

WHAT IS A BIG QUESTION? WHY ASK A BIG QUESTION?

Little, local questions: On social media writing center workers share answers with each other about whether or not their center is open for the summer or what software to buy for their computers. Or maybe someone wants to know what percentage of the student population your center serves, how your job description is phrased, what your teaching load is in addition to directing the writing center, or if your center is appointment only or has drop in. These are local questions with short answers.

Big whole-field questions: BIG QUESTIONS are ones such as what topics should be covered in tutor training, with an accompanying discussion of what each of these topics includes and perhaps a way to help tutors understand and blend into their tutoring. Or a BIG QUESTION might be what powerful, closely argued rationale can be presented to administrators who are considering downsizing, closing, or moving your center into a large student services center. Or how does a tutor know if a student has learned or absorbed what they've been talking about? What is learning? How much can be learned in a single tutorial? How is online tutoring different from in-person learning? What is a new service a writing center can add, and how does an administrator figure out if it's needed? Or given that so many students come for one or two tutorials but don't return, how can writing center workers motivate them to continue to meet with a tutor? What kind of outreach is needed to find out if the writing center is or is not serving certain populations of students? What are some successful outreach efforts, and how do you know if they are successful? How can tutors be trained to help with multimedia documents? Should a writing center offer reading skills help or verbal communication help? If so, why and how?

Why ask big questions: As a field, writing center studies emphasizes sharing, supporting, and collaborating. By asking a big question, you might energize someone else to write an article for *WLN* that tackles that question you asked. And as you formulate a question, you might also begin to work on answers that you had not realized you want answers to. Sometimes we get so buried in managing the day-to-day needs of the writing center that we forget to stop, to take a more expansive look at what we're doing. Asking BIG QUESTIONS can energize us to seek new directions for our centers, to have them grow in ways we haven't thought of before, and to take stock of what others can help us with. Moreover, just reading questions others are asking can help us to realize that question is one we should be asking and answering for our center, our tutors, and ourselves. And some answers might result in articles in *WLN* you want to read!