

# THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E W T T E R

Volume 39, Number 7-8

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

March/April 2015

## — FROM THE EDITOR —

This issue of *WLN* focuses on the work of tutors—both their tutoring abilities and their scholarship. One important tutoring skill, as reported on in a study by Pamela Bromley, Eliana Schonberg, and Kara Northway, is that most tutors engage students intellectually when working together on the students' writing. Because such engagement is integral to determining student learning, tutoring is not just a student "service." It is, as demonstrated by the study, an essential part of students' intellectual growth.

Tutors are also scholars, as we know. One such scholarly project undertaken by a tutor is described by Claire Lutkewitte. A tutor in her writing center, Kamila Albert, spent a semester learning about and conducting archival research. That research resulted in uncovering knowledge about the Southeastern Writing Center Association's history that became part of the SWCA website. Kelly Elmore, another scholar/tutor, demonstrates her ability to transfer knowledge from one field (gymnastics) to another (tutoring) to help other tutors improve their scaffolding abilities. Working from a different perspective, Mahala Lettvin expands on the oft-repeated goal of tutors to help writers improve to show that a tutor can also help herself improve.

Also in this issue: Lisa Zimmerelli's call for proposals for a special *WLN* issue on religion in the writing center (p. 11); the *WLN*'s project, WcORD, a searchable database of online resources for writing centers that we invite you to use and add to by sharing resources you've developed (p. 9); and an article (or two?) for you to reflect on (p. 5).

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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## STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE WRITING CENTER: COGNITIVE CHALLENGE, TUTOR INVOLVEMENT, AND PRODUCTIVE SESSIONS

◆ Pamela Bromley, Pomona College, Claremont, CA  
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Student engagement and intellectual challenge are key to successful learning, according to widely circulated reports from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE 36; Gallup-Purdue University). How student-writers engage and how they define and value engagement, however, is often missing from these conversations; in addition, the role of writing centers in engagement is often misunderstood. For example, the NSSE places writing centers only in one of four engagement categories—campus environment, as part of "support services"—separating writing centers problematically from two other NSSE categories, writing and learning with peers (NSSE 34, 45). Our empirical, multi-institutional study uncovers and evaluates students' definitions of intellectual engagement in their writing center sessions. First, most students report they are engaged. Second, students define "intellectual engagement" variously: as cognitive involvement; as affective social interaction; and further, as a collaborative process—not just a collaborative outcome—of problem-solving. Third, students are paying attention to, and valuing, both their own and their tutors' engagement, specifically whether consultants think and engage with them and their ideas, in

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**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 book reviews and Tutor's Column essays, in MLA format (including Works Cited). Please send files through the *WLN* website.

contrast to the NSSE's assumption of one-way support implied in the language associated with campus support services. Finally, if students feel engaged, they are statistically more likely to report productive sessions. Simply coming in to talk about writing with a consultant (even an especially friendly one) is not always intellectually engaging or productive in and of itself.

The implications of our study speak to the place of writing centers within the knowledge-making communities that are our academic institutions. In light of the NSSE underreporting writing centers' work, our findings demonstrate that writing centers provide measurable engagement data in line with universities' missions. In combining quantitative and qualitative data, we illustrate the need to address students' multifaceted definitions of intellectual engagement formally and informally in pedagogy and research.

## METHODOLOGY

Our study uses quantitative methods (administering the same exit survey) and qualitative methods (conducting focus groups) at three very different institutions: a small liberal arts college (SLAC); a medium, private, research university (MRU); and a large, public, land-grant university (LPU). In 2009-10, we collected over 2000 survey submissions, completed on computers immediately after sessions in each writing center. The survey included these two statements: "During the consultation, I felt intellectually engaged" and "I feel that my consultation was productive." We analyzed results at the 0.05 level using t-tests, defined by statisticians as a test that determines whether there is a statistical difference between data from two groups. At the 0.05 significance level, we are 95% confident that the differences observed are statistically significant and not the result of chance; at the 0.01 significance level, we are 99% confident that the differences observed are statistically significant.

Because we wanted to discover how students were defining "intellectual engagement" and to probe students' perceptions of their visits, we conducted focus groups in spring 2012 with writing center users. We had 10 groups, totaling 37 participants across all 3 schools. To train tutors to facilitate hour-long focus groups, we followed the protocol in Cushman, Marx, Brower, Holahan, and Boquet's 2005 *WLN* article, which outlines how to collaborate with tutors to conduct peer-to-peer focus groups by including information on moderator and participant selection, incentives, and recording and room set-up. Using our survey results, we created one set of questions for all campuses and then collaborated with tutors to adapt the questions for student populations. Our questions included 1) "For you, what does it mean to be 'intellectually engaged' in a writing center session? Can you give an example?" and 2) "Is it important that your session is intellectually engaging? Why?"

We note some potential study limitations. First, like many surveys, we did not pre-test the student survey to ensure validity; therefore, we were not able to confirm, in advance of administering the survey, that the language of all the questions was unambiguous to participants. Second, both the survey and the focus groups are subject to selection bias. With respect to the survey, tutors did not invite all students to complete it, and some students chose not to. With respect to the focus groups, students volunteered to attend and therefore may have been more likely to feel positive about their experiences, though some participants communicated negative experiences. Third, a potential exists for positive-response bias. Because students took the survey immediately after their appointments, a halo-effect may have occurred, in which students' initial positive perceptions of their visit to the writing center influenced their immediate survey responses (Bell 9). In addition, survey and focus group questions may have prompted students to give socially acceptable answers, something common in social science research (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff 552). Finally, while the survey had 2000+ responses, the focus groups had only 37 participants, who could only share individual experiences. Limitations notwithstanding, investigating student engagement using mixed methods provides a fuller, more comprehensive picture than either method alone.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identifying whether students believed they experienced intellectual engagement in their sessions was our first step. Our survey found that 83-95% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they did. While our surveys revealed that a large majority of students at all three schools felt intellectually engaged, our focus groups investigated students' understandings of what this meant to them, including whether students found such engagement productive. In responding to questions about their definitions of intellectual engagement, students reported a range of understandings that fell into two complementary categories: "intellectual engagement" in the writing center as cognitive challenge and "intellectual engagement" as tutor collaboration.

### INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT AS COGNITIVE CHALLENGE

Students at all three schools indicated that intellectual engagement incorporated cognitive challenge, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Representative Definitions of Intellectual Engagement as Cognitive Challenge by Type of Institution—Focus Groups

SLAC	MRU	LPU
<p>"Having my ideas challenged"</p> <p>"Actually making me think about whether or not what I was trying to say was worth saying"</p>	<p>"Challenge"</p> <p>"Just asking the questions and making you think about it in a new way and maybe try and help you engage in it"</p>	<p><i>"Being challenged"</i></p> <p><i>"Making you think"</i></p>

Focus group responses at all three institutions were similar in that, without prompting, students defined "intellectual engagement" as "challenge." Students' responses from all institutions referred to being challenged and to "thinking," more explicitly:

"Asking me questions about it until I know exactly what I am saying" (SLAC)

"What I was thinking when I wrote that?" (sic) (LPU)

"Pushing you beyond boundaries" (MRU)

Researchers in education and composition equate engagement with higher-order thinking, such as recognizing the necessity of making meaning out of information (Flynn 6-7; Manning and Hanewell 36). By promoting rhetorical awareness, tutors, like instructors, help challenge student-writers to draw conclusions from difficult and sometimes conflicting information. Our students' definitions of engagement diverge importantly from NSSE definitions. While the NSSE focuses on outcomes of educational experiences, students also find process valuable. As one can see from students' comments, the presence of a second party (the tutor) is what prompts intellectual challenge in the moment, through the give-and-take of conversation between the tutor and the student. Thus, cognitive challenge and thinking happen in, and because of, the writing center session, rather than exclusively through students' engagement with texts or content.

*“ [O]ur findings demonstrate that writing centers provide measurable engagement data in line with universities’ missions. ”*

### INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT AS TUTOR INVOLVEMENT

In addition to perceiving "intellectual engagement" as cognitive challenge, focus group participants emphasized the necessity of their tutors' active involvement with their writing, thinking, and ideas. Students' reported understanding of intellectual engagement as thinking/challenge is tightly connected to tutors stimulating students' thinking. Intellectual engagement thus goes far beyond student-tutor rapport at all three institutions, as indicated in Table 2.

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Center for Writing Director College of Holy Cross

The College of the Holy Cross is establishing a new Center for Writing and seeks a Director.

Ph.D. in a relevant field, with a special interest in writing pedagogy required; interest and experience in ESL pedagogy preferred; experience in directing a writing center or writing-across-the-curriculum program will be given the strongest consideration. This is a 12-month, exempt level, position that reports directly to the Office of the Dean. To review our Employee Benefit Options, please go to: <[offices.holycross.edu/humanresources/benefits](http://offices.holycross.edu/humanresources/benefits)>.

Please submit a cover letter, curriculum vitae, statement of teaching philosophy, and transcripts (undergraduate and graduate). Application deadline is March 16, 2015. Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. Should you be a candidate for further consideration after hiring manager review, you will be contacted by a human resources representative.

KJ Rawson <[kjrawson@holycross.edu](mailto:kjrawson@holycross.edu)> is happy to answer questions about the position: Full ad available here: <[holycross.interviewexchange.com/jobofferdetails.jsp?JOBID=56982](http://holycross.interviewexchange.com/jobofferdetails.jsp?JOBID=56982)>.

EEOP Employer

**Table 2:** Representative Definitions of Intellectual Engagement as Tutor Involvement by Type of Institution—Focus Groups

SLAC	MRU	LPU
<p>“The [writing] fellow is thinking”</p> <p>“There is back and forth”</p> <p>“Things are clicking”</p> <p>“When my writing fellow doesn’t tell me what they think of my argument, necessarily, but keeps asking me questions about it until I know exactly what I am saying”</p>	<p>“I like it when they’re [the tutor is] just as excited about my work as I am”</p> <p>“Active communication”</p> <p>“The [tutor] I was talking to just got me interested. . . . The way he approached it I was like, ‘Wow that could be a cool paper’ where previously I was like, ‘This sucks, I don’t want to do this at all.’ . . . And then I was really into it”</p> <p>“I just think [the tutor] has the power to spark your interest. . . . I feel like they’re really good in the Writing Center about that. . . . [T]hey can gauge whether they feel like you’re into the paper or not.”</p>	<p>“Someone coming at you at the level you’re at”</p> <p>“He or she is asking you questions, and it’s making you think”</p> <p>“[The tutor] showing an interest. Then as an individual, clearly wanting [the writer] to succeed. Not just throwing words out”</p>

Students notice whether consultants match intellectual challenge and excitement, revealing an understanding of intellectual engagement as a two-way street. Student-writers describe this engagement as centered not only in the writing, but also in the conversation and the individual writer and learner. In the focus groups, students reported a relationship between these features of intellectual engagement—cognitive challenge and tutor collaboration. As one student explained, “You have to use your brain because the only way you’re going to understand any of the concepts or even begin to work on your paper, you have to be thinking on your feet, engaged in the conversation” (LPU).

## INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT AS PRODUCTIVE AND IMPORTANT

Having established the presence of intellectual engagement in writing centers and identified students’ definitions of intellectual engagement, we can now ask: how does it affect students’ impressions of how productive writing center sessions were? While some students in the surveys and focus groups noted that intellectual engagement was not linked to productive sessions, most students reported a strong, and even necessary, connection. Table 3 presents survey findings from all three institutions.

**Table 3:** Relationship between Intellectual Engagement and Productivity by Type of Institution—Survey Data

	SLAC	MRU	LPU
Of the students who felt intellectually engaged, the percentage of students who felt their consultation was productive	100%** (n=374/374)	99%** (n=1336/1369)	100%** (n=339/340)
Of the students who did <i>not</i> feel intellectually engaged, the percentage of students who felt their consultation was productive	67%** (n=10/15)	51%** (n=25/49)	18%** (n=5/28)

\*\*At all three schools, a statistically significant difference exists when comparing the student productivity ratings in the first and second rows of the table ( $p < 0.01$ ).

If students agreed they were intellectually engaged, almost all of them also agreed sessions were productive (99-100%). Conversely, if students agreed that they were not intellectually engaged, they were much less likely to agree that their sessions were productive (18-67%). At all three campuses, t-tests reveal a statistically significant difference in students’ productivity ratings depending on whether students are or are not



# ANNOUNCEMENTS

intellectually engaged ( $p < 0.01$ ); there is a 99% probability that this finding is not due simply to chance. In short, student reports of intellectual engagement and productivity strongly overlap in the writing centers we studied.

While the survey data demonstrate the correlation between productivity and intellectual engagement, the focus groups showed a causal connection between productive, or successful, sessions and intellectual engagement. At all three schools, the majority of focus group participants connected intellectual engagement to productive sessions, as seen in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Relationship between Intellectual Engagement and Productivity by Type of Institution—Focus Groups

SLAC	MRU	LPU
<p>“It is necessary”                      “Because I felt that my writing fellow was really thinking about my paper not just as a paper but as a statement, actually respecting it as some academic thought, as opposed to just a paper for a grade, which I found very helpful. It sort of got me to the place I wanted to be, and it also made the consultation really interesting and not just kind of something to sit through”</p>	<p>“It’s hard to write a paper if you’re not interested in it at all and you just really don’t want to be doing it. . . . [I]f the person that you’re meeting with is helping you get more involved with it or happy about writing it, then that’s helpful. Because if they’re not even interested in it, then you’re not going to get anything out of that session”</p>	<p><i>“The only way you’re going to understand any of the concepts or even begin to work on your paper . . . [is to be] engaged in the conversation you’re having, so that way it can better benefit you”</i>  <i>“Yeah, I believe so. That’s the only way it’s going to help you!”</i></p>

Students noted not just the connection, but the necessity, of intellectual engagement for productive sessions.

There is a potential difference across institutions here. Very few students reported on the survey that they could have a productive session without being intellectually engaged, and students in all but one of the focus groups described intellectual engagement and productivity as wedded. Students in one of the five focus groups at the MRU did not believe that intellectual engagement was absolutely necessary for a successful session:

- “I don’t think so”
- “It’s not the tutor’s job to be intellectually stimulated”
- “I don’t have to be challenged to be productive”

These students were the minority in the focus groups both at the MRU and in general. This difference may be partially attributable to variations in campus cultures, such as the lack of an official mascot or central gathering place at the MRU.

## CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing empirical data, we found that students who used our writing centers have a more nuanced understanding and appreciation of their own, and of their tutors’, intellectual engagement. When students were intellectually engaged in the writing center, they believed their sessions were also productive. Students valued the experience of being cognitively challenged and collaborating well with their tutor, someone who was excited by their ideas and by them, both as writers and as people in the midst of a learning process.

That student-visitors valued their own intellectual engagement, that this engagement almost always led to productive sessions and that tutors’ engagement played a key role has two important implications. First,

### Another Call for Your Reflection

Once again, as part of our 40th anniversary celebration of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* (scheduled to become *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* with the beginning of Vol. 40 in Sept.), we invite you to reflect on an article that has appeared over all those years. How has some particular article influenced writing center scholarship and work? How has this topic changed directions since the time in which it was written? Why? What relevance does the article have?

Please send your reflection through the Submission section on our website: <writinglabnewsletter.org>. And we invite your recommendations for future articles for these Reflections. Send suggestions for future articles for this to Muriel Harris (harrism@purdue.edu). We recommend that reflections be limited to about 200 words, and we will notify you in advance as to whether your response will be published. Deadline for submitting your reflection: April 13, 2015.

### A Call to Reflect On Lerner’s Bean Counting

This time, given the drumbeat about the need for assessment, we’re asking for your thoughts on Neal Lerner’s “Counting Beans and Making Beans Count,” Vol. 22.1 (September 1997), and, if appropriate to what is on your mind, also his later “Choosing Beans Wisely” Vol. 26.1 (September 2001). Both articles are available in the open access Archives on the *WLN* website: <writinglabnewsletter.org/>. We look forward to reading your thoughts about this topic and sharing them with other *WLN* readers.

## INTERNATIONAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

**October 8-10, 2015  
Pittsburgh, PA**  
"Writing Center  
(r)Evolution"  
**Keynote speaker:  
Ben Rafoth**

We invite you to consider writing center (r)evolutions: the ways in which we create our writing center pedagogies, practices, spaces, and programs through artistic and technological innovations. Playing on Pittsburgh's own evolution, we encourage proposals that consider the evolution of your own writing centers and writing center work.

Successful proposals might focus on new communities, places, and spaces, and be inspired by (but not limited to) threads described in detail on the conference website. Conference formats include concurrent sessions, panel presentations, roundtable discussions, poster presentations, workshop sessions, ignite sessions, and special interest groups.

Proposal deadline: April 1, 2015. Please contact Russell Carpenter, Program Chair: <russell.carpenter@eku.edu>, phone: 859-622-7403, with questions regarding the conference proposal submission process. Conference website: <writingcenters.org/events-2/past-conferences/iwca-2015-writing-center-revolutions>.

it causes us to reconsider tutor training. While scholars have usefully discussed the intellectual work of tutors and administrators (e.g., Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail 13, 26; Geller and Denny 115; Marshall 78), tutors need not only to consider their own intellectual work, but also to communicate it effectively. Because thinking is a difficult process to "see" in others, tutors need to be not only thinking during the session, as we already hope they are, but also making this thinking visible by actively engaging with students and their ideas. As the data make plain, the intellectual engagement of tutors, at its best, is seen by students as "clicking," "back and forth," "excited." This finding suggests that tutors should model thinking as a process of collaborative knowledge-creation. Making tutors aware that students notice how engaged tutors are suggests that, while we should not necessarily promote "performance" by tutors, we should explicitly encourage tutors to demonstrate more frequently and transparently their thinking processes and their personal engagement with every student-writer.

Second, our research changes how we communicate with the rest of the university in terms that are meaningful both to ourselves and to administrators concerned with student learning. Writing centers give students outside of the classroom a chance to practice intellectual engagement, something the national studies, campus administrators, and scholars report as essential to higher education. In conducting assessments for administrators and themselves, writing center practitioners can point to a statistically significant finding: that the more engaged students are in writing center sessions, the more productive students believe their sessions are. This finding on engagement, therefore, exemplifies one way that writing center missions dovetail with institutional missions—an expectation sometimes difficult for centers to make explicit. Such communication with campus administrators may help to articulate to the broader academic community the importance of robust writing center-based research to elucidate the complexities of student learning. ♦

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## UNDERGRADUATE WRITING FELLOWS AND ARCHIVAL RESEARCH: ANSWERING THE “SO WHAT?” QUESTIONS

◆ *Claire Lutkewitte and Kamila Albert*  
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The concept of undergraduate writing center tutors as researchers is nothing new. For instance, at IWCA's 2012 conference, Lauren Fitzgerald gave a keynote speech on the subject which was later published in the *Writing Center Journal*. In a 2009 national survey conducted by Rebecca Jackson and Jackie Grutsch McKinney, 35% of the respondents indicated that undergraduates conducted research on writing center theory, practice, or administration. In fact, the research and scholarship conducted by undergraduates have been influencing writing center work for decades. Several publications feature undergraduates, including the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, the *American Undergraduate Journal of Research*, *Xchanges*, and *Young Scholars in Writing*. In a special issue of the *Writing Center Journal*, Melissa Ianetta and Lauren Fitzgerald argue that “there are no conversations in writing center studies that peer tutors cannot fruitfully address” (11). Likewise, in “Scholarship Reconsidered: Tutor-Scholars as Undergraduate Researchers,” Laurie Grobman and Jeanne Marie Rose see undergraduate research as “a means of cultivating engaged tutor-scholars” (10). Grobman and Rose propose that undergraduate research in the writing center can help tutors view their practicum holistically (10) and “see all their tutoring activities as part of a comprehensive scholarly agenda” (13). One kind of research that can be significant to an undergraduate’s comprehensive scholarly agenda is archival research. However, we, a writing instructor and an undergraduate writing fellow at the time, believe that undergraduate tutors should not only participate in archival research but also contribute to archives and that an internship course can provide the opportunity for this kind of work.

Through our involvement in our university’s Writing Fellows program and an internship project with the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA), we gained experience working with and building an archive. We have come to understand that archival research can have value beyond a graded class assignment. Undergraduates can develop a variety of essential skills conducting similar work and, as a result, can consider the broader implications of their research. For this project, Kamila learned these skills: critical thinking, observation, textual analysis, interpretation, evaluation, problem solving, visual design, and web authoring by a) collecting archival material, b) sorting through that material, c) creating a webspace to present the material, and d) writing a report that reflected on what she learned from this material. As a result of this work, Kamila’s final research paper stepped away from general conference themes to identify specific trends in presentation abstracts from 2008-2013. In the following article, we will reflect on this semester-long internship project undertaken by Kamila, the undergraduate writing fellow, and overseen by Claire, the instructor for the internship course, to show how undergraduates can develop and improve their research skills, even when they do not follow a traditional research agenda that begins with a single research question.

Founded in 1981, the SWCA held its 33rd conference in 2014. Yet, prior to the conference, its webpage only contained information and materials from the organization’s last seven conferences: 2008-2014. Aside from a small paragraph on the home page, there was little information about the history of SWCA’s conferences. Kevin Dvorak, SWCA’s past-president, 2013 conference co-chair, and coordinator of our university’s Writing Fellows program, identified this as a problem and asked Kamila if she would like to intern for the SWCA, research the organization’s history, and update the webpage. Because Kamila was interested in writing center work and had experience as a writing fellow, she agreed and signed up for the internship course with Claire.

### NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PEER TUTORING IN WRITING (NCPTW)

**November 5-8, 2015**  
**Salt Lake City, UT**  
**Westminster College**  
“(De)Center: Testing  
Assumptions about  
Peer Tutoring and  
Writing Centers”  
**Keynote: Jackie  
Grutsch McKinney**

Throughout its history, peer tutoring has often operated on a set of sometimes untested assumptions, but by (de)centering traditional notions of peer tutoring, we can re-imagine the idea of a center as a place and a praxis.

Proposals can be made online at [ncptw2015.org/call-for-papers/](http://ncptw2015.org/call-for-papers/). Special interest group (SIG) proposals can be submitted at [ncptw2015.org/call-for-special-interest-groups/](http://ncptw2015.org/call-for-special-interest-groups/). E-mail: [ncptw2015@gmail.com](mailto:ncptw2015@gmail.com).

Proposal Deadline: May 1, 2015.

## CANADIAN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

**May 29, 2015**  
**Ottawa, ON Canada**

The conference immediately precedes the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences Annual Conference (CHSS): <congress2015.ca/>. We welcome writing centre administrators, writing instructors, and tutors to join us for a day of discussions about writing centre practice, theory, and research. Contact: Lucie Moussu: <moussu@ualberta.ca>. Conference website: <cwcaaccr.wordpress.com/2015-conference-university-of-ottawa>.

## SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER CONFERENCE

**April 10, 2015**  
**Southern Illinois University Carbondale**  
"Facing the Future: Roles for Writing Centers on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Campuses"  
**Keynote: Carol Severino**

As part of our "Semester of the Writing Center," the Writing Center at Southern Illinois University Carbondale will host a regional conference. We invite all university units and academic departments to attend and foster conversation about the importance of collaboration in writing across the curriculum and in the disciplines. For further information, contact Katrina Marie Bell: <kmbell@SIU.EDU>.

Our university's description for the internship course is as follows: A 10 to- 20-hour-per-week field or work experience for one semester in the student's major area of study. Its learning outcomes include the following: 1) Engage in approximately 10 to- 20-hours-per-week of supervised educational and constructive nonpaying work at the specified venue, 2) keep a thorough weekly work journal that not only describes the student's work experience but is analytical and reflective, and 3) complete one 10-page report that addresses a related critical issue. Working closely with the internship director and Claire, Kamila was able to plan her semester based on the requirements for the course.

Archives can help us discover "the nature of our efforts over time" and help us "chronicle a wide array of writing center operations" (Liggett, Jordan, and Price 64). Kamila's plan was to locate and organize materials from the first 26 years of the SWCA's conference history. Doing so would not only chronicle SWCA's past but also preserve an important period in the larger field of writing center studies. As Gaddis contends, "If you think of the past as a landscape, then history is the way we represent it, and it's that act of representation that lifts us above the familiar to let us experience vicariously what we can't experience directly: a wider view" (5). Kamila's goal in locating and organizing materials from SWCA's past was to ultimately present a wider view of SWCA. To do so, rather than using an overarching research question as her guide as one might in a traditional research project, Kamila relied on answering a series of questions and completing a series of tasks throughout her internship to meet the learning outcomes of the course.

At the beginning of Kamila's project, the SWCA's map was a work-in-progress—a small portion of the organization's history. Her research required finding information that was not readily available online, so her first task was to create a list of SWCA board members, conference leaders, and participants—past and present—to contact about materials such as programs and papers. For an undergraduate, this was an exciting opportunity to learn directly from leaders in the field, and Kamila soon understood that she was building both an archive and a network. However, she also discovered the difficulty of contacting writing centers in the middle of a busy semester. She expanded her contact list; she sent e-mails to the SWCA board, general writing centers, past conference chairs, and university libraries. She submitted posts to the WCenter listserv and a Facebook group from the IWCA Summer Institute. Many of these attempts produced unsatisfactory results. Although she was sent many replies praising her research, after the first month of work, her contacts had only supplied her with a few photos and general information. Kamila recognized that these frustrations are a regular part of the research process, and she continued to submit requests through these outlets and others. Very slowly, answers and materials trickled into her inbox, mailbox, and archive search results. These efforts put her in contact with the right people, often at unexpected times, who answered her questions and provided the materials she needed. The process even put her in touch with leaders of the 1980s conferences, including an interview with one of the organization's retired founders, Tom Waldrep, who discussed the purpose of the SWCA and his larger efforts to address the misperception of writing centers as remedial stations.

Besides collaborating with leaders, students who participate in archival research learn a number of skills such as critical thinking, observation, textual analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. For instance, in collecting materials such as conference programs, she was not only reading and evaluating them, but she was also learning to preserve them for future generations by updating the online space where they could be accessed by others. Claire witnessed Kamila's growth as a researcher when she evaluated past conference themes and connected them to her work with the Writing Fellows program. Kamila's project allowed her to understand her work as a peer tutor from a larger historical perspective. Before her internship with the SWCA, Kamila only considered herself a writing tutor working in a small program and doing something she enjoyed. She never thought to veer too far from her immediate writing center environment until her peers and professors encouraged her to get involved in local and regional conferences. Later on, the SWCA's research project introduced her to writing center databases and online communities and served as a gateway to current and former directors of other writing centers. While not the director of the Writing Fellows program on campus, Claire also could see how Kamila's development would benefit that program in a number of ways. For instance, Kamila would be



a knowledgeable resource for other fellows in the program interested in presenting at future SWCA conferences. She could also help guide fellows interested in conducting their own archival research.

Kamila's project required her to conduct archival research, define relevant content and, finally, condense and present her findings in a visual format for site visitors. In doing so, she made important decisions that all researchers contend with. As an instructor, Claire also recognized how valuable this experience was in developing Kamila's problem solving skills. As mentioned earlier, Kamila was challenged in finding contacts who would help her, but she also faced challenges when sifting through materials, trying to decide what belonged and what did not. Like Nan Johnson in "Autobiography of an Archivist," Kamila found herself "giving contour, weight, direction, and angle to the materials" she collected (292). In order to do this, she relied on these questions: 1) Which information will be most valuable to site visitors? 2) What combination of materials, visual and textual, will create a complete account of these conferences? Throughout this process, Kamila kept a log of her work and met with Claire to discuss her progress, questions, and concerns. In reading her logs, Claire could see that Kamila actively tried to work out her frustrations and strategized how to move forward.

While Kamila built the archive, she digitized multiple documents and worked with Shanti Bruce, the organization's webmaster and a professor at our university, to arrange her content on the "Past Conferences" page. This aspect of the internship challenged Kamila to organize her research, an amalgamation of six months' work, in a professional, user-friendly format. In this regard, Kamila was able to see her project to its conclusion, from the early research stages to the moment the webpage went live. The current "Past Conferences" page on SWCA's website now presents a more complete picture of an organization's annual gathering, a gathering which reflects on the practical and theoretical aspects of its field. The website represents over thirty years of ideas, research, and shared moments.

Once the semester was complete, Kamila had one last course requirement to meet, a final reflective research paper that contemplated the larger, more important "So what?" questions involved in historical inquiry. These questions included:

1. So, I just did all this archival research, but what does it mean?
2. So, what is all this research good for?
3. So, what greater value does it have other than just helping me to pass this course?
4. So, what does it do for the field of writing center studies?

Often, people remember general conference histories by their larger themes. However, in doing so, they bypass individual voices and trends. For this reason, Kamila's final paper investigated particular topics in conference presentations by answering additional questions like these: Were there recurring topics? What messages did writing centers want to communicate? In the introduction to *Undergraduate Research in English Studies*, Laurie Grobman and Joyce Kinkead suggest that research leads students to "gain an insider's understanding of field-specific debates, develop relevant skills and insights for future careers and graduate study, and most important, contribute their voices to creating knowledge through the research process (ix).

Kamila's final research paper presented terms we would expect to see in writing center conferences in context. "Tutor," for example, does not only refer to presenters but also links to topics like guiding students in reading/writing poetry and working with graduate and non-traditional age tutees. Her "So, what?" response concluded that broader research is a necessary starting point. As the writing center field progresses, it is important that we establish where we have been. In examining a wider view of these histories, further research prompts us to identify and record more specific trends.

Since the SWCA's initial conference in 1981, writing centers have evolved and adapted alongside their educational institutions. They have established themselves within their respec-

## NEWS

### WcORD: WLN's Writing Center Online Resource Database

Writing center professionals have developed a huge collection of online resources, e.g., blogs, videos, podcasts, listservs, online archives for journals, and more. But how and where do we begin searching when we are looking for answers?

To meet the need for a searchable database that helps us find information and materials, two of the *WLN* editorial staff have developed an open-access searchable database we're calling WcORD (Writing Center Online Resource Database). *WLN* Development Editor, Alan Benson, set up the database, and *WLN* Associate Editor, Lee Ann Glowzinski, led the project to start collecting resources to put into WcORD.

We invite you to use WcORD to search for information and to add resources you use or have developed that will be helpful for others involved with writing center work.

We are preparing a link on the *WLN* homepage with an introduction, a link to WcORD <[groups.diigo.com/group/wln-resource-archive](http://groups.diigo.com/group/wln-resource-archive)>, and instructions for how you can add resources and materials to WcORD, plus the form to use to add materials: <[goo.gl/forms/z4dVWtBglp](http://goo.gl/forms/z4dVWtBglp)>.

There are many useful resources the *WLN* staff haven't found that you can add to WcORD. So please start sharing what you have developed or used by adding it to WcORD. This is a group project that will be as important as we all can make it.

tive academic communities as creative and collaborative environments. Archival research has allowed Kamila to reflect more thoroughly on conversations within the field. At the time, Kamila was also taking a Writing Center Studies course, which gave her research a historical and contextual foundation. On a personal level, Kamila's research interests include technology in writing center spaces. Her search for conference information in sources like the *Writing Lab Newsletter* archives allowed her to gauge how tutoring sessions have changed with the rise of technology. These experiences influenced her work as a peer tutor and guided her towards pursuing writing center studies at the graduate level.

We acknowledge that not all tutors will become writing center scholars. However, we argue that students in any field, no matter the length of their tenure there, can benefit by becoming more engaged in that field. Archival research is one way for tutors to better understand their work in the writing center. Because of this understanding, they can improve their tutoring skills, helping fellow students and their writing center in the process. For example, Kamila's research introduced her to new strategies she could implement during sessions, and she has shared these with other tutors in the program. Having a direct effect on the improvement of an academic community prepares students to affect communities outside of academia. Those who feel connected to a community are more likely to invest in that community. For example, this project allowed Kamila to develop her research skills, which could be valuable for future work experiences.

Academia has a long history of creating grand narratives, ones that serve as explanations for how things have come to be. To understand the past, we certainly have to consider how these larger events have taken place. But, often these larger events and their grand narratives overshadow smaller events that shape the past just as much. To know the present we must investigate the whole past; we must account for all voices and events, not just a few. Archival research can help tutors examine and understand the history of writing centers from different viewpoints, fill in gaps of missing information, uncover voices of those marginalized, or rewrite accounts that are incomplete. In doing so, they help tutors raise questions about an institution's past that can produce answers about how to make the future better. As mentioned earlier, if students can see this for one institution, they may be able to see this for another, one outside of academia.

Christina Saidy, Mark Hannah, and Tom Sura contend that archiving can help students move beyond the notion that archives are just "monolithic repositories" and to see them as "dynamic rhetorical texts" (179). Archiving involves a number of processes: appraisal, selection, retention, collaboration, and articulation that can help students develop archival literacy (180). These kinds of processes can be useful to students even if they are not going to be writing center scholars when they graduate college. Appraising, selecting, retaining, collaborating, and articulating are important processes in professions that, for instance, rely on the use of mass information to do business in a globalized world. Tech companies, for example, have to decide which data to store and use to develop new products. These companies need employees who can appraise, select, retain, and so forth.

Although the internship and the course are over, we would like to see the archive of SWCA continue to expand. We consider the present published archive a start, and our hope is that people who visit the website will submit more memories, histories, and information. In archiving, Kamila was able to write a story that hadn't yet been told. That is what archiving can do. Kamila's project affirmed that research can be a complex process. The more experience students have in it, the better. Likewise, "So what?" questions are important for undergraduates to grapple with even when they are not pursuing careers in writing centers. Often undergraduates hold a perspective that the research paper they write is only meant for the teacher, only meant for passing a class, or only meant for a writing center director at a particular writing center. As we have observed, undergraduate research, especially archival research, can have a profound effect on the discipline in many ways beyond a passing grade and should be framed as such. Claire and Kamila discovered that the writing center field and its tutors have a lot to gain from this work. Writing center tutors can help the field shed light on its important past and, along the way, develop a better understanding of their work as peer tutors. ♦

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### Proposal for May/June 2016 Special Issue of *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*: "Religion in the Writing Center"

Guest editor: Lisa Zimmerelli  
Loyola University Maryland

#### Religion in the Writing Center, May/June 2016 Special Issue

Although a robust conversation around race, class, gender, and sexual identity has emerged within writing center studies, religion as a category of identity remains under-theorized in our field, perhaps because of its characterization as intimate, personal, and almost irreproachably private. Harry Denny's consideration of the "politics attendant" to sex and gender in *Facing the Center* draws attention to the way in which "private" aspects of identity are performed in social contexts and how they shape and are shaped by political discourse.

For this special issue on "Religion in the Writing Center," we invite proposals for articles up to 3000 words that recognize religious identity as one category of identity that is present in our daily work in writing centers and that explore the potential of religious belief to inspire productive academic and civic discourses in the writing center. We are interested in proposals covering the broadest range of religious identity that consider questions organized around the broader categories of religion as an identity category; writing centers at religious/faith based institutions; the role of religion at secular institutions; tutor-student interactions over issues of faith and religion; and tutor religious identity.

Proposals will be accepted through May 30, 2015.  
Invitations to submit full articles will be issued by July 1, 2015.  
Manuscripts will be due on December 31, 2015.

Proposal format: Please submit a 250–400 word proposal that includes your focus and working, relevant scholarship, theoretical underpinnings, and your plans for structuring a 3000-word article. Send the proposal to Lisa Zimmerelli at <ldzimmerelli@loyola.edu>. Please provide full contact information with your submission.

(For the more complete CFP, please go to the entry on *WLN's* blog: Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders: <[www.writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/2015/02/religion-in-the-writing-center-cfp](http://www.writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/2015/02/religion-in-the-writing-center-cfp)>.)



## 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 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 the blog at <[writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/](http://writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/)>.

*WLN* Blog Editor, Josh Ambrose <[jambrose@mcdaniel.edu](mailto:jambrose@mcdaniel.edu)>, suggests the following: "Read more about the "Write it Like Disaster" project fostered by Scott Whiddon, musician and director of the Transylvania University Writing Center and member of the Southeast Writing Center Association. Bonus: listen to over two hours of free music from the writing center community, while you're at it!"

# TUTOR'S COLUMN

## GYMNASTICS IN THE WRITING CENTER: HOW TO GIVE A GOOD SPOT

◆ Kelly Elmore  
Georgia State University  
Atlanta, GA

In life before graduate school, I coached gymnastics, which helped prepare me for tutoring. I learned how to read a gymnast, to know who needs a kind word of encouragement, who needs a mini-lesson on technique, who needs an honest bit of criticism, and who needs to be left alone to practice. Writers in the center are similar to gymnasts, each one needing a slightly different kind and amount of support. Based on my experience spotting gymnasts as they learn new skills, I've developed an informal heuristic for "spotting" writers in the Writing Studio. Exploring the metaphor of spotting and pointing out links between coaching and tutoring will help other tutors to think through the process of supporting writers and slowly removing support to promote independence.

Spotting is providing support for a skill a gymnast is not quite ready to use on his own. To help explain how spotting works in gymnastics, I'll explain the process of learning a back handspring. When first teaching the body positioning for the handspring, the coach uses a lot of muscle to carry the gymnast slowly through the movement. Once the gymnast understands the skill, the coach sets up activities for independent practice of the parts of the skill. When each part is individually mastered, the coach uses her hands to propel the gymnast through the back handspring with a little extra "oomph" and is prepared to catch the gymnast if he falls. Each time the gymnast improves the back handspring a little, the coach withdraws a tiny bit more support, until the gymnast is essentially using the skill on his own. Eventually, when the gymnast can do a back handspring completely on his own, the coach stands nearby to provide a "mental spot," a supportive presence to encourage confidence. After using the skill independently many times, the coach removes her physical presence so the gymnast sees he can do a back handspring now without any support. This technique of providing the right amount of support and then gradually removing it is often called scaffolding in education circles.<sup>1</sup> We all know writers need different levels of support as they learn new skills, but I have found it very hard to know when to remove scaffolding and how to judge if I removed the right amount of support. I don't want students who work with me to become dependent on my help (a danger of too much spotting), and I don't want them to go away feeling unsupported and overwhelmed (a danger of not providing enough spotting). I've developed a mental heuristic to help me determine how much to help and when to withdraw my help.

*STEP 1: JUMP IN SOMEWHERE:* This step requires listening to students' concerns, reading the writing they bring, and noticing body language cues about their level of confidence and their feelings. For example, a student mentions grammar as a main concern and shares the first few paragraphs of his paper with me. I notice a pattern of mistakes in joining sentences. Since there is a pattern of errors, expressed student interest, and nonverbal cues that he is nervous, I opt to give the student a lot of support on this issue. I start with a "heavy spot" to increase his confidence, to build trust and rapport, and to ensure a confidence-building, immediate success. In practice this means showing him an example in his own writing of the mistake, explain the rule, and show him exactly how to fix it. I don't ask a lot of open-ended, Socratic-style questions and am more directive at this point. I associate the moments when a tutor uses more directive techniques with the heavy spot a coach might give a frightened gymnast.

*STEP 2: EVALUATE THE RESPONSE:* Does the student show signs of not understanding or of low confidence about what I explained? If he seems to understand and feel confident about what I said, I move on to step three. If he seems unsure or expresses confusion, I return to step one and provide a heavier spot. For example, I explain the rule again with a much simpler example sentence. I use different words or try to make my explanation more visual. I find a way to give more emotional or intellectual support, since the student has shown me he is not yet ready for the next step. I continue to reevaluate his response and only move on to step three when the student shows understanding and confidence about joining sentences.

*STEP 3: SET UP INDEPENDENT EXERCISES FOR THE STUDENT:* When the student has shown he is ready for more independence, I don't remove all of the support immediately. I don't want the student to experience an immediate failure because I ask him to take on too much, and I want to make



sure he has a chance to practice his new knowledge with my support. Instead, I do what gymnastics coaches do: I break down the skill into pieces I feel the student can handle independently. I might ask the student to find a similar mistake in another sentence, but I don't ask him to fix it himself right away. I only ask him to do one part of the skill independently at a time. Alternately, I might find the next mistake for him and ask the student to fix it himself. I continue to show him how to do some of the task, but I ask him to take responsibility for other parts.

*STEP 4: EVALUATE:* Was the student able to do the smaller pieces of the task (sentence joining) by himself? If so, I move on to step five. If he wasn't able to complete the parts of the task independently, I return to step three with a heavier spot. I might give him more clues about where the mistake is, or I might provide the rule as the student tries to fix the sentence himself. There are many ways I could provide a little extra support, but I mustn't leave the student alone to use a skill he has shown me he can't quite succeed at yet.

*STEP 5: GIVE THE STUDENT A CHANCE TO PRACTICE THE WHOLE SKILL WITH A LITTLE BIT OF A SPOT:* Once the student can handle the pieces of the task, I ask the student to find and correct mistakes on his own, but I continue to provide support and advice as he goes. Think of the coach giving the gymnast a little more "oomph" to complete the back handspring and being there to catch the gymnast if he falls. In this step, my role is to catch any mistakes as they are happening and provide guidance.

*STEP 6: EVALUATE:* Was the student able to find and correct his sentences with my support? If so, I move on to the next step. If not, I return to step five and support the student through as many repetitions of the skill as he needs to be ready to move on. Different students might require more supported practice, while others might fly through this step. Remember that very few gymnasts go from a back handspring with a spot to an independent back handspring without a lot of repetition, supported practice, feedback, and encouragement. Writers sometimes need to practice new skills many times as well before they reach independent mastery.

*STEP 7: THE MENTAL SPOT:* Many writers need the emotional support of working with new skills in our presence without our help. In this step, the student works on correcting his grammatical errors independently, perhaps editing a paragraph or two, while I sit supportively by. It can be hard for me to stay quiet, to watch passively, and to let the student be independent, but this step is essential if he is to carry these skills out side of the writing center, where he will not have a writing tutor with him as he writes. I bite my lip and sit on my hands, if necessary.

*Step 8: Evaluate:* Did the student work confidently on his own writing? If he made a lot of mistakes or became frustrated with the task, I return to step seven and continue to provide supportive watching and listening or go back to an earlier step and provide more help. If the student was able to complete the skill on his own, he's ready for step nine. Though he is ready to work on sentence joining independently, he may still need coaching and support on other writing issues. Occasionally students and gymnasts have trouble moving past the need for a mental spot. They might know how to do the work independently, but they might still feel dependent on us and less confident than they should be about their ability. As a coach, I sometimes had to remove myself gently from the situation (a bathroom break with instructions to keep going sometimes worked), and I use the same technique in the writing center. If a student doesn't want to let go of my help, sometimes I say, "I'm going to go get a coffee refill while you finish this paragraph. Want some?" And then I walk away.

*STEP 9: INDEPENDENT WORK:* At this point, the student is ready to work on sentence joining independently. However, in my experience, students at this stage need to hear what we are thinking about their progress. "I can see you are ready to do this on your own. What other concerns do you have about the paper?" ♦

#### Note

1. For more information about scaffolding and its role in the writing center, see Isabelle Thompson. "Scaffolding in the Writing Center: A Microanalysis of an Experienced Tutor's Verbal and Nonverbal Tutoring Strategies." *Written Communication* 26.4 (2009): 417-453. Print.



# TUTOR'S COLUMN

## BEYOND BETTER WRITING

◆ *Mabala Lettvin*  
*University of Washington Bothell*  
*Bothell, WA*

When I first began training as a consultant for the University of Washington Bothell Writing and Communication Center, I had hoped to find some formulaic method for my new role as a writing tutor. Initially, my understanding was that I was to help students become more aware of their own writing styles—implementing a non-directive approach by asking questions that encouraged self-reflection and self-correction. The focus, I reminded myself repeatedly, was to allow students to take ownership of their work: to develop the confidence and skills to become better writers. This focus aligns with the widely used writing center motto, we make better writers, not better papers. However, this motto and the accompanying philosophy, unfortunately, tend to oversimplify and negate the complexities inherent in the experiences and outcomes associated with both the writing consultant and the student. Tutoring at the writing center need not be reduced to merely making students better writers. Instead, tutoring can foster an awareness of our own development as writers, and expand beyond this narrow idea of “better writers” to include better students, better mothers, better wives, and in general—better individuals.

I first realized that I was internalizing this motto very narrowly during my second quarter working at the writing center. “Mary” invaded my life ridiculously early one morning during the depressing first weeks of winter quarter. When she arrived, her annoyingly chipper personality and glowing appearance were in sharp contrast to the gloomy silence I had found solace in. This was Mary’s first time visiting the center, so after I attempted a semi-coherent introduction of the writing center’s missions and practices, I asked her about her assignment. Pulling a labeled, color-coded, and extraordinarily organized binder, she handed me the assignment guidelines and explained she was required to narrate her personal experiences through the lens of academic theory and scholarship derived from her course learning. When asked, she indicated she was more comfortable if I read her paper aloud so she could mark her paper and catch any mistakes as she listened.

“Is that okay with you?” She asked timidly, as if she was doing something wrong or in some way offending me. Of course it was okay. It had to be absolutely, positively okay. As a tutor, I was to ensure she was as comfortable as possible. And despite my aversion to reading aloud, her assignment actually intrigued me.

“Yes, that’s fine!” I responded, fumbling with a pen I had planned on handing her but awkwardly left dangling in the air between us after realizing she had a dozen lined up and ready to go.

It turns out I lied to her. It wasn’t fine. Nothing about her writing was fine. Nothing about me reading her words aloud was fine. Her introduction was everything we as consultants dream introductions to be. The remainder of the paper followed the assignment guidelines impeccably. The words were beautifully constructed: strung together artistically, creatively, and professionally. The vocabulary was impressive without being condescending. The transitions from academic to personal language were smooth, and all ideas in-between flowed logically from one to the next. All elements categorized under “higher order concerns” were not concerns at all. So I looked for the “lower order concerns:” grammatical mishaps, spelling errors, run-on sentences. I looked for margin inconsistencies, for anything—at least she could have written it in Comic Sans so I could enlighten her on the appropriate font selection and usage (never, ever, use Comic Sans!). I searched the pages for something. Anything. There was nothing.

My voice shaking, I struggled with reading her words in my voice. Her acknowledgment of her various positions in society as a woman, mother, wife, and student—and therefore both as invisible and privileged—were extremely painful to read. Her words represented my loneliness, my frustration, and my own struggles as a woman, mother, (ex)wife, and student. Not only was I envious of how awake Mary was at 8 AM, I was also envious of her beauty, the way she did her hair, her makeup, her outfit. I was envious of her academic achievements and her neatly organized binders. And most of all I was envious of her courage in writing words that represented my own struggles that I, for too long, avoided even

acknowledging. And thus, I hated that she had asked me to use my own voice to read her words.

We were approaching the final page of her paper as I fumbled on one word—the only word throughout the pages that made me pause. In truth I was delighted I had found something.

“What did you mean here, when you wrote that your husband ‘stalls’ you?”

“Oh, well, like, he, you know, he doesn’t want me to—he doesn’t want me to be myself I guess.”

“Oh? Hmm . . . can you tell me a bit more? I am just curious about why you chose this particular word, ‘stall’?”

She proceeded to tell me stories of her husband’s demands on her to keep quiet in social settings. The stories continued as she discussed parenting concerns, particularly in balancing demands as both a mother and a student. The message she internalized from her husband—and from others—was to be more invisible than she already was.

The conversation that followed may as well have been decorated with martinis and Virginia Slims, heels up on the table, filing our nails. The words coming out of our mouths likely mirrored a scene from some reality TV show on the entertaining, yet shallow housewives. “He said what?”—“I would have slapped him!”—“When did we ever decide it was a good idea to get married?”—comments of that nature. You know, language academics and tutors aren’t often allowed to say, but language that women, wives, and mothers are not only allowed to say, but also expected and often encouraged to say.

As it turns out, regardless of how unprofessional this conversation was, it was in fact highly productive not only because it was apparent we both needed a healthy venting session but also because we were becoming better writers and stronger women. We delved back into the paper with a keener sense of “self” —a self that represented not merely the lonely struggles of a mother attempting to finish her paper, but the collective self. I read her words more confidently, and she listened more intently, perhaps realizing they represented more than just her words. She began scratching out words like “maybe” and “possibly” and replacing them with definitive, bold statements about her identity and the position she has claimed, as well as the one she has been violently or otherwise forced into by her husband, her professors, her son, and society.

I realized then that my role as a tutor isn’t reduced to a simple motto, “we make better writers not better papers.” I am sure, without a doubt, our meeting made two better writers, and perhaps made two better women, two better friends, two better students, activists, wives.



*THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER IS ABOUT TO CHANGE NAMES!*

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## CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

**March 7, 2015:** Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Fresno, CA

**Contact:** Magda Gilewicz:  
<writingcenter@csufresno.edu>;  
Conference Website: [www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/writingcenter/ncwca2015/index.html](http://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/writingcenter/ncwca2015/index.html).

**April 10-11, 2015:** East Central Writing Centers Association, in Notre Dame, IN

**Contact:** Matthew Capdevielle:  
<matthew.capdevielle@nd.edu>;  
conference website:  
<[www.ecwca2015.org](http://www.ecwca2015.org)>.

**April 10-11, 2015:** Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Harrisonburg, VA

**Contact:** Jared Jay Featherstone:  
<feathejj@jmu.edu>; Conference website: <[mawcaconference.wix.com/mawca2015](http://mawcaconference.wix.com/mawca2015)>.

**April 18-19, 2015:** Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Hackettstown, NJ

**Contact:** Richard Severe: <severer@centenarycollege.edu>. Conference website: <[www.centenarycollege.edu/collaboratory](http://www.centenarycollege.edu/collaboratory)>.

**May 29, 2015:** Canadian Writing Centres Association, in Ottawa, ON, Canada

**Contact:** <Lucie Moussu: [moussu@ualberta.ca](mailto:moussu@ualberta.ca)>; Conference website: <[cwcaaccr.wordpress.com/2015-conference-university-of-ottawa/](http://cwcaaccr.wordpress.com/2015-conference-university-of-ottawa/)>.

**October 8-10, 2015:** International Writing Centers Association, in Pittsburgh, PA

**Contact:** Russell Carpenter: <[russell.carpenter@eku.edu](mailto:russell.carpenter@eku.edu)>; Conference website: <[writingcenters.org/events-2/past-conferences/iwca-2015-writing-center-revolutions](http://writingcenters.org/events-2/past-conferences/iwca-2015-writing-center-revolutions)>.

**November 5-8, 2015:** National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Salt Lake City, UT

**Contact:** E-mail: <[ncptw2015@gmail.com](mailto:ncptw2015@gmail.com)>; Conference website: <[ncptw2015.org](http://ncptw2015.org)>.