. In the first case, ten hours of work might translate to 20 individual sessions; in the second case, it could mean far fewer. We suggest that tutors quantify their work by indicating the number of individual tutoring sessions they conducted and the average length of time of each session. For example, a tutor could record, “At X University, I conducted approximately 200, 40-minute tutoring sessions.” Tutors could keep a journal or rely on session report forms to calculate the number of sessions they conducted. In the absence of documentation, they could consult with veteran tutors or their director for a reliable estimate. This quantification strategy gives potential employers an understanding of the size and scope of the tutor’s writing center. This quantification may also pleasantly surprise tutors, who may be unaware that they have most likely conducted hundreds of sessions and helped hundreds of writers during their tutoring careers.

LOOK AT OTHER RESOURCES

Angela Laflen offers helpful advice about making professional documents more persuasive to prospective employers, although her suggestions are for anyone writing a résumé, not specifically for writing tutors. For detailed lists of the various administrative, communication, technological, and other skills developed in the writing center, tutors should consult Kathleen Welsch’s and Lisa Whalen’s work. We also recommend that tutors consult veteran tutors and their director for feedback. Revising their professional documents will simultaneously showcase tutors’ skills and promote a wider awareness of the mission of writing centers. ♦

Note

Special thanks to Dr. Ben Rafoth, the director of the Writing Center at IUP, for his encouragement and help with this article. We are also grateful for the feedback we received at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring In Writing (NCPTW) in November 2011.

Works Cited

- Dinitz, Sue, and Jean Kiedaisch. “Tutoring Writing as Career Development.” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 34.3 (2009): 1-5. Print.
- Hughes, Bradley, Paula Gillespie, and Harvey Kail. “What They Take with Them: Findings from the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project.” *Writing Center Journal* 30.2 (2010): 12-46. Print.
- Laflen, Angela. “‘To Whom It May Concern’ and Beyond: Equipping Students to Write for Employers.” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 27.8 (2003): 4-6. Print.
- Welsch, Kathleen. “Shaping Careers in the Writing Center.” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 32.8 (2008): 1-8. Print.
- Whalen, Lisa. “Putting Your Writing Center Experience to Work.” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 29.9 (2005): 9-10. Print.





Muriel Harris, editor
TWENTY SIX LLC.
1835 E. Hallandale Beach Blvd #178
Hallandale Beach, FL 33009

Prsrt Std
US Postage
PAID
Milwaukee, WI
Permit #4496

CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

May 23, 2014: Canadian Writing Centres Conference, in St. Catherine's, Ontario, Canada
Contact: Liv Marken: <Liv.Marken@usask.ca>; Conference website: <cwcaaccr.wordpress.com/2013/12/17/cwcaaccr-2014-conference-registration-now-open/>.

July 19-22, 2014: European Writing Centers Association, in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany
Contact: <ewca14@europa-uni.de>; Conference website: <www.ewca14.eu>.

Oct. 1, 2014: Chicagoland Organization of Writing, Literacy, and Learning Centers: Tutor Leaders, in Aurora, IL.
Contact: Erin Micklo: <emicklo@imsa.edu>; Conference website: <sites.google.com/site/chicagoowllc/tutor-conference-2014>.

Oct. 30-Nov. 1, 2014: International Writing Centers Association and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Lake Buena Vista, FL
Contact: <iwcancptw2014@gmail.com>; Conference website: <iwcancptw2014.com>.

Nov. 7-8, 2014: Middle East/North Africa Writing Centers, in Dubai, UAE
Contact: Nadine Ashkuri <Nadine@tud.ac.ae>; Kathy O'Sullivan <Kathy@tud.ac.ae>; Conference website: <menawca.org>.

Feb. 19-21, 2015: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Nashville, TN
Contact: Stacia Watkins <stacia.watkins@lipscomb.edu>; Conference website: <www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html>.