East Central Writing Centers Association

ECWCA Journal

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From the Editor:

I am so pleased to be sharing the inaugural issue of the *ECWCA Journal*. The board and wider membership of the East Central Writing Centers Association has been interested in developing a journal that reflects and amplifies voices from the region for a long time. We built momentum around the idea a few years ago, and many of you might remember attending conference sessions during the 2017 and 2018 conferences focused on the development of a journal. However, our efforts stalled, and we had further setbacks during the pandemic. What I'm taking a long time to say is that launching a new journal is a time-consuming endeavor that requires consistent engagement from a dedicated team.

As editor, I have had the great fortune of working with an energized editorial board who have made the *ECWCA Journal* possible. Our efforts have included not just shaping the issue you're reading but in considering what kind of journal we want to make and working through creating practices and procedures that could move our ideas into realities.

Thank you to our submissions and communications team—Colton Wansitler, Zachery Koppleman, Annabelle Miller, and Mary Rose Bihler. This group created procedures for making the submission process clear and providing writers with quick feedback on questions about submissions type and production timelines.

Kudos to our review and mentoring team—Jackie Kauza, Grace Pregent, and Laura Clapper. This group has exemplified the strength of human-centered writing support by offering kind feedback for writers and engaging in one-to-one conversations with writers to guide revision.

Huzzah to our editorial assistant Savannah who has embraced tasks big and small and been subjected to me reciting my own various to-do lists during our meetings. Savannah is also the author of this issue's Center Spotlight.

And the most heartfelt gratitude to our amazing web editor Noah Patterson whose attention to detail and deep enthusiasm for the journal has made these last stages of journal production a lot less stressful.

In addition to our amazing editorial board, I want to thank several journal editors in Writing Center Studies and the broader field of Rhetoric & Writing Studies who took time to share their experiences as editors to help me avoid pitfalls and manage expectations. Thank you Nikki Caswell, Christina Cedillo, Harry Denny, and Genie Giaimo for your words of caution, encouragement, and wisdom.

Our first issue shares the 2023 ECWCA Conference theme of Innovation Hub. All of the articles presented in this issue started as ideas in individual writing centers; inspired inquiry and research among tutors, consultants, and administrators; informed proposals for the 2023 conference; and developed into the articles in the issue. It has been a delight to be part of the process and share the important insights and ideas developed in these pages with the region.

-Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Editor

ECWCA Journal

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Rejecting White Benevolence: An Anti-Deficit Understanding of Justice-Involved Writers

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Writing center administrators and scholars have become increasingly concerned with the intersection of writing center studies and carceral education. Recent writing center scholarship focuses on making writing center services more accessible for incarcerated students (Marshall & Ocasio, 2020), training incarcerated writing tutors to operate inside of prisons (Pavlik, 2020), and defining the constraints of peer tutoring in carceral settings (Rios, 2020). But despite this recent interest in carceral writing center praxis, writing center scholarship hasn't yet comprehensively accounted for the experiences of formerly incarcerated writers in *post-carceral* educational contexts. As access to higher education in prison expands with the introduction of the Second Chance Pell Initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), advocates for formerly incarcerated students are calling for academic and administrative professionals, including writing center administrators and staff, to begin accounting for the unique perspectives and experiences of students with carceral experiences at their institutions.

As a graduate writing consultant at an urban public university, this call feels urgent. In the spring of 2023, I became more aware of the ways in which neither I nor the University Writing Center (UWC) at my institution were accounting for the knowledges, meaning-making practices, or literacies of student populations with carceral experiences in our policies or praxis. This realization engendered a research project intended to explore how administrators and staff at the UWC might reimagine our approach to administration and peer consulting in order to best support writers with carceral experiences. The research I conducted focuses on a population

that I refer to as justice-involved, those having had interactions with the criminal justice system as defendants. I prefer to use this term and definition, recommended by organizations like Both Sides of the Bars (MMN NYC, 2017) and The Fortune Society (n.d.), because I believe that this understanding of what it means to be justice-involved attends more thoroughly to multiple forms of regulation especially those that extend beyond incarceration like the parole and probation systems which enact similar forms of surveillance, oppression, and stigmatization as other carceral conditions.

In this article, I share how my original conceptions of justice-involved research evolved in response to the perspective of justice-involved scholars, students, and writers; explore the implications of my positionality as a non-justice-involved scholar; and suggest connections between findings from justice-involved scholarship and writing center praxis. I hope that in explicating the process of my research, including the misconceptions and limitations that became apparent during the initial stages, this article also encourages other scholars operating from positions of privilege to reexamine how they undertake similar work.

(Re)Considering Scholar Positionality

As a non-justice-involved person, the research process that engendered this article was both humbling and transformative. I pursued this research because I believed there was exigency for institutional actors to become more familiar with a population that is increasingly being granted access to spaces of higher education, and I envisioned writing centers as being a robust force in creating a more inclusive landscape for justice-involved students. However, early in the project, I lacked critical awareness of my positionality as a researcher and the ways that my methods of understanding served to further other and disempower the very population that I wanted to engage. My initial attempts to conduct primary research on justice-involved students' experiences in higher education quickly revealed the limitations of my preconceptions and assumptions about the work that I wanted to accomplish.

My desire to study the relationship between justice-involved students and writing center work was motivated by an event facilitated at my institution intended to advocate for increased visibility for justice-involved individuals in higher education and to elevate the voices of justice-involved students in discussions of more equitable admissions practices. The event included panels featuring justice-involved students from various post-secondary institutions in our region, administrators who work closely with justice-involved students integrating into institutional cultures, and advocates for justice-involved students' increased access to post-secondary education. Attending the event provided me with an introduction to justice-involved scholarship and perspectives. I learned about the unique systemic barriers that justice-involved students experience accessing post-secondary spaces and the importance of institutional and organizational support for persistence and success. I began to think about the role of the writing center in supporting justice-involved students; more specifically, I wondered how the knowledge that justice-involved students shared with me that day could be applied to the localized context of the UWC.

The initial project that developed after this event involved contacting the justice-involved students on my campus in order to better understand how the UWC could

best "support" and "help" justice-involved populations. The lack of awareness that my positionality as a non-justice-involved person afforded me immediately became apparent during this initial phase of research. I realized firstly, and quite problematically, that no affinity group, peer organization, or administrative division existed to represent justice-involved students on my campus. The admissions office at my institution doesn't even compile or report demographic information pertaining to justice-involved populations, a necessary prerequisite to the allocation of resources or funds. This also meant that I had no viable means of contacting justice-involved students. My privilege as a person who lacked either involvement in the criminal justice system or experience navigating post-secondary spaces as a justice-involved person had invisibilized the deficit of institutional support and consideration available to justice-involved students.

I also became aware of another potentially complicating factor for speaking with justice-involved students. Identifying people with justice-involvement requires their disclosure, a decision that can be uncomfortable or even unsafe. Without a method to safely identify or communicate anonymously with justice-involved students on my campus, I began to look for external resources through which to funnel my research. I became more familiar with the work of peer mentoring student organizations like the Underground Scholars and higher education programs advocating and providing resources for justice-involved students like Project Rebound and the Rising Scholars Network. Considering the complex implications of disclosure, I decided that a safe way to learn about justice-involved students' unique "needs" from writing center services would be to have organizations like those mentioned above disseminate a survey to their local members. However, this plan to develop a survey was further challenged by scholarship based on carceral writing pedagogies.

In his essay about circulating prisoner voices within wider public audiences for Joe Lockard and Sherry Rankins-Robertson's collection *Prison Pedagogies: Learning and Teaching with Imprisoned Writers*, Bidhan Chandra Roy (2018) critiques Foucault's work for the Groupe d'information sur les prisons (GIP). Specifically, Roy identifies problems with the project's use of written modes to collect and disseminate imprisoned individuals' narratives. Roy argues that "concerns and fears over *how* something is said play a significant role in determining who gets to speak" (p. 37) especially in the case of imprisoned individuals whose perceived grammatical deficiencies prevented them from wanting to participate in the GIP's work. As one respondent shared, "people don't write much in prison, because of spelling; they are ashamed of their spelling before the censors" (Brich 2008, p. 30). Ultimately, the project's reliance on textual engagement further silenced imprisoned people because of the way that normative grammar conventions exerted control over the participants' written voices through a sense of shame and embarrassment.

The methods used by the GIP proved incongruent with the group's objectives to facilitate dialogue between imprisoned individuals and the non-incarcerated public, to allow imprisoned participants to *speak*. Critical carceral research methodologies and pedagogy must instead engage in more authentic dialogue if they intend to avoid the silencing of justice-involved voices. Relying on Freire's (1993) conception of critical pedagogy, Roy argues that "the process of transformation must act in both ways, that

the voices from the prison must be able to transform those people working with them on the outside if the project is to avoid the paternalistic savior or charitable form of engagement" (2018, p. 39). Based on the considerations Roy offers, I realized that my original objectives for justice-involved research were aligned with the paternalistic savior orientation he describes in which I, a white, non-justice-involved researcher, sought to "help" justice-involved writers, who often occupy multiply-marginalized identities because of the ways that the criminal justice-system disproportionately criminalizes black, brown, and low socioeconomic populations, by understanding their "needs" as potential writing center clients.

This white savior orientation reflects a common theme in work undertaken by other white writing center professionals. In his article for *WLN*, Mark Latta (2019) critiques writing center studies' "collective and historical reliance upon deficit thinking orientations" (p. 17), orientations that he argues are rooted in Stephen North's conception of writing centers' central function as "produc[ing] better writers" (1984, p. 438). Latta (2019) asserts that North's legacy has defined the work of writing center professionals as the "seeing and uncovering of problems...a better-intended, kinder, and gentler way of seeing people by what they lack rather than what they possess" (p.19). The initial intention to discover the "needs" of justice-involved writers in my research reflects the deficit thinking that Latta describes in his article. Critically reflecting on the deficit approach that I brought to my research revealed that the view I had of myself as "helping" justice-involved writers was similarly problematic.

In their chapter from *Counterstories from the Writing Center*, Wonderful Faison, Romeo García, and Anna K. Treviño (2022) encourage readers to critically interrogate "the driving force and the mechanisms behind the concept of helpfulness in academia" (p. 82). Faison et al. suggest that motivations for helpfulness are often rooted in what they term "white benevolence," the assumption that all non-white people need help assimilating into white linguistic practices and epistemologies (p. 83). White benevolence is often deeply rooted in deficit-thinking (recall the adjectives Latta uses to describe deficit approaches to writing center work—well-intended, kind, gentle), and perpetuates conceptions of non-white writers as deficient, non-normative, and in need of saving from white writing center professionals.

Informed by Latta and Faison et al.'s research, I realized that my understanding of justice-involved writers relied on deficit modes of thinking and that my motivations for the research project constituted white benevolence. Instead of conceptualizing justice-involved writers as possessing powerful linguistic, discursive, and epistemological assets, I had approached their practices as "[those] which can still be studied and researched as non-normative discourse" (Faison et al., 2022, p. 82). Faison et al.'s call to reject white benevolence moved me to reorient myself to the research project; instead of asking how writing centers might best "help" justice-involved writers, I began asking how writing center professionals might better understand and engage justice-involved writers' assets in their work. By recognizing the ways in which my positionality as a white researcher had limited my perspective on justice-involved writers and even perpetuated racist, classist understandings of literacy, I was able to begin imagining the ways that my research might reject white benevolence and deficit-thinking.

Engaging Anti-Deficit Frameworks for Justice-Involved Research

Fortunately, Joe Louis Hernandez, a scholar who identifies as a student with a history of conviction, has already begun to identify the assets that formerly incarcerated students bring to higher education (Hernandez, 2019; Hernandez, 2020). Using anti-deficit frameworks, Hernandez describes how formerly incarcerated students transfer knowledge from their lived experiences in order to leverage social and cultural capitals, find and access limited resources, and thrive in academic contexts.

Hernandez's (2019) research provides valuable frameworks for understanding justice-involved writer's experiences and perspectives. In particular, his use of anti-deficit frameworks including funds of knowledge (FOK) and community cultural wealth (CCW), can help writing center scholars and administrators understand the assets that justice-involved writers bring to writing. The FOK approach was originally theorized to counter the deficit research methodologies that situated historically marginalized communities as lacking in the resources and knowledge to be successful in academic contexts (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992; Moll et al., 1992). Rather than asking students from marginalized cultural backgrounds to assimilate into dominant academic codes, literacies, and practices, the FOK framework encourages educators to create connections or bridges between students' prior knowledges and experiences and their academic work. Similarly, the CCW framework uses a strengths-based approach to argue that students from marginalized communities, particularly communities of color, can employ the wealth of cultural knowledge and resources available to them in order to find success in academic contexts (Hernandez, 2019).

Melissa Abeyta (2022) utilizes a framework similar to the CCW approach used by Hernandez to examine the experiences of formerly incarcerated community college students. Abeyta theorizes that some justice-involved students in higher education possess "carceral capital," or a form of cultural wealth specific to formerly incarcerated students that can be leveraged in post-secondary educational contexts. Abeyta's study identifies multiple forms of carceral capital including engaging in positive faculty interactions in order to acquire academic support, using writing assignments to disclose their justice-involvement and share their opinions on mass incarceration, and employing the resources and support networks available through their home communities to access and persist in higher education. Writing center professionals should familiarize themselves with these anti-deficit frameworks and the findings of Hernandez and Abeyta's studies in order to better understand the knowledges and experiences that justice-involved writers bring to their post-secondary education.

Additionally, Ashwin J. Manthripragada (2018) offers useful insight on carceral meaning-making practices in her chapter for Lockard and Rankins-Robertson's collection. Manthripragada's "Freedom Within Limits: The Pen(cil) is Mightier Than the Sword" explicates the material and discursive realities of writing and teaching in prison. The chapter examines both the constraints and possibilities of such realities. The constraints that Manthripragada outlines include the unavailability of common technological tools like word processors, search engines, and printers; limits on prisoners' access to information; the censorship of curricular materials by the prison

educational board, and the physical conditions that limit instruction, engagement, and discussion like the classroom space, proximity of incarcerated students in and outside of the classroom, and frequent interruptions during class time. However, these constraints also produce some positive effects for teaching and learning in prison. For example, the lack of access to technology allows instructors to engage in slow teaching and learning practices. Manthripragada also describes how writing and revising by hand enables students to participate in a more explicitly embodied act of meaning-making.

Benny Rios (2020), a Writing Advisor at Stateville Correctional Center's satellite writing center, also emphasizes the effects of material constraints on carceral writing, particularly the ways that they transform tutors' understanding of collaborative learning. Rios first outlines the material and pedagogical constraints of writing center work in the carceral institution: "1) limited mobility for students; 2) no internet access; 3) limited access to the education building; 4) little communication with peers, tutors, and teachers; 5) no opportunities to work formally in small groups or hold conferences aside from our weekly classes and study hall; 6) the possibility of lockdowns; and 7) stresses caused by the prison environment" (pp. 27-28). Rios then illustrates how the informal learning of carceral contexts is driven by collaborative learning, even when that collaboration manifests in ways that are overlooked by writing center professionals unfamiliar with carceral conditions. He describes the "spontaneous, informal discussions" (p. 27) about writing that occur in various settings across Stateville: the commissary, the yard, the dining room, etc. These informal conversations allow peer tutors to decentralize the authority from the teacher to the student writers, an important component of collaborative learning. Additionally, the extended time away from formal class instruction or writing advising allows students to "reflect on and re-contextualize conversations in [their] writing" (p. 28).

This discussion illustrates the ways that the material conditions of incarceration affect justice-involved writers' processes and practices and produce unique ways of learning, communicating, and writing. Manthripragada and Rios's insights also have implications for writing and writing center work in higher education outside of prisons. The modes of communication, writing processes, and discursive practices that are available to or privileged by incarcerated students inform the writing that they perform in post-carceral academic contexts. In order to engage the assets that justice-involved students bring to writing, tutors should seek to understand the meaning-making practices that influence their writing processes and practices in both carceral and post-carceral contexts. Without awareness of the epistemological, linguistic, and discursive practices that justice-involved writers possess, writing center professionals will be unable to adequately engage the assets that they bring to writing.

Further research suggests that justice-involved writers also have a unique affective relationship to writing, another asset that they may bring to writing center sessions. In their article exploring the liberatory effects of a liberal arts education for incarcerated individuals, Deborah Appleman, Zeke Caligiuri, and Jon Vang (2014) found that writing forms a crucial component of justice-involved students' recrafted identity during their carceral education. Caligiuri, who identified himself as an incarcerated student at the time of the article's publication, reflects on his relationship to writing, describing its

role in his identity formation as a justice-involved person. For Caligiuri, writing is a "re-humanization process" through which he was able to "re-conceive [his] own humanity and self-respect" (p. 203). Caligiuri notes how writing signified his inclusion in an ecology of human existence that extended beyond his carceral setting. It gave him the power to narrate his story in agentic and empowered ways despite the constraints of his justice-involvement.

Appleman et al.'s (2014) research demonstrates that justice-involved students may have an especially meaningful relationship to writing. Writing, as both personal practice and social process, allows justice-involved students to communicate their experiences and construct more emancipated identities. Therefore, it's crucial for tutors and administrators to begin theorizing pedagogical practices which respect justice-involved writer's unique strengths while recognizing writing as a potentially restorative or liberatory practice for writers who have experienced justice-involvement.

Implications for Writing Center Praxis

Research from these scholars indicate the types of assets that justice-involved individuals bring to writing as well as the anti-deficit frameworks that writing center professionals should employ when thinking about and working with justice-involved writers. Hernandez's (2019) FOK and CCW frameworks as well as Abeyta's (2022) theory of carceral capital reflect the "collaborative, resource-oriented approaches" that allow writing center professionals to "uncover each writer's unique funds of knowledge so that [they] may engage in authentic discussion of the writer's personal and cultural knowledge" (Latta, 2019, p. 21). Recognizing the assets that justice-involved writers possess can also inform praxis in more material ways. Tutors should be aware of the material and pedagogical practices that some justice-involved writers prefer to engage whether that includes writing by hand, engaging in informal conversations about writing that reject entrenched ideas about agenda-setting and session goals, or re-envisioning what the writing process may look like for individual writers. Additionally, Rios's research on writing advising in carceral contexts indicates that justice-involved writers theorize unique and productive avenues for engaging in collaborative learning. While writing center studies has long privileged collaboration (Lunsford, 1991), tutors will need to begin reimagining what collaborative learning looks like in various contexts and the methods of collaboration that justice-involved writers bring to their centers

Faison et al. (2022) also suggest a different form of collaboration for writing center professionals—collaborative benevolence. Collaborative benevolence, as opposed to white benevolence, defines the goal of writing center work as "work[ing] with clients, to engage and form bonds with them through listening to their stories, being explicit about the ways academic writing can silence their stories if they do not learn certain rhetorical moves, and showing clients the choices they can make in writing" (p. 93). Shifting to an orientation of collaborative benevolence asks administrators, tutors, and scholars to affirm justice-involved writers' linguistic and epistemological practices, a call that reflects many of the conversations about language, power, and identity that already circulate in writing center spaces. Discussions of critical language awareness (Aguilar-Smith et al., 2022; Daut & Rebe, 2022; Hutchinson & Morris, 2020) can and

should be broadened to include justice-involved literacies. As Manthripragada (2018) notes in his chapter, conversations about linguicism can be especially meaningful to justice-involved writers who have experienced the systematic silencing and gatekeeping that accompanies their association with the criminal justice system.

Continuing Research

In her chapter "A Long Path to *Semi*-Woke," Jill Reglin confronts her positionality as a white writing center professional who has enacted white benevolence to the detriment of her colleagues, students, and tutees of color. Responding to the "need... for white women to talk out loud about social and racial injustice" (p. 121), Reglin exposes the problematic ways of thinking, teaching, and tutoring that she has engaged throughout her career in order to illustrate the ways in which white writing center professionals might move away from orientations of white benevolence and towards critical self-reflection. As I tell this research story—here in this article, in conversations with my colleagues at the writing center, to students in the writing center training course, at conferences, etc.—I hope to articulate not just the ways that anti-deficit frameworks might inform the work we do with and among justice-involved writers, but also the importance of interrogating our own positionalities and orientations as we undertake that work. As a white writing center scholar, I recognize the condition of semi-wokeness that Reglin invokes in her title as my own; I have much to learn from justice-involved writers, scholars, and colleagues. After considering the perspectives of the justice-involved writers included above, I have decided to continue developing a study to explore justice-involved writers' experiences with writing; however, the work that I do moving forward will be grounded in anti-deficit thinking about justice-involved writers' assets and writing center professionals' responsibility to enact collaborative benevolence in response to those assets. For now, I hope that this account serves as a reminder to those of us in writing center studies who occupy positions of privilege that challenging white benevolence in our field requires us first to "push [ourselves] beyond the fear of revealing [our] own ignorance" (Reglin, p. 120) in order to pursue more equitable, just orientations to our work.

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No Train, No Gain: Understanding Consultants' Training Experiences Through Empirical Inquiry

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The procedures to train student consultants at the Oakland University Writing Center (OUWC) have evolved over the past decade. Like many writing centers, when the OUWC first opened in 2006, the university's Writing and Rhetoric Department offered a peer tutoring course focused on writing center pedagogy and training students to become effective peer consultants. However, in 2013, the course was re-classified and became a general education requirement. With this change, the course began to attract people who were interested in becoming teachers, rather than becoming employed at the writing center (Cerku et al., 2021). As a result, instead of becoming writing center consultants after taking the course, most students moved on to their student teaching placements. To mitigate this shift in recruitment, our center developed a comprehensive training program in 2013, entitled *Consult Right* (Cerku et al., 2021)[a][b]. The shift to facilitating this training in-house was caused by multiple factors at our institution, but given the significant enrollment decreases stemming from the pandemic, other institutions may have been forced to make similar transitions to accommodate budget cuts (Kelchen et al., 2021; National Student Clearinghouse, 2020). Thus, this study can be utilized by other writing centers facing such challenges.

From its inception, *Consult Right* was a glowing success, and, in fact, was the topic of a presentation at the 2019 ECWCA

conference in Dayton, OH. The program was predominantly facilitated in person with multimethod delivery via digital, print, and face-to-face collaborative avenues. Of note, many writing centers have facilitated training and education for their staff online prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the pandemic necessitated the need for fully online and therefore, remote delivery. In the case of *Consult Right*, after the pandemic and our move to fully remote training, as well as myriad challenges this transition presented, it became clear the program was less effective via entirely remote channels. This realization led us to revise the program in spring 2022. It was streamlined and reconfigured to merge the digital, print, and face-to-face aspects. We moved the training curriculum to Google Sites because it was fully integrated with consultants' institutional email accounts. This move was deemed necessary to increase accessibility during the pandemic when new hires were onboarding entirely remotely. The content was also revised to be more appropriate for fully virtual delivery and was redesigned to address feedback we received from past employees who interacted with the prior digital platform in an effort to better trainees' experience across various mediums. After including this feedback, the modules were further reconstructed to reflect our ongoing search for innovative training theories and methods. For example, the updated version included the addition of a Diversity and Accessibility module given our center's increased diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

The spring 2022 iteration, which was analyzed in this study, consisted of six core modules on key writing center topics, as well as two additional sessions that included observations and co-tutorings (outlined in Table 1). The training culminated in the composition of a personal consultant philosophy.

Table 1
Spring 2022 Consult Right Training Modules.

Module	Content Covered
1	The Idea of the Writing Center & Professionalism
2	Theoretical Approaches
3	Client Interaction
4	Diversity & Accessibility
5	Metacognition & Transfer of Learning
6	Observations
7	Co-Tutoring Sessions (3 total)
8	Taking Ownership of Your Consulting Role

Our training program was initially designed for consultants to work at their own pace. Although we anticipated they would complete it in about four weeks, we found new hires consistently took longer to complete the training, some much longer. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to survey recently hired student consultants about their experience with the program. The major research question guiding this study was: "Why is training taking longer than anticipated for trainees to complete?" More specifically, this analysis examined the following sub-categories:

1. The impact of external time commitments (jobs, coursework, extracurricular activities) on length of training
2. The impact of demographic factors on length of training
3. The relationship between trainees' and mentors' perceptions of training
4. The relationship between trainees' perceptions of training materials and length of training

The hypotheses for each sub-category are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2
Research Hypotheses.

#	Hypothesis
1.1	*There is a relationship between…* A trainee having multiple jobs and how long it takes them to complete their training
1.2	How difficult trainees find it to dedicate time to training due to another job and how long it takes them to complete their training
1.3	The number of jobs a trainee has and how long it takes them to complete their training
1.4	The number of credit hours a trainee was enrolled in at the time of their training and how long it took them to complete their training
1.5	The number of extracurricular activities trainees participate in and how long it took them to complete their training
2.1	Class standing and length of training
3.1	The number of mentors a trainee perceives they have and how long it takes them to complete their training
4.1	Understanding how training materials will translate to their work as a consultant and how long it takes them to complete their training
4.2	How overwhelmed a trainee feels about the amount of work demanded by training and how long it takes them to complete their training
4.3	Trainees feeling there was too much information in the training materials and how long it took trainees to complete their training
4.4	How conducive trainees felt the length of training materials were to their training and how long it took trainees to complete their training

Literature Review

Research on orientation, consultant education, and ongoing professional development exists within the writing center field, despite not using the term "onboarding" specifically. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of how to facilitate such training remains understudied. This is particularly true in the post-COVID-19 pandemic landscape. Thus, the following review of literature draws from multiple disciplines, in addition to writing center studies, to provide a holistic approach to addressing our research question.

Importance of Effective Onboarding

Onboarding is understood as the series of processes used to integrate new employees into organizations (Holliday, 2020; Maurer, 2018), and for the context of this project, includes the consultant training curriculum, *Consult Right*. It is important to note that orientation and onboarding are not the same. Orientation typically entails filling out the necessary paperwork and sometimes includes tours of the organization's space or facility, whereas onboarding is a longer and more deliberate process designed to integrate employees into their new roles and acclimate them with the organizational culture. However, the two concepts are often conflated. According to Maurer (2018):

> Although 62% of respondents said their primary goal with onboarding is to integrate employees with the workplace culture . . . culture integration accounts for just 30% of the onboarding process for managers and 27% for nonmanagers, according to respondents. Instead about 40% of their onboarding activities consist of completing paperwork, such as filling out . . . forms and going over . . . documents. (p. 2)

Importantly, research shows effective onboarding is critical to an organization's overall success. For example, a 2015 study by Glassdoor, an anonymous online platform where employees rate employers, found positive experiences with onboarding improved workers' productivity by 70% (as cited in Emek, 2021). This finding is echoed by Fang et al. (2011) who highlighted that the effective assimilation of employees can have a deep and lasting impact on their job performance. Moreover, the Human Capital Institute found that experience-driven onboarding, or training that seeks to engage others, also boosted productivity by 70% (as cited in Holliday, 2020). Additionally, Reynolds (2018) discovered that over three-quarters of employees surveyed agreed that their commitment to an organization was increased by positive onboarding experiences, and 86% of survey participants agreed that effective training provided a better first impression of the organization.

Nearly 40% of new hires experience significant onboarding challenges when beginning a new position according to a survey of 4,000 workers from across the globe (Reynolds, 2018). Fard (2020) found onboarding experiences were at an all-time low across industries due to the COVID-19 pandemic and noted "inconsistent onboarding process[es] . . . [have] never worked well, but in today's landscape, this type of approach to onboarding can be detrimental and may result in new hires feeling overwhelmed and alone." These findings are noteworthy in the context of this study because data show that issues experienced early in an employee's onboarding

experience added an additional month to how long it takes employees to settle into their roles in new organizations (Reynolds, 2018).

Factors Prolonging Onboarding

Our experience with onboarding in the post-COVID world was not unique. A survey revealed over half of participating employers had onboarding programs that lasted between 30 and 90 days (Maurer, 2018), yet other findings by ServiceNow, a software company that produces cloud platforms, reported that 20% of participants did not feel they had been fully onboarded after as long as 90 days, or three months (Ellis, 2019). In some cases, onboarding processes can be so extended that empirical research seeking to measure its effects must examine timeframes of up to two years after hire (Keisling & Laning, 2016; Klein et al., 2015). Several factors can contribute to prolonging an employee's length of training, including information overload, lack of structure, accountability, or expectations, and lack of engagement (Ellis, 2019; Emek, 2021; Fard, 2020; Holliday, 2020; Maurer, 2018).

Information Overload

Information overload occurs when trainees are met with too much information in too short of a time span (Ellis, 2019; Holliday, 2020). Information overload is common among new employees and recent data show this issue was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and remote work settings (Emek, 2021; Fard, 2020). This observation is particularly important because information overload often leads to decreased employee efficiency (Nugapitiya & Wickramarachchi, 2023). In fact, statistics showed[c] one third of employees would rather go on an awkward first date than attend their first day at a new place of employment (Ellis, 2019). To put it another way, "Onboarding is a matter of emotions" (Harpelund et al., 2019, p. 9). Therefore, an organization's primary role during onboarding is to ease the anxieties that are naturally associated with transitionary periods (Palmquist, 2023).

Lack of Structure, Accountability, or Expectations

The literature revealed length of training is prolonged by a lack of structure and accountability (Emek, 2021; Holliday, 2020; Keisling & Laning, 2016). As Holliday (2020) discussed, "even highly creative employees who fully appreciate the freedoms of a casual company need a sense of belonging to function well in a team environment and to bring productivity levels up to expectations" (p. 1). Management must thoroughly communicate what the position entails and how success is measured to encourage the development of good habits in the early days of training (Fard, 2020). The importance of management's role is further emphasized by Keisling and Laning (2016) who found that employees had more negative onboarding experiences when the process was "too self-directed" (p. 387).

A major reason new hires lose enthusiasm about their job and subsequently experience a decrease in performance is unclear expectations (Holliday, 2020). Keisling and Laning (2016) found that, upon hiring, employees are often keen to know the ways in which their future success will be measured. Statistics indicate employees are vastly more productive (83%) and satisfied (75%) with their organization when

their roles are clearly defined (Emek, 2021), which underscores the importance of making expectations clear to new hires from the beginning.

Lack of Engagement

An essential, but often overlooked aspect of onboarding, engagement is neglected because responsibilities for onboarding are shared between different people and/or departments, which results in people and tasks falling between the cracks (Reynolds, 2018). When new hires do not know who to approach with questions or where to find help, they struggle to get work done (Fard, 2020). Moreover, "employees who feel they're working in a vacuum do not bond with colleagues and tend to get little satisfaction from their work" (Holliday, 2020), which has been found to increase the risk of resignation (Palmquist, 2023).

These risks can be mitigated by increasing the number of social onboarding practices, as this has been found to improve employee socialization (Klein et al., 2015). One such practice is the use of an engagement schedule. Emek (2021) suggested establishing group activities, such as lunches and social gatherings—whether virtual or in-person—to help employees bond. Researchers also recommend that leaders regularly check in or poll new hires about their first weeks and progress (Emek, 2021; Holliday, 2020). Video conferencing can also be utilized for such meetings or check-ins. Small gestures may go a long way; actions as simple as receiving a welcome packet from coworkers or an invitation to lunch from a supervisor can be impactful for new employees (Fard, 2020). These seemingly simple gestures extend a warm welcome to new hires, which can ultimately shorten their length of training and boost their productivity.

Writing Center Onboarding

A variety of approaches have been employed to effectively prepare new tutors to facilitate writing center sessions. Some tutors are required to take a semester-long course that explores writing center studies, while others have programs that are self-directed and scaffolded by their writing center (Bell, 2001; Jiang et al., 2022; McDonald, 2005). These onboarding mechanisms usually introduce new tutors to the local values and procedures of their writing center and prepare them for "typical" tutoring scenarios (Gillespie & Lerner, 2000; Fitzgerald & Iannetta, 2015; Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016). A large component of these training programs is introducing tutors to the field of writing center studies, theory, and discussions within a community of writing center practice. Through guidebooks, journal articles, or other educational materials, tutors are introduced to writing center concepts, such as directive/non-directive tutoring and global/local order concerns (Bell, 2001; Gillespie & Lerner, 2000; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 205; McDonald, 2005; Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016; Vandenberg, 1999). Furthermore, tutor training may introduce conversations about transfer of learning, metacognition, linguistic diversity, and queer and disability theories, inviting trainees to think critically and reflectively about sociocultural components that make the act of tutoring more complex (Blazer, 2015; Denny et al., 2018; Eckstein, 2016; Stock & Liechty, 2022). In addition to reading texts, trainees may also observe sessions run by experienced tutors and/or participate in mock sessions to observe strategies, practices, and tutoring

"moves" in action (Kim, 2022). Many writing center onboarding programs include a mentor/mentee component, pairing the trainee with an experienced writing center tutor, a pedagogical model that is supported broadly across social and cognitive theory (Jiang et al., 2022). After onboarding is complete, numerous writing centers have ongoing professional development meetings, where tutors discuss articles, tutoring models, or other developments in writing center scholarship and practice to continue their growth (Bell; 2001; Posey, 1986; Stock & Liechty, 2022; Vandenberg, 1999).

Introducing new tutors to writing center praxis and pedagogy is a key part of training. Providing support and guidance for new tutors as they learn about tutoring "moves," theoretical frameworks, and session logistics helps them develop their own philosophies in turn. Because tutor onboarding is such an important factor in the success of the writing center, training and onboarding processes should be evaluated using empirical inquiries.

Call for RAD Research

As writing center studies has emerged and evolved as a discipline, scholars have advocated for increased research to support the work done within the writing center consultation. Because of practitioners' connections with humanities disciplines, early research in the writing center field was dominated by anecdotes and program descriptions because those approaches required less familiarity with empirical methods and fewer resources (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2012; Nordlof, 2014; Ozer & Zhang, 2021). However, this type of scholarship becomes difficult to replicate and validate, thus impacting the ways writing center practice could be more broadly supported and bolstered by data. Echoing Haswell's (2005) call for "replicable, aggregable, and data supported" (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2012, p. 18) research within rhetoric and composition studies, writing center scholars began advocating for research-based inquiries under the RAD framework (Block, 2016; Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2012; Hall & Ryan, 2021; Haswell, 2005; Messina & Lerner, 2020; Nordlof, 2014; Ozer & Zhang, 2021).

In contrast with anecdotal and lore-based research, RAD scholarship is designed, executed, and described in such a way that scholars can replicate or transfer similar inquiries and compare data-supported conclusions (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2012; Haswell, 2005). However, RAD scholarship is not confined to statistical or empirical methodologies. The framework invites both qualitative and quantitative inquiries to thoroughly describe research sites, methodologies, and analysis techniques, all of which encourage replication and ultimately, an evolving body of knowledge (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2012; Hall & Ryan, 2021; Haswell, 2005). RAD scholarship welcomes research replication [and transfer] in varied, diverse contexts to more effectively compare data, see patterns, challenge the status quo, and inspire change, making this form of inquiry a fitting framework for writing center studies (Hall & Ryan, 2021).

This study's investigation of writing center training contributes to the growing body of writing center RAD inquiry, which emphasizes our writing center's commitment to innovative theories, methods, and praxis of writing center consulting. Investigating the effectiveness of *Consult Right* forced us to think about the local, institutional factors that influence our trainees and the relationships between module concepts and the

practices that are carried out in our center daily. We echo Stock and Liechty (2022) in recognizing the "importance of designing empirical research...that foregrounds tutors' perceptions and experiences" (p. 88). To that end, our data is derived from the tutors and trainees themselves because these data "will more likely ensure that tutor education remains grounded in the context of peer tutoring and centered on the needs and experiences of tutors" (Stock & Liechty, 2022, p. 87). To understand such needs and experiences in the most effective way, it is essential to reach as many consultants as possible. While every writing center is bound by the size of its staff, replication can give us the tools to more effectively expand and multiply our pool of knowledge (Hall & Ryan, 2021).

Replicability

While our inquiries are contextually dependent and unique to our institution, these same research questions can be investigated using similar methods in other institutions. A rich deposit of data-supported tutor training knowledge would be indispensable to writing center practitioners as they introduce new writing center tutors to the larger scope of writing center studies and practice (Hall & Ryan, 2021; Jiang et al., 2022; Stock & Liechty, 2022).

Replication can reinforce or challenge a study's original findings when conducted in a new context, yet inadequate descriptions of methods and rationale can cause greater confusion for future researchers seeking to investigate similar questions at different institutions (Freese & Peterson, 2017). These shortcomings have made researchers avoid replication because of its difficulty to execute (Freese & Peterson, 2017). Therefore, we foreground Hall and Ryan's (2021) call for increased replication of writing center research through methodological transparency so that replication can be more accessible and contribute to a larger web of contextual writing center knowledge.

Methods

We used bivariate inferential analyses to examine the relationship between different independent variables and length of training. More specifically, we utilized simple linear regressions because all variables were continuous.

Sample and Data

The sample used in this study was selected purposively and included currently employed consultants at the Oakland University Writing Center. Participants (N=20) were recruited via email and responded to an anonymous survey offered via Qualtrics. Data were collected using a self-developed survey that consisted of 34 multiple-choice and scaled items across two sections. The first section gathered data on trainees' general demographics, including gender and class standing, as well as information pertaining to their date of hire, commencement of training, and length of time spent training. The second section consisted of 18 Likert scale items, structured from one to six, with "1" indicating strong disagreement and "6" indicating strong agreement.

These items queried trainees' perceptions of the content and overall training experience and were automatically randomized for each participant using the Qualtrics randomization function. See Appendix A for a copy of our questionnaire and Appendix B to reference the questionnaire's constructs and corresponding items. This study was deemed exempt by the Oakland University Institutional Review Board as

intradepartmental research that relied on internal data for the purpose of program improvement.

The sample self-identified as 85% female (n=17), 10% male (n=2), and 5% other (n=1). The most frequent class standing reported at the commencement of training was sophomore (n=8), and of note, there were no freshmen participants in the sample due to a center-wide policy precluding freshmen from consultant positions. The mean number of credit hours participants were enrolled in at the time of training was 12.12 (SD=4.86).

Measures

This study sought to examine the impact of various predictors on the outcome of trainees' length of training. Predictors included external time commitments, such as whether trainees had other jobs, and if so, how many; whether trainees participated in extracurricular activities, and if so, how many; and the number of credit hours the trainee was enrolled in at the time of training. Other predictors included demographics, such as class standing and how many mentors trainees perceived they had. Finally, the fourth hypothesis category focused on predictors related to trainees' perceptions of the length and content of the training material.

The dependent variable, *length of training in weeks*, was initially a short answer response; however, it was recoded into a continuous variable using the recode function in SPSS version 28 for this analysis. Figure 1 shows the normal distribution of the data once the variable was recoded. The mean length of time it took participants to complete their training was 8.67 weeks, with a standard deviation of 3.27 weeks. Notably, training took one participant only two weeks whereas it took another participant 16 weeks.

Figure 1
Length of Training in Weeks.
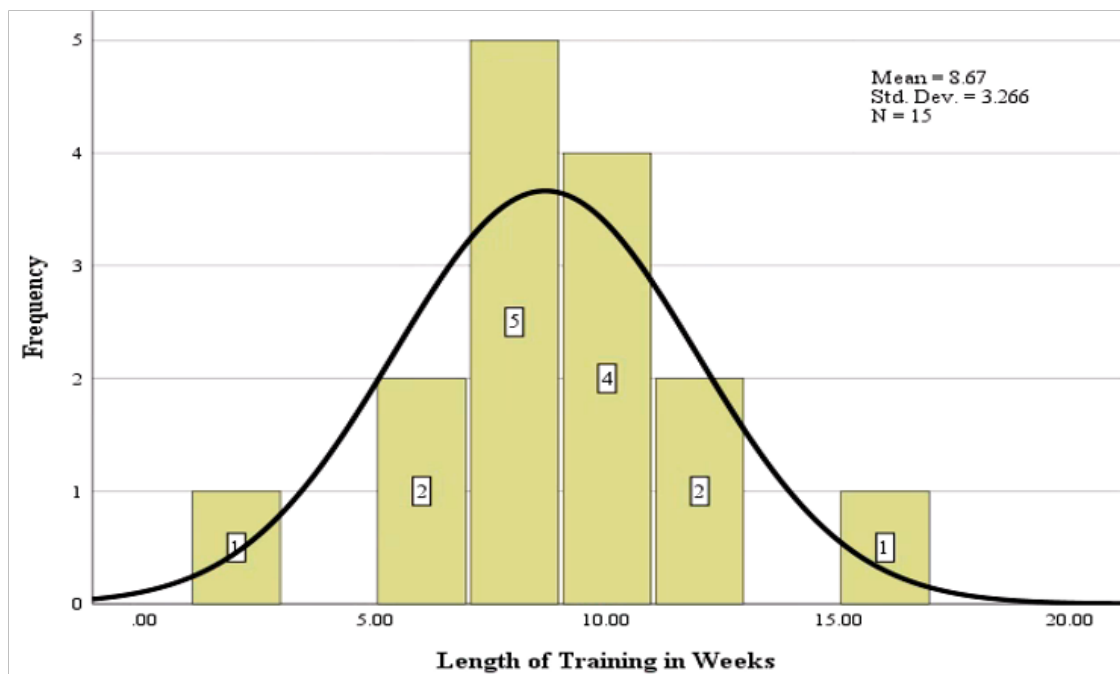
Analysis

We used Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) linear regression analyses to examine relationships between variables. This analysis builds on the correlational association between two continuous variables and uses calculus to solve the least-squares-distance estimation to find the best-fitting line minimizing the distance between all observed points. As such, this analysis provides two critical points of information: (1) the strength of association (R) and its related amount of variance explained by the predictor (R^2); and (2) the amount of estimated linear relationship between the predictor and outcome (B). Regression analysis also supplies each estimate with an associated significance, to determine the extent to which the observed estimate could have occurred by chance. For this analysis, we used the standard alpha level of .05 to argue for significance. These statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26.

Results

Table 3

Relationship Between Predictor Variables and Length of Training.

	R	R^2	Std. Coefficient	Significance
I found/find it difficult to work through the Consult Right materials because there was/is too much information	.58	.34	.58	.023
I found/find the length of Consult Right materials conducive to my training	.60	.36	-.60	.018
I felt/feel overwhelmed by the amount of work training demands	.51	.26	.58	.052

While it was originally hypothesized that external time commitments, demographic factors, and the number of mentors trainees perceived they had would impact length of training, surprisingly the only analyses that yielded significant results pertained to subcategory four, which focused on trainees' perceptions of the length and content of Consult Right materials. More specifically, Hypotheses 4.3 and 4.4 were the only significant relationships found. Hypothesis 4.2 showed meaningful yet statistically insignificant results at the 95% confidence level. Table 3 shows the results of the linear regressions for these hypotheses.

There was a significant positive relationship between how difficult trainees found it to work through training materials due to the amount of information and their length of training (see Table 3). The relationship between the two variables indicates nearly 34% of the variance in length of training can be accounted for by how difficult

trainees reported finding the training materials ($F(1)$= 6.63, p=.023). For every standard deviation increase in trainee's perceptions of difficulty re: length, there was an increase of over half of a standard deviation in the number of weeks it took to complete training, adding an approximate 10 to 11 days onto the length of their training.

We also found a significant negative relationship between how conducive trainees found the length of *Consult Right* materials to their training and how long it took them to complete their training. The relationship between these variables indicates 36% of the variance in length of training can be accounted for by how conducive trainees found the length of the training materials to their training ($F(1)$= 7.28, p=.018). Interestingly, for every standard deviation increase in how conducive trainees felt the length of the materials was to their learning, there was over half of a standard deviation decrease in the number of weeks it took to complete training, reducing approximately a week and a half from their length of training. In other words, if they found the materials too dense and they did not understand the importance of the materials, it took them longer.

Finally, data showed a meaningful positive relationship between how overwhelmed a trainee felt about the number of training materials and how many weeks it took them to complete their training; however, the results were not statistically significant at a 95% confidence level. Nevertheless, we chose to report this finding because the relationship between these two variables indicates 26% of the variance in length of training can be accounted for by how overwhelmed trainees felt about the number and length of training materials ($F(1)$= 4.56, p=.052). For every standard deviation increase in the report of trainees feeling overwhelmed, there was approximately half a standard deviation increase in the number of weeks it took to complete training. Given the SD of 3.27 weeks, one standard deviation increase in how overwhelmed a trainee felt added another week and a half to their length of training. While this result was just beyond the .05 threshold to reject the corresponding null hypothesis (p=.052), we felt this statistic nevertheless warranted discussion in this study due to its relationship to Hypotheses 4.3 and 4.4.

Discussion and Recommendations

Data from this study revealed trainees' onboarding was prolonged by how difficult they found it to work through the training materials due to the length and amount of information as well as how conducive they found the length of training materials to their training. We also found new hires' length of training was impacted by how overwhelmed they felt about the amount of work the training demanded. While our training program is not a semester-long course and may be longer than that of other institutions (Bell, 2001; Vandenberg, 1999), our recommendations still reflect a holistic approach to onboarding that previous research and industry experts have suggested can help reduce overall time to completion. We feel writing center leadership will benefit from the following recommendations when revising their own training curriculums. These recommendations can serve to reduce trainees' overall time to completion.

Length of Training and Conducivity

Findings revealed new hires who had a prolonged onboarding period found it difficult to work through training materials due to the length and amount of information. Furthermore, the less beneficial trainees found the length of the materials to be, the longer it took them to complete the training. We term this phenomenon "conducivity," in other words, the relation between the length of training materials and trainees' perceptions of the training. This points to the reality that trainees' perspectives on the importance of the training materials have a significant effect on how quickly they will navigate the modules. This finding is consistent with existing literature that highlights the importance of rules and requirements being presented in a way that employees find meaningful (Harpelund et al., 2019). That is, to motivate employees to "buy-in" or agree to follow organizational rules and regulations, they must understand how they are beneficial to them and the workplace. To address motivation in this regard, we recommend each module or phase of the training be presented with an explanation of why it is important and how the trainee will apply learned concepts in their practice as writing consultants. In doing so, new hires will better understand how and why their training is conducive to their future work, thus encouraging them to engage with the material more expeditiously.

Feeling Overwhelmed

Several factors can contribute to why new hires feel overwhelmed, but three primary aspects emerged from the literature: information overload, unclear expectations, and a lack of engagement.

Information Overload

While not statistically significant at a 95% confidence level, the data showed a meaningful positive relationship between how overwhelmed trainees felt about the amount of work demanded by our training program and how long it took them to complete their training. These findings are consistent with existing literature on employee onboarding, which illustrates that employees' sense of feeling overwhelmed can and often does prolong already lengthy onboarding processes (Harpelund et al., 2019). Leaders in human resource management suggest that onboarding processes, such as peer and management introductions, should be spread over the span of multiple weeks to reduce information overload (Holliday, 2020). Additionally, those facilitating employee training should plan to review key information on a weekly basis (Holliday, 2020). Other ways to mitigate new hires becoming overwhelmed include focusing on short rather than long-term goals and providing them with a clearly defined process for asking questions, as well as assigning a mentor to each new hire (Emek, 2021)–the latter of which we currently do at our center. More clearly delineating mentors' expectations will help ensure all trainees are receiving consistent mentorship.

For centers whose training is organized into modules, adjusting the number of tasks per module or rearranging content into more modules with fewer tasks could reduce how overwhelmed trainees feel. It is also important to balance theory-heavy modules with practical experience, such as observations, as well as to design training

structures that combine theory and praxis in ways that are manageable, accessible, and welcoming. Finally, quizzes should be avoided early on in the training process, as they may be off-putting to new hires and may establish a tone that the training is more of a test than a friendly introduction to peer consulting. This, in turn, may lead them to feel overwhelmed about the rest of the training, thereby adding to its overall length.

Structure, Accountability, and Expectations

Using a platform that tracks tasks in real time (e.g., Google Sheet, Trello, and other task managing applications) and is monitored by writing center leadership will provide trainees with a better sense of structure and accountability. Moreover, unclear expectations can be mitigated by encouraging more regular communication between writing center leadership and trainees. These open channels of communication will ensure expectations are more clearly defined by leaders and understood by trainees.

It is also important to clearly outline and define what success means in the context of training at the writing center. According to Emek (2021), one of the most helpful ways to bolster new hires' success is to ensure they know what key performance goals must be met to show progress. A sample timeline of how training should be navigated can also add to the structure, accountability, and expectations that are communicated to new employees (Emek, 2021). Lastly, an employee FAQ page on the training website can add to structure and consistency by providing answers to questions, such as those provided by Holliday (2020): (1) When is payday?; (2) When and where do we enter hours?; (3) When are we closed (for break)?; (4) What if I need to call in sick?; (5) What is our work-from-home policy?; and (5) Is there an organizational chart to help me know who to reach out to with questions? Providing explicit information about the workplace ecosystem and professional expectations demystifies new hires' roles and responsibilities, thus making professional engagement more accessible.

Engagement

While organizations often focus on job-specific training during the onboarding phase, they fail to facilitate cultural connections between existing organizational members and new hires (Emek, 2021). Holliday (2020) and Fard (2020) both emphasized the importance of bringing recently hired employees on-site to highlight the organization's culture, especially in cases where people are onboarding remotely. Fard (2020) emphasized that in the contemporary landscape where many employees undergo onboarding remotely, it is important to standardize the process to ensure employees are met with an experience that is engaging and helps them feel like they have agency in the organization. Furthermore, Emek (2021) pointed out that since the interview process is often virtual, that form of communication can likewise be utilized for onboarding new employees. Additionally, leaders in human resource management suggest training should include a welcome video or real-time tour facilitated by writing center leaders, as well as team introductions that allow new hires to put names to faces (Emek, 2021).

Writing centers with remote work options should consider having new hires visit the center to do a portion of their training in person. These visits allow trainees to familiarize themselves with the layout of the center and the culture of the organization as well as to bond with veteran employees. This bonding—whether virtual or in-person—

is important because it gives trainees an opportunity to engage with coworkers and build community (Holliday, 2020). To help ensure engagement does not fall between the cracks during shared onboarding responsibilities, leaders must determine who is involved in new hires' onboarding and routinely check that all stakeholders understand their role in the process (Reynolds, 2018).

Conclusion

This study sought to answer the research question: "Why is training taking longer than anticipated for trainees to complete?" Based on the results of the above analyses, we found trainees took longer to complete training based on (1) how difficult they found it to work through training materials due to the length and amount of information and (2) how conducive trainees found the length of the training materials to their training. We also found a meaningful yet statistically insignificant relationship between how overwhelmed trainees felt about the amount of work they had to complete and length of training. The literature suggested several factors can contribute to why trainees feel overwhelmed by the amount of training work. Some of these factors include information overload, lack of structure and accountability, unclear expectations, and feeling isolated from other members in the organization.

Of note, while this study was designed quantitatively, the smaller-than-usual staff we employed during the pandemic limited our sample size and therefore these findings may not be generalizable to other institutions despite being statistically significant. Moreover, due to the rapidly changing nature of higher education in the post-pandemic era–even during the short time period since our data analysis–circumstances may have evolved further.

Future work on this topic should include continued evaluation to measure whether revisions to onboarding are helping to mitigate prolonged training. The next phase of this study will entail re-surveying new hires after implementing the changes outlined above to observe whether length of training has decreased. Innovation in writing center praxis is only possible through collaboration, so in order to effectively answer the call Hall and Ryan (2021) made for replication studies in writing center contexts, we transparently included multiple appendices detailing all the necessary information to replicate this study. It is important to note that exact replication is impossible because of the rapidly changing nature of the post-pandemic world of higher education, as well as the different sizes, training programs, and idiosyncrasies of other writing centers. Nevertheless, we strongly advocate for transcontextual replications that, as Serviss and Jamieson (2018) describe, not only seek to reproduce and verify the same study, but also contribute to the continuous evolution of writing center studies.

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Appendix A: Survey

Section I: Demographic/General Info, Multiple Choice

What is your gender?
    1. Male
    2. Female
    3. Non-Binary
    4. Other
    5. Prefer not to answer?

What is your class standing?
    1. Freshman
    2. Sophomore
    3. Junior
    4. Senior
    5. Graduate Student

When was your interview?
    1. 1-2 weeks ago
    2. 3-4 weeks ago
    3. 1 month ago
    4. 2 months ago
    5. 3+ months ago

When did you begin training?
    1. 1-2 weeks ago
    2. 3-4 weeks ago
    3. 1 month ago
    4. 2 months ago
    5. 3+ months ago

What module are you currently on?
    1. Module 1
    2. Module 2
    3. Module 3
    4. Module 4
    5. Observation
    6. Co-tutoring
    7. Currently writing consultant philosophy paper

On average, about how long have you spent on each module?
    1. 1-3 days
    2. 4-7 days
    3. Over a week
    4. More than one week

Once your training is complete, how many hours do you intend on working at the OUWC?
    1. 5 or fewer
    2. 6-10
    3. 11-15
    4. 16-20
    5. 21-25

Section II: Consult Right Questions
Scale 1-6: 1 strongly disagree, 3 neutral, 5 strongly agree
***Slider scale used on Qualtrics. Questions automatically randomized.**

1a. I feel the length of *Consult Right* is appropriate
1b. I feel overwhelmed by the amount of work *Consult Right* demands

2a. I have not spent as much time on training as I would have liked to at this point
2b. I feel I am on pace with my training

3a. The *Consult Right* expectations were made clear to me at the beginning of my training
3b. I find it difficult to complete *Consult Right* because the directions are unclear

4a. I find the length of *Consult Right* materials conducive to my training
4b. I find it difficult to work through the *Consult Right* materials because there is too much information

5a. I find the content in each *Consult Right* module I have finished to be informative and useful
5b. I am unsure how some of the material in the *Consult Right* modules I've completed will translate to my work as a consultant

6a. The *Consult Right* website is easy to navigate
6b. I have had difficulty finding things on the *Consult Right* website

7a. I have found my meetings with the OUWC mentors helpful to my training
7b. I have not found meeting with OUWC mentors useful to my training

8. I find it difficult to dedicate time to *Consult Right* due to my schoolwork

9. I find it difficult to dedicate time to *Consult Right* due to my extracurricular activities

10. I find it difficult to dedicate time to *Consult Right* due to another job

11. Things have come up in my personal life that have prevented me from working on *Consult Right*

Appendix B: Constructs and Corresponding Survey Items

Construct	Corresponding Survey Items
Is the training too long?	• I feel the length of *Consult Right* is appropriate • I feel overwhelmed by the amount of work *Consult Right* demands • I find the length of *Consult Right* materials conducive to my training • I find it difficult to work through the *Consult Right* materials because there is too much information
Were the training expectations clear?	• The *Consult Right* expectations were made clear to me at the beginning of my training • I find it difficult to complete *Consult Right* because the directions are unclear
Is the content useful and understandable?	• I find the content in each *Consult Right* module I have finished to be informative and useful • I am unsure how some of the material in the *Consult Right* modules I've completed will translate to my work as a consultant
Is there a flaw in the delivery/ accessibility of the training program?	• The *Consult Right* website is easy to navigate • I have had difficulty finding things on the *Consult Right* website
Are there other responsibilities that are preventing the trainees from working on their training?	• I find it difficult to dedicate time to *Consult Right* due to my schoolwork • I find it difficult to dedicate time to *Consult Right* due to my extracurricular activities • I find it difficult to dedicate time to *Consult Right* due to another job • Things have come up in my personal life that have prevented me from working on *Consult Right* • I have not spent as much time on training as I would have liked to at this point • I feel I am on pace with my training.
Are the training mentors helping the trainees?	• I have found my meetings with the OUWC mentors helpful to my training • I have not found meeting with OUWC mentors useful to my training

Red Douglas

Red is a fourth-year doctoral student, KCP Future Faculty Fellow studying Higher Education Leadership at Oakland University, and Graduate Assistant in Oakland University Writing Center. He holds a B.S. in Public Administration and Policy, an M.A. in Liberal Studies, and a paralegal certificate. His research focuses on academic success, retention, and post-traumatic growth among college students. His interests include traveling, competing in athletics, playing guitar, and participating in outdoor recreation.

Isabelle Lundin

Isabelle is a Michigan native now attending Northeastern University for her M.A. in English and works in the Northeastern Writing Center as a Graduate Consultant. She received her B.A. in Writing and Rhetoric from Oakland University, where she worked as a Consultant in the Oakland University Writing Center for five semesters. Isabelle is passionate about fostering more confident student writers through writing center sessions, research, and social media outreach. Her current research centers on how walk-in sessions can contribute to larger conversations about inclusion, help-seeking behaviors, and student engagement within the field of writing center studies. In her free time, Isabelle loves doing CrossFit, reading, drinking tea, and snuggling with her two cats, Nyara and Archie.

Ashley Cerku

Ashley is the Manager of the Oakland University Writing Center and a doctoral candidate in Sociocultural Anthropology at Michigan State University. She holds a B.A. in English and Writing/Rhetoric and an M.A. in Liberal Studies from Oakland University, and an M.A. in Sociocultural Anthropology from Michigan State University. Her research focuses on historical photography and the intersections of cultural heritage, community memory, and digital work. In the writing center, her goal is to help create a more interactive writing environment on campus. She has conducted research on consultant training, clients' usage of university writing centers, as well as interactive learning platforms and activities. In her free time, she enjoys spending time on her farm with her horses, sheep, and dogs, as well as having game nights with her family.

Xavier Iriarte

Xavier holds a B.A. in Creative Writing from Oakland University and is pursuing an M.A. in English. He is a Graduate Assistant in the Oakland University Writing Center. Having spent almost all of his life in Mexico and then moving to Michigan, Xavier has a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by the multicultural experience. His creative writing background and Writing Center experience afford him a broad range of perspectives that inform his research and writing process. When he is not at school, you can find him playing chess, listening to music, or simply binge watching video essays for hours on end.

Kaylie Williams

Kaylie is a research assistant and first-year clinical psychology doctoral student within the community concentration at Bowling Green State University. Additionally, she holds a B.S. in Psychology from Michigan State University and an M.S. in Psychology from Oakland University. Her research focuses on motivations of gun carrying and gun violence, especially within justice-involved populations. In her free time, she enjoys reading, riding horses, collecting plants, and cuddling her cats.

Shawna Boomgaard

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Outer and Inner Space: How a Space Change Impacted Consultants

Jacqueline Borchert, Purdue University

I had never put much thought into the spaces I occupied, but as I returned to the old classroom on the second floor of the English building as a graduate consultant during the summer of 2021, about a decade after I had left it as an undergraduate consultant, the mere existence of that space almost felt like a time capsule. I looked around to see the same tables and chairs, the same front desk, the same cubicley office barriers. The faces were different and I think the computers had a slight update, but that space brought back my own feelings of being a skilled professional in a familiar writing center space. A nostalgia for a physical space wasn't something I was used to, but it held me in its grip. However, I entered this building with the knowledge that we wouldn't be there for much longer—the building was old and always filled with problems, many health-impacting—and the time had finally come to clear and demolish the building, so I knew this place was just a brief stop, as writing centers are for most people.

In the summer of 2022, between the end of my position as a graduate tutor and the beginning of my position as a full-time Professional Writing Specialist, it was time to move. Our director had been given a variety of options—the classic basement classroom, of course, one of them. While of course no place is perfect for everyone, the chosen space ended up being a shared space—we joined a relatively new building focused on student services, located right between academic and residential campus, with a few offices and a front desk to claim as our own. This new spot was certainly more visually appealing and overall safer, but the shared space would be something new to navigate. Knowing that this was a unique time in history as many centers find themselves moving, I wanted to further explore if space and place impacted tutors, taking advantage of my ability to speak with tutors on either side and both sides of the transition, learning

from some time-sensitive, context-based data. I wanted to hear about the experiences in a new building, new system, and new way of functioning from colleagues who were straddling memories of the old space and awe of the new space. Like any good academic, I knew this called for a study.

So, to introduce myself, my name is Jacqueline Borchert. My sense of nostalgia for our objectively-bad old space translated into inquiry about how space might shape myself and the consultants around me—would there be a noticeable change in how we tutored simply because we moved? I quickly went to one of our assistant directors, knowing we were in a transition time I could never replicate again. As is my brand, I probably bit off more than I should chew, despite guidance from that director. I decided to cast a wide net and just see what would have significant change in terms of relationships, environment, and pedagogy to pull from. Funny enough, I actually started off mostly focused on pedagogy, but those results were not significantly changed, so I am glad that I cast a net wider than my initial focus. Instead, over the course of a survey and conversations, consultants focused on relationships and the environment, discussing themes of various anxieties in each space, shifts in depth and breadth of relationships, and usability and value of the two spaces.

I worked with the director throughout the process—this was my first time going through IRB (I appreciate the need for it, but WOOF that was a learning process), creating questions that would be put into Qualtrics, emails that would be sent out to the listservs, and more. The methods section will break down how those questions came into play, but that process was long and involved a lot of categorizing, cutting, adding, changing, and discussion. I ended up with many Likert questions and a few short answer questions, hoping that interviews would further fill in the gaps of quantitative-focused data.

In this article, I explore the literature surrounding space and place within higher education and, more specifically, writing centers. I then introduce the context of the study, including details of both the old and new spaces, upholding the belief that local context highly impacted results. After mixed-methods are shared, I share results within the major categories of relationships and space, exploring the various relationships that consultants navigate in their professional roles. Based on these results, the discussion is broken down into three major findings: spontaneous vs integrated interactions, value reflected by space, and usability of space. After discussing limitations, the article finishes with impact and recommendations, advocating for considerations of local context and facilitated conversations with consultants regarding space.

Literature Review

As I turned to the literature, I noticed disciplinary conversations have turned more broadly toward the ways in which space impacts learning spaces. Using the theories of space, place, Thirdspace, and non-place, Kjesrud (2021) explores a backwards design approach to see how built space intersects with how higher education functions. As we live in a world that centers on multiliteracies and multimodal communication, the skill sets students need are changing and the traditional classroom design is becoming more obsolete, spurring a need to study how much power space really has and how

to harness it (Carpenter et al., 2013). Writing centers have inevitably come upon these issues, increasingly moving away from makeshift classrooms in the basement to a variety of innovative digital and physical spaces such as libraries, active learning classrooms, campus student support, studio spaces, and more (Azima, 2022; Carpenter et. al., 2013; Kjerud, 2021; Sabatino & Herb, 2021).

Studies seem to conflict on whether space does or does not change pedagogical strategy effectiveness in education, sometimes even within a single article. Some claim space and pedagogy are inseparably intertwined, as space affects the actors within them, constraining or encouraging outcomes (Brooks, 2012). Brooks (2012) even provides empirical data to show that space—such as spaces incorporating student-centered design, technology, and flexible furniture to facilitate active learning—contributes to improved student learning outcomes. He goes as far as to say that classrooms act as indirect causal agents, changing instructional behavior, classroom activities and student on-task behavior, recommending that instructors actively consider the space when shaping their pedagogical strategies. Consequently, classroom instructors have extensively studied how to adapt their pedagogical techniques to their space, considering material space, metaphorical space, sentimental place, lived place, Thirdspace, and more. Taking a central position, Kjesrud (2021) says that while space does not determine pedagogy, she does see influence. With conflicting ideas and studies about what space design is most effective and an inherent difference between one-on-one consulting and classroom teaching, writing labs must consider what crucial role space plays in "facilitating ecological networks that bring together disparate infrastructural elements" (Sheridan, 2006, as cited in Purdy & DeVoss, 2017).

When general space and higher education studies are applied to writing specifically, more insight suggests that space and place do have power to shape people's documents. Composition scholar Nedra Reynolds (2004) urges people to not ignore the physicality and materiality of learning environments, asserting that, "places are hugely important to learning processes and to acts of writing because the kinds of spaces we occupy determine, to some extent, the kinds of work we can do or the types of artifacts we can create" (157). Brazeau and Hall (2020) focus on space not only in terms of design, but also intentional use of the space that influences interaction with artifacts and each other. Using an artifactual literacy lens, the authors argue that practices and pedagogies are intrinsically enmeshed in space and material items, including written documents.

Within compositional studies, writing centers require even more unique considerations for space. As quoted in Purdy and DeVoss' (2017) "Making Space to Theorize and Situate Space Making: An Introduction," Kathleen Blake Yancey (2006) noted that the writing center "creates a different kind of learning than does the classroom [. . . because] peers tutor peers side by side" (11). Moreover, Kjesrud (2021) recently observed a gap when it comes to researched-based evidence on space and writing centers, saying that most research on learning optimization and space focuses on classrooms, omitting learning academic support system spaces like writing centers. In a push to make academic support programs more streamlined, other writing studies scholars have pointed to writing centers as examples of how physical space affects writing pedagogy, often arguing that the layout of writing centers can result

in improved student learning (Sheridan, 2006; Purdue & DeVoss, 2017; Zammarelli & Bebbe, 2019; Azima, 2022). Additionally, space deeply affects usability. In an effort to make writing centers more "sticky," Howard and Schendel (2009) explore the adaptability of space and feeling of ownership that influences what takes place in the writing center (for example, do people perceive the writing center as a place to stick around and write?).

This stickiness is often discussed with "homey-ness" in writing center literature. Although "homey-ness" has been prevalent in writing center space literature, it is a fraught concept considering individual, cultural, and societal definitions of home and how they compare to the past and current spaces. What feels "homey" is not universal, but cultural and individual. This means to declare something "homey" is naturally problematic because it assumes bias, most often white-middle-class bias. In response to this "homey-ness," using Indigenous epistemologies, Zammarelli and Beebe (2019) propose the effects of physical designs on those who use spaces can be built upon through multiple locations to increase the potential of a welcoming atmosphere for individuals. This further complicates space, calling for multiple locations as one cannot create a space that is homey/comfortable for everyone.

Even one step further, writing center studies call for conversations about space that consider timeliness and locality. Recent conversations in writing center studies have shifted away from the concept of cozy spaces to a concept of more equitable spaces, often referred to as braver spaces (Martini et. al., 2017). As writing centers consider themselves to be places for decolonization and linguistic justice, abandoning the old historical understandings of self as regulatory, Camarillo (2019) pushes the writing center community to be, "mindful of the local diversities and know who our students are and where they come from." This is further complicated by the new realities that writing centers have had to wade through as the pandemic has brought digital spaces, and the embodiment and power those spaces have (Hull, K. & Pettit, C., 2021), into consideration as we consider what our space includes—for example, does our use of Teams and WCO also change how we perceive our space, even as we have re-entered our physical spaces?

This conversation about the connection of space and pedagogy has impacted administrators' perceptions in creating community. Typically, the scholarship recommends listening to the individual voices that make up the workforce of a space. Bouquet (2002), advocating for true pedagogical bravery, focuses on community and space, coming to the realization that community was not hers to make as the director, but to sustain. In response to these issues and the influence of local context, many stress the importance of directors listening to their staff to see what parts of the community the staff hope to sustain, and which they do not. Azima (2022) asserts that space both does and does not matter, but emphasizes the need to challenge assumed space concepts (for example, a round table is better than a rectangular table for sessions), instead deferring to consultant and staff opinions.

This is especially critical when a center is in a state of flux. When studying their shift into a library, Sabatino and Herb (2021) shared their unique struggles with noise in shared spaces, feelings over ownership, lack of a shared back room for consultants, and director control over space. Ousley (2006) further stresses the importance of

including staff, specifically in the process of shifting spaces and roles. Purdy and DeVoss (2017) explore the infrastructures of writing centers, studying how transitions, like the one focused upon in this article, can cause confusion and identity changes that must be purposefully navigated.

Study Space Summary

The writing center of this study, located at a STEM-geared, R1 University in the Midwest with an enrollment of over 50,000 students, 18% of which are international students, has recently been a part of academia's shift in space conception. While some have moved to innovation labs, many to libraries, and some even to multimodal spaces they designed from the ground up, the center in this study integrated into shared space beginning the Fall Semester of 2022.

The contrast of the two spaces led me to believe this move to a completely different model would inevitably have implications on the entire staff—consultants, administrators, and clients alike. Many factors changed including physical location, environment, and usability. The previous space was located in the neglected, moldy English building on the edge of campus in a glorified classroom on the second floor. It was all pretty basic in terms of furniture, technology, and resources. The space had a main area for consulting and two small offset areas—one filled with offices and books and one filled with offices and a backroom break area. The backroom tables were usually pushed together and consultants sat at a long table. The dark classroom oozed that academia-neglect-can't-hold-us-down vibe.

The new space is much more modern: it was built this century and privileges tall windows, open concepts, glass walls, and screens that display programming and campus news. Located in a central area between the dorms and the academic buildings, the building is dedicated to student services. With flexible furniture, light, openness, and the hustle and bustle of students, this space envelopes a very different feel than the previous space. All space is shared other than the front desk and a few administrative offices, not only with another organization like a library, but with the entire university community. The Lab does not own the tables and chairs used for consulting. There is no backroom or consultant hang-out area. On a typical day, consultants have their own spot and tend to anchor down because space is a hot commodity when it's shared this way. These were some pretty major shifts, and as is the nature of writing centers that typically have a high turnover rate of consultants, the consultants didn't get too much of a say even though they were arguably the most affected. So, I wanted to hear from them.

Methods

With my PI and Associate Director, I created a mixed-methods, IRB-approved study. It was composed of a survey made mostly of Likert-scale questions for all consultants, past and present. Additionally, for those who had consulted at both locations, there were a few short answer questions (Appendix A), along with an optional interview component (Appendix B). The survey was distributed through the WholeLab Listserv and included three categories of people:

1. Those who had only consulted in the old location;
2. Those who had consulted only in the new location;
3. Those who had consulted in both locations.

Participants were reminded throughout the survey to focus only on the main location, not any satellite labs where they may have consulted. The survey mostly used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1. Strongly Disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neither Disagree or Agree; 4. Agree; and 5. Strongly Agree. Therefore, any average score 1-3 was considered an overall disagreement and 3-5, overall agreement. With 68 Likert questions and four short answer questions, this format hoped to cast a wide net to see what variables were or were not relevant to the shift in space. The goal was to have this wide net be done as quickly and as efficiently as possible, hence the consistent and quick form that Likert questions create. The short answer questions were hoping to capitalize on having qualitative data from everyone who had the ability to compare both spaces without needing them to sign up for the interview to achieve this. When designing the questions, they were sorted in three major themes: Relationships, Infrastructure, and Pedagogical Values. Relationships were broken down into three subcategories: Relationships with Coworkers, Relationships with Clients, and Relationships with Administrators. Infrastructure was broken down into the three subcategories of Environment, Location, and Usability. Pedagogical Values was broken down into Emotional Labor, Skills, and Roles.

Within that survey, I also asked for volunteers who had consulted at both locations and were willing to discuss the specific differences between the locations in more depth. I had one full-time writing consultant, two graduate consultants, and two undergraduate consultants volunteer. Those who volunteered were interviewed via Zoom for 20-30 minutes through structured interviews with eight total questions. The qualitative data was used to illustrate the quantitative data and did not provide unique data. The goal of using structured as opposed to semi-structured interview techniques was to control the topics in a way that would help draw out parallels and themes across interviewees.

With my three major themes in mind, my research question started out focused on pedagogical value, but that section of the survey did not yield significant data, indicating there wasn't a significant shift in pedagogical values and ideas among the consultants, as most of the literature would suggest. This could be because consultant education is just that strong or it could be that it's too soon for the changes in relationships and infrastructure to change those values and techniques. Because of this, my attention and this article shifted focus to responses on relationships and infrastructure.

Results

Relationships

The most significant results across both the quantitative and qualitative data were found in questions that foregrounded relationships. Across the subcategories of relationships between coworkers, administrators, and clients, consultants shifted in their perceptions and approaches to these connections. The environment shifted how people connected; sometimes, even the same shift impacted individual consultants

in opposite ways. These trends provide valuable insight into that environment-relationship connection.

Relationships - Coworkers

The most prevalent shift in the quantitative data focused on consultants' relationships with their coworkers. Despite the data showing steady rates of hoping for bonds with coworkers that extend outside of work, data on coworker relationships showcased a sense of loss. Being more spread out and much less likely to share a table, there's a clear drop in reaching out to coworkers naturally. Consultants reported they used time for relationship building in the old space with an average of 3.83. In the new spaces, they crossed the midline with a 2.92 average. Backing up this changed frequency of inter-consultant interaction, the survey also reported that people know each other's names less. Similarly, rates of people requesting assistance from a coworker during asynchronous and synchronous appointments dropped due to a general lack of knowing fellow consultants (which dropped from 4.1 to 2.85) and feeling comfortable asking for advice. However, a lot of data points within co-consultant relationships stayed steady. People reported steady rates of having interactions that change how they approach consulting, discussions with coworkers who do not share their job title, and discussion of non-work related items.

The qualitative data provides more detailed explanations of how coworker relationships have shifted. While one person reported connecting with fellow consultants by coordinating space availability, writing, "My interactions with coworkers are more positive, as we consistently talk to each other about space availability (e.g. where to go, if anyone will be done with a table soon, etc.)," most people found the shared aspect of the space to be difficult to navigate. For example, one consultant reported,

> It can often be awkward for me to talk to my coworkers, since I have to more obviously direct my attention to them and sometimes move to a different table to speak to them directly. I think this makes my conversations more brief and less casual, because I feel as though I need to have something important/relevant to say in order for it to be worth the effort. In [Old Location], all I had to do was look up from our shared table to have a conversation with the person next to me or across from me. The more 'private' aspect of the space allowed me to feel more free discussing things beyond the scope of work as well.

One consultant additionally found connections hard because of concern about adding to the background noise and felt awkward trying to connect if there wasn't a clear purpose stating,

> The lack of break room for consultants makes it really hard to connect with fellow consultants. You don't want to add to the background noise by being too loud around other people's sessions. And you definitely don't want to lose your spot by moving around and/or leaving your belongings anywhere given that it is assigned open space and not the writing lab's. It is more interaction on Teams to be honest as if we were working from home in the pandemic…

Additional comments state that being a writing consultant feels like any other job where "you just show up and then clock out" without connection. In many ways, consultants point out how purposeful and brave they have to be to make connections without the natural connection of sitting at the same table or having a break room.

Relationships - Clients

While the quantitative data about consultant-client relationships stayed largely unchanged, the short answer questions and interviews revealed that consultants have noticed a shift in their interactions with clients. These shifts had to do with rapport, sound, professionalism, and comfort. Across the board, everyone but one person's written responses found the volume to be more problematic at the new location. Consultants reported a drop of over two full points in knowing where they were going to sit and feeling secure in having a space to work, going from 4.67 to 2.63 points. Interestingly, some voiced that they felt this search for space made client interactions easier and some harder. Some felt they could bond over the search stating, "It is easy to build rapport with some people over finding a place to sit," while others felt it made it more stressful and awkward stating, "A lot of the times when the clients asked for a quieter space I am unable to give them that. It is sometimes difficult to hear each other clearly due to the noise and distracting open environment."

Some felt the new system for getting clients made the whole experience feel more transactional:

> It's very strange to me that I have to go grab the clients. It feels very customer service to me. I don't like it. I guess they just did it that way because of the setup of this space....I wouldn't necessarily wanna do that like, it's very awkward to me.

They observed that their clients felt this lack of privacy in a space filled with students just there to eat lunch, study, or hang out. They felt this may directly limit interactions writing,

> Clients are less likely to be honest about their struggles if we are sitting in [New Location] because there are often too many people in the room that can overhear our conversations. I find that in these situations, the clients will often ask to go to another floor/area that is quieter and has fewer people. (For reference these situations occur when all the tables across the front desk are taken.)

Both the physical and social implications of shared space clearly changed the experience for the consultants and their perception of the clients' experiences, requiring different types of awareness and adaptation.

Relationships - Administration

With all three categories of relationships indicating clear changes before and after the move, the last relationship researched–consultant-administration relationships– provided data regarding proximity and the layout's effect on these relationships. Consultants reported a drop in one full point when asked about seeing directors in the space; this was extended by a drop in over one point for interactions with the directors. In the old space, the directors had to go through the consultant and/or break room space to access their offices. Now, the offices are located in a corner of the building that doesn't necessarily have anything other than occasionally some coffee or food to

entice consultants back there and doesn't have a table or chairs to encourage staying there for a prolonged amount of time. This has shifted the interaction rates, or at least the consultant's perception about those rates, from 4.7 to 3.77.

This wasn't due to lack of consultant desire. Consultants still valued the face-time with their directors stating,

> I would like it to mirror a lot what [Old Location] had but sort of combine both these experiences where the leadership offices are sort of situated in the tutor pod, if I may say so, like we had before so there's more interaction with leadership. I feel like I barely see my directors anymore and I kind of miss that. So, I have to make a conscious effort to go back there and check if they're not in a meeting.

One particular consultant focused on the loss of impromptu discussions sharing, "Earlier it was more of a relaxed environment where we could hangout in the break room outside of our sessions and interact with the directors." These quotes express not only a desire to learn from directors, but a desire to just connect with them as human beings. These relationships inevitably cultivate conversations related to work that will ideally increase consultant self-efficacy and skills, making our awareness of spaces' impact on them important.

Space

The new space environment is vastly different. The environment in terms of light and infrastructure is undoubtedly better across qualitative data, but the shared nature of it makes it more complex. The short answers and interviews focused on openness, flexibility, and anxiety that have come with the big move. As the consultants could agree that, "The space is much more aesthetically pleasing," one consultant even connected this with their emotions, stating,

> One other thing I'll say is that I think I'm feeling better in the way... You know, like having an issue like being an anxious person, like the openness of the space really helps me...the old space was very orange, and dim and limited.

> However, the space changed not only in physical ways, but also in ownership. A theme of anxiety over the loss of ownership of the space was prevalent throughout the data. Without having guaranteed space, the feeling of knowing where to consult asynchronously shifted:

> I have to leave much earlier and I feel more anxiety coming into work because I don't know where I'll be able to find parking. In the fall, I was often unable to find a quiet place to focus on my e-tutoring sessions (which were probably 75% of my sessions).

This shift was also felt synchronously:

> I have to be more flexible in [New Location] because there is less space available and this makes my sessions start a little bumpy. Therefore, I often have to apologize to clients and gauge how they feel about certain spaces.

Consultants reflected on the space location in positive ways. They felt more valued by the university with an increase of 2.73 to 3.54. The only contradictory data regarding

usability was related to accessibility. The quantitative data noted a decrease in accessibility, while qualitative data was focused on an increase. This will be further explored in the discussion section.

Two people shared that they felt the "niceness" of the new space led to a more professional vibe, with a particularly memorable quote from one (half) joking,

I think we ultimately gain more than we lost by having a space that, I think to students, I think it says professional. Whereas our old space said like, "Oh, what is going on here? I know I'm gonna get murdered walking in the hallways of this building."

The other consultant who noted this shift in professionalism further extended the feeling, connecting this architectural upgrade to how they should dress and interact with clients:

I do feel like there's a certain way we need to be, because it's the Leadership Center... isn't that more professional like architecture? So it feels like we need to do that. And just dress like that, you know, I think I dress up more with [New Location] than I would with [Old Location] which is interesting.

As discussed earlier, "homey-ness" is a concept often present in writing center studies and has continued to be challenged for the past decades. Despite this, or perhaps even because of this, I was curious how "homey" the space felt to consultants. Whatever it meant to them, there was a clear drop in that feeling from 3.03 to 2.31, leaving me to wonder how the concepts of professionalism and "homey-ness" do and/or do not intersect.

Consultants also noted changes in the usability of the space. There was a clear drop in using outside tools and a clear increase in feeling the furniture was impeding the ability to consult. Most writing centers, the one studied here included, have resources such as books and paper available for consultants. One consultant noted,

Shared materials are less accessible in [New Location] because the admin door is locked when mgmt is gone and all cabinets are locked; I feel anxious placing my belongings down in the [New Location] shared space especially when they are out of sight for any period of time.

The shared space also changes the usability of the space itself. While the new building has flexible furniture, one consultant noted,

In terms of furniture, I think what we have now is that, like, it's more accessible. I would have more noise cancellation rooms or quiet rooms, not just have multiple rooms like that.... Oh, with us, I, I think more tables for tutoring, because I do think that they're not a lot right now, and we don't have them only for tutoring. I know the signage does like: These are our tables, but I think like having more, or maybe like larger tables where, like maybe 2 tutors can sit that they wanna work with each other or more. Like having different sizes per table. I guess also the outlets not being off the floor. It's so weird that they're on the floor.

Space availability and type directly impacted consultants' reflections on how artifacts in the space complement or take away from usability.

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative data combined to paint a clear picture of perceived gains and losses. Most items stayed steady, differentiating what is more dependent on the space and what is more dependent on the job, training, and people who make up the space. A consultant best summed it up:

> I definitely think there are assets of both spaces and I would, you know, prefer that someday the writing lab explores being able to incorporate the best of those assets from both spaces rather than picking just one over the other now. When I say best, I guess I mean kind of best by consensus. So, whatever everybody who's consultants in both those spaces determines as what is the best. I hope the Writing Lab pursues a space more like that, rather than one over the other.

Discussion

After casting such a wide net, the data provided key insights into what had and had not changed. While pedagogical values showed the least amount of shift between locations, relationships and infrastructure were clearly impacted to the consultants. As with most major space shifts, there were lots of positives and negatives. When reflecting on both the gains and losses, three major themes emerged: Spontaneous vs. Integrated Interaction, Value Reflected by Space, and Usability of Space. Considering how often these three areas were discussed, there's reason to correlate these concepts with the space itself, especially given the insights of the qualitative data in which consultants explicitly connected these concepts to their old and new spaces. Acknowledging these shifts lets writing centers see what they can capitalize upon in new spaces and what responses may be warranted to continue to thoughtfully and purposefully create new solutions. As the shift has led to some feeling unsupported or unable to reach out when they needed help, there is an impact that must be addressed.

Spontaneous vs. Integrated Interaction

The most prevalent and frequent changes in both the quantitative and qualitative data were related to relationships. Writing centers are by definition service-based and relationship-centered, so it wasn't surprising to see that consultants think deeply about their relationships with each other, their clients, and their administrators.

The research clearly showed a drop in coworker interactions. While coworkers do not need to have interactions to be successful within their jobs, the data showed a connection between these relationships and collaborative professional development and growth. As a consultant noted,

> So, having someone to model the way that I'm teaching off of, I think that was a big part for me. So like watching, more experienced consultants figuring out like, oh, okay, like, here are the kinds of things they're doing.

Being able to learn from others is key to most jobs, and writing consulting is no exception. While friendships may not be critical to a functioning workplace, ease in reaching out certainly enhances experience and outcomes.

Despite a drop in these spontaneous interactions, the similar rates of interaction that change how consultants approach sessions, discussion with people outside of their positions, and discussions about non-work related items suggest that connections

are still happening. I speculate this is a result of connections built in by necessity of the job, like graduate students instructing undergrads throughout the consultant prep course and staff meetings. This shows a struggle to make spontaneous connections, but that the integrated interactions are continuing to create interactions.

Value Reflected by Space

Another interesting find was an increased awareness of worth that comes from a professional-looking building. Whether they felt like one should dress up more or a general sense of their position being more valued, consultants were deeply affected by the aesthetics of the two spaces. In the new space, consultants felt the institution valued them more, both because of the building and location. With a more central location, consultants not only reflected on what it meant to their own issues like parking, but to students who were less likely to visit the humanities edge of campus. Consultants themselves interpreted this value into their own interactions, considering professional attire and the ways they interact with clients.

Usability of Space

The usability of the space was frequently discussed in both positive and negative ways, emphasizing how the dynamic nature of the space impacted how tutors interacted with the space itself and the resources within it. While writing center literature is pushing away from this concept of homey writing centers, there was a drop in that feeling of hominess. This does not necessarily indicate a negative change, but the clear drop does suggest a different response to the space. This may have a direct connection to the ideas of ownership and control. Consultants don't own space and are more likely to need to move because a room is being taken over for a meeting, so a more distanced relationship with the space itself is not surprising.

While there was anxiety due to ownership, the environment also alleviated anxiety for consultants. One consultant loved how bright the space was compared to the old location, but another lamented parking concerns and availability of quiet space. However, consultants clearly enjoy the more central, open, and modern space, connecting it with their experiences of the job itself.

Although the new building was specifically designed to be adaptable and flexible, usability of resources provided some unexpected results. There was a clear drop in using non-personal tools and a clear increase in feeling of the furniture impeding ability of consultants. These unexpected results left me with some questions: Are fewer tools due to a lack of ownership? Is there a benefit to increasing this? In the previous space, the furniture was pretty barebones and not super comfortable, yet consultants seem to be struggling with the furniture more here. Could this have to do with the signs posted around telling people not to move the intentionally-flexible furniture?

Another unexpected usability result was the quantitative data indicated a decrease in accessibility, while the qualitative data suggested an increase. The new space is much more new, up-to-date, and accessible in my definition of being capable of being used by people with different physical and neuro abilities. Consultants may be factoring in unintended concepts when they think of accessibility such as sufficient space. For example, when discussing accessibility, one consultant writes, "Accessibility to other spaces closer to central campus (food options, study spaces, conference

rooms): [New Location] is much closer to where I park and other convenient campus amenities (corec)..." Accessibility can mean very different things to different consultants such as the access to materials, constraints of supposedly-flexible furniture, ability to find space, and even presence/type of electronic outlets. Yet others think about how easy it is to access parking and Starbucks. Some others thought in the frame of disability. This shows that quantitative responses were most likely referencing very different concepts that qualitative data provided clarity to.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations. In the move, many factors changed. With a change of location, ownership, environment, and more, it's impossible to conclude direct correlation between specific aspects of that change to specific data changes. Additionally, the consultants surveyed and interviewed all work within the same local context. While a few had experiences from previous writing centers, most have only worked within this specific center. This local context makes the specific data here less generalizable, but does show a generalizable need to formally hear from the tutors during transitions. Finally, all survey questions were written to minimize different interpretations, but terms like "accessibility" were interpreted in different ways and the data was subject to the consultants' interpretations.

Moving Forward

In the interviews, I asked consultants to tell me a little about their ideal writing center if they were to design one from the ground up. Consultants' main concern with the new space that they expressed was the lack of a consultant space that created a feeling of community and cohorts. Uncovering and discussing what consultants value in both spaces and critically thinking of how to best help consultants get the most out of their relationships and the space is vital when there are large space shifts. The largest theme was that consultants want a space dedicated to them to see each other and administrators more. The data indicates that they can still interact, but it takes more planning and these interactions must be thoughtful and purposeful, creating structured opportunities to interact since they do not happen as spontaneously or naturally. Whether it's to have a quick discussion for e-consulting, a place to talk without being overheard by clients, and for those who want it, a place to make relationships that extend outside of the lab, a loss of a place to make more spontaneous relationships kept popping up. Consultants also wanted more private space options for their clients and to feel secure that they will find a place to consult. They loved the flexibility, lighting, and just professional air of a newer building, connecting this to their own mental health and perception of self and the Lab.

In the new space, it's easy to take advantage of the advantages, and there are strategies to mitigate some of the losses. In response to the losses, administrators created signs that dedicated five standard circular tables and two accent circular tables to the OWL noon to 5 p.m. The front desk staff had to fight for this, and it did help medicate the search for space, though many consultants indicated they still struggled to find a spot. Purposeful community creation is highlighted through events like all-staff meetings, social events, Team messages, and monthly whiteboard brackets

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that have encouraged spontaneous conversations across tables. The consultants also share access to one sensory room that is private. It must be booked in advance, but consultants are able to take advantage of that to help mitigate any privacy issues they may come across.

As situated in the discussion section, key learnings for our particular center focused on interaction types, feelings of value, and usability. It's well established that space shapes and affects learning, but this particular study gave insight into what our consultants most attributed to space. Interactions inevitably shift due to space, and those considerations must be at the forefront of any space decision with employees who are usually very relationship-focused due to the nature of the job. This doesn't mean there is a need for a break room—it just means there's a need to consider how a space may change interaction types and consider how to fill in any gaps. It's also important for stakeholders to see how much space really can determine how a consultant feels in terms of value. Though it may not be conscious or brought up, this shift revealed just how much the old space and new space changed how consultants connected that space with their worth and the worth of the lab as a whole. Finally, it's important to critically examine how the usability of a space works and how it can shift. For this particular center, it's important to consider how accessible resources are, how the check-in process can shift the overall feel of the appointment, and how resources just outside the lab within proximity can shape a consultant's experience. The unique context of shared space influenced all three of these areas, asserting its noticeability to the consultants. In any story, the setting impacts the narrative in noticeable ways; while consultants may be wonderful actors and will continue to be so in any play, the setting is worthy of examination and reflection.

Moving forward, it is critical that writing center stakeholders continue hearing the voices of the consultants in formal ways like forums. I personally hope to see how this data will shift once most of the population has only consulted and trained in the new location. Repeating this survey again in a few years when consultants are more established in the new space could yield very interesting results. Furthermore, writing center space shifts all look very different. Further research across different space changes could provide insight into what is commonly felt across institutions and what is dependent on the details of the space change. This could help narrow down the factors that contribute to change as perceived by consultants and indicate what to pay attention to when writing centers experience a space change. This way, those who are arguably the face of the writing center, the consultants, have their voices heard so they can continue to be effective and connected.

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Appendix A

Please note these are the questions given for time in our old space. All questions for the new space are the same, only written in the present tense. These questions were after consultants were asked, "In which locations have you tutored for the XXX?" and the survey diverted them to their correct set of questions accordingly.

For your time in [location] please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. I prioritized relationship-building with my coworkers during work hours when I did not have a client.
2. I chatted with coworkers while working on asynchronous appointments.
3. I have reached out to a coworker midsession during a synchronous appointment (online or F2F) when I was unsure of something.
4. If I had a session I was struggling with, I turned to my coworkers for advice after the session was done.
5. I have had a conversation with a coworker that changed how I view or approach tutoring in general.
6. I have gotten work advice from someone who is not in my position, but not my supervisor (e.g. a PWS getting advice from a UTA or a GTA getting advice from a Post Doc).
7. I have spoken to my coworkers about non-work-related items.
8. I spent time with coworkers outside of work.
9. I thought tutors at the lab should spend time with coworkers outside of work.
10. I knew most of my coworkers (UTAs, GTAs, Administrative Staff, Director Staff) by name.
11. I saw the directors in the space often.
12. I interacted with the directors often.
13. I liked the building we tutored in and look forward to spending time there.
14. I felt the workplace was a home away from home.
15. I spent time on a regular basis in writing-lab-used space directly before or after one of my tutoring shifts.
16. The physical environment where I tutored was comfortable (e.g. chairs, temperature, brightness).
17. I felt energized in the space.
18. In general, I felt happy with the volume in the space I worked.

19. I moved furniture around to meet my needs (beyond pulling out a chair)
20. The furniture options impeded my ability to tutor.
21. The aesthetic components of our space (art, posters, signage, etc.) expressed the writing center's purpose.
22. I felt the location I tutored in was safe.
23. Our space reflected that the university valued us.
24. Our space reflected our values as a writing center.
25. The location of the building impacted who came to the writing center.
26. One of the purposes of [Location Name] was to house the writing center.
27. I felt confident I knew where in the building I would tutor every day.
28. I felt in control of the learning space.
29. The space was accessible to me.
30. I would have described our space as flexible.
31. I have asked someone to move so I have space to tutor.
32. I have been asked by someone else to leave a space while tutoring.
33. I needed to move during a session because the space wasn't working for me or the client.
34. There were tools that were not my own personal property (whiteboards, papers, folders, pens, visual aids, screens, diagrams, books, handouts, etc.) that I used during sessions.
35. There was a private space I could access for students or documents that required it.
36. There was space for me to decompress between sessions.
37. I felt the building enhanced my ability to tutor well.
38. I prioritized relationship-building with clients during sessions.
39. Being an encouraging, positive presence for clients was an important part of my job.
40. As a tutor in the Writing Lab, kindness was more important than being direct.
41. Collaboration was at the center of my sessions.
42. Patience was necessary to be a tutor.
43. I changed how I communicated based on my perception of the client's culture.

During the time you worked in [building], indicate how strongly you believed or disbelieved each of the following statements:

1. Writers got to make decisions – never me.
2. There was no "right" or "wrong" way to write.
3. It was important a client left with a better document.
4. The writing center should make better writers, not better writing.
5. My goal was to help the writer make stronger choices.
6. Writing was context dependent.
7. Writing was culturally influenced.
8. When I read a paper, I found myself evaluating the quality of the paper.
9. I had ethical responsibilities when responding to in-process documents (e.g. raising difficult topics when someone was using discriminatory language or

helping someone advocate for their own writing choices).
10. Part of my job was increasing linguistic justice.
11. In my sessions, I purposefully established respect for the writer.
12. I believed a writer must respect the tutor for a session to be productive.
13. I brought expertise to a session that my client did not have.
14. My ability to adjust was critical to a tutorial session.
15. Being able to facilitate compromise was part of the job.
16. I was in control of the direction of the tutorial.
17. I needed the client to bring a prompt or rubric (when applicable) to best do my job.
18. The best predictor of a successful session was how much effort the writer made.
19. I feel confident as a tutor.
20. I actively look for new tutoring strategies and approaches.
21. I like to try new strategies and approaches.
22. Genre conventions are more important than personal style.
23. Addressing purely grammatical items is part of my job.
24. I focus on asking questions.
25. I make cultural influences of writing explicit in sessions.

Short Answer Questions:

1. Since the move from [Old Location] to [New Location], do you see any changes in your interactions with clients that you think may have been influenced by space? If so, how?
2. Since the move from [Old Location] to [New Location], do you see any changes in your interactions with coworkers that you think may have been influenced by space? If so, how?
3. Since the move from [Old Location] to [New Location], do you see any changes in how you view tutoring?
4. Are there any other notable changes in your work experience that you may attribute to space?

Appendix B
Interview Questions:

1. What are some key pedagogical practices that you believe are important to your consulting?
2. How have these practices changed and grown throughout your time as a consultant? What do you think has caused the change?
3. How would you say you interacted with [Old Location]'s space?
4. How would you say you interact with [New Location]'s space?
5. (possible follow up if not answered in previous question) What shifts have you noticed of how you function in the space since the move from [Old Location] to [New Location]?
6. If you were to design your ideal writing center, what would that space look like?

Some ideas to consider would be about furniture, signage, front desk location, waiting areas, noise factors, leadership offices, outlets, anything that makes a space more workable for you.

7. Do you find yourself working differently in the new space?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to share about space?

Jacqueline Borchert

Jacqueline Borchert is a Professional Writing Specialist at the Purdue University Writing Lab. She has worked as a writing consultant there throughout her academic and professional career as an undergraduate tutor, graduate tutor, OWL content creator, and now full-time staff member. She has a background in education including a Teaching English Language Learners certificate. She enjoys working with a diverse group of students, faculty, and staff and has research interests in place, community-based writing projects, multilingualism, group identity and multiracial identity. Within the lab she does one-on-one tutoring, creates and presents workshops, leads an English conversation group, and does individual research.

Addressing Challenges Faced by Neurodivergent Writers

Kaycee Johnson, Eastern Michigan University
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As writers and peer writing center consultants, we have experienced personal challenges with writing due to diagnosed and or suspected neurodiversity and have experienced many consultations with neurodivergent writers; we also personally know peers who express challenges with both writing and other forms of education possibly related to neurodiversity. Thus, we were curious to see if other neurodiverse individuals have had the same experiences, or unique experiences, that would benefit from a set of compiled strategies meant to promote the effectiveness of one's environment, focus, and collaboration with others.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to answer the question: *How does neurodiversity affect the writing experience?* and to identify strategies to make the writing experience more successful for neurodivergent writers. Additionally, the study sought to suggest ways to implement the findings in the context of writing centers and other education environments. The "writing experience" was not restricted in the survey to any particular style or category of writing, but phrased as "writing" in general. Leaving this open to the participants' interpretation, we assume that the participants answered considering the act of composing a written piece in any context.

Neurodiversity is a word used to describe the different ways that people's brains function; being neurodivergent, as opposed to neurotypical, means that one's brain functions differently from what is considered normal (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). These differences in turn affect behavior, learning experiences, and interactions with the environment and peers. Neurodivergence includes many conditions, from mental disorders to learning disabilities to depression or anxiety. For this study, we took the most common conditions from the *Diagnostic and Statistical*

Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and provided survey participants with a list that included attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), both inattentive (which has replaced the diagnosis of ADD) and hyperactive-impulsive presentations; autism spectrum disorder (ASD); anxiety; and dyslexia.

This study was completed in a 3-credit hour training course open to undergraduate students to become consultants in the Eastern Michigan University (EMU) University Writing Center. The research results were presented at the EMU CONNECT Teaching Conference in workshop form, the EMU Undergraduate Research Symposium, and the 2023 ECWCA Conference at Purdue in workshop form. In addition to the survey and interviews, we continued compiling perspectives and solutions to the issues originally examined through review of current literature and the input of workshop participants, as well as new issues that emerged during the workshops. These significant issues include difficulty writing about topics in which the writer is not interested and focusing on interesting versus uninteresting writing tasks. The scope of analysis was expanded from peer-student interaction in a writing center to general learning environments, including writing centers, classrooms, tutoring spaces, and individual learning spaces (such as working from home).

Background and Justification

Existing literature regarding neurodivergence shows how neurodivergence is treated in a neurotypical society and how that society automatically creates barriers for people who function differently than the accepted norm. Neurodivergent conditions are still treated as issues within individuals that need to be changed or fixed rather than "normal human variation" (Honeybourne, 2019), creating immediate stigma when someone is diagnosed. This creates barriers for neurodivergent people to get access to accommodations that can help them be more successful in environments and situations geared toward the way neurotypical people function (Tumlin, 2019). Neurotypical society often presents consequences, particularly social, for neurodivergent people as soon as others know that someone is different, but self-advocacy could combat the negative stereotypes surrounding neurodiversity, increase access to accommodations, and increase acceptance of neurodiversity by exposing neurotypical society to the realities of neurodiversity (Tumlin, 2019). Tumlin (2019) explains that

> neurodivergence is not a gift or a curse, but a state of being. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, period. Removing someone's impairment would give them a different set of attributes, not make them perfect or their lives hardship-free. However, their life would become easier, in many cases because they would fit into our ableist society better. (p. 6)

A society built for neurotypical people can present challenges for neurodivergent people through environmental conditions. Environmental stimuli that annoy or distract neurotypical people can be overwhelming and even painful to neurodivergent people, such as bright lights, loud or incessant noise, lack of personal space, and busy visual stimuli (Honeybourne, 2019) and can cause sensory overload and trouble concentrating. Open-plan spaces can intensify all of these sensory inputs, as well as

contribute a great amount of stress due to social expectations; neurodivergent people often feel more anxiety as they are pressured to work in the same ways as their neurotypical peers when visually exposed in open spaces (Honeybourne, 2019).

The writing experience is not limited to the solitary action of writing. Making a holistic evaluation of the writing journey should include considerations of situations that involve collaborative writing. These range from group projects to writing center consultations, where a writer is actively or passively working with another person to create some type of cohesive written piece. Expectations surrounding collaboration created by a neurotypical society can create challenges for neurodivergent people. Cecil-Lemkin (2020) describes the current assumption in education to be that "collaboration is an implicit skill" (p. 9) and thus educational professionals dismiss the experiences of neurodivergent students by assuming that collaboration is "universally accessible" (p. 9). Cecil-Lemkin (2020) found that neurodivergent students enjoyed collaboration more than neurotypical students but felt significantly more anxiety than did their neurotypical peers when they had to work in a group. This anxiety might come from having to follow social norms, experiencing discrimination within the group based on being neurodivergent, or not knowing how and how well other group members will contribute to the collaborative task. When collaborative projects were ungraded, neurodivergent students expressed less anxiety; Cecil- Lemkin (2020) therefore suggested that the stakes be gradually increased so students can learn to be comfortable collaborating without feeling as though they have no control over an important grade. And, as neurodivergent students become more comfortable working in groups, the efforts and eventually the project could be graded so as to build positive associations with collaboration, rather than negative, anxiety-inducing associations.

In writing centers, we have the ability to individualize each student's learning experience (Gemmell, 2022). An example of this individualization is reflected in Fleming's (2020) focus on asynchronous video tutoring practices in the context of working with autistic students, asserting that asynchronous tutoring is just as dynamic, collaborative, and writer-focused as synchronous tutoring, in-person and virtual. Giving writers an alternative form of collaboration has the potential to improve their overall collaborative experiences in education as well as increase their comfort level with utilizing writing center services. The asynchronous format might serve the needs of neurodivergent writers better than having to be physically in a writing center space or having to interact in a real-time social exchange (*sensu* Fleming, 2020). Students have discussed the videos as having the feel of real-time consultations because the tutor's reactions to a student's writing are spontaneous as they would be synchronously (Fleming, 2020). This technique could be used in writing centers as an alternative feedback option for students who face challenges regarding environmental or social situations. Cottle (2023) has implemented many strategies inspired by Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into writing center practices. UDL focuses on motivating students to learn, having students try different types of learning, developing skills and setting goals to succeed, and creating accessible physical spaces (Cottle, 2023). When centers and tutors can practice strategies such as these, it helps make the writing center accessible to all learners. We suggest that the growing awareness of the combination of challenges faced by neurodivergent writers, the nature of the

strategies to combat them currently in practice, and the overall limited amount of field studies call for further research and discussion. The hope is that the rest of this article will explore and provide improved evolution of best practices that would be useful for synchronous and asynchronous writing consultations and other educational situations.

Methods

This study was conducted at Eastern Michigan University, a public four-year university enrolling about 14,000 students at the time of the study, at the end of the Fall 2022 semester in the form of a survey (see Appendix) asking about writing experiences and neurodiversity. An internal institutional analysis determined that the scope and scale of this study fell below the need for IRB approval (Pavlock, 2021). The survey defined "neurodivergence" as "when someone's brain works differently or processes information differently from what is socially accepted, which is known in some circles as being neurotypical" and provided examples of some common conditions, including ADHD, depression, OCD, dyslexia, anxiety, and Autism spectrum disorder. Survey questions collected demographic data such as gender, age, and whether participants were neurotypical, had a diagnosis of a neurodivergent condition, or had no diagnosis but suspected they had a condition, and were provided a text box to specify what diagnosis they had or suspected they had. Six questions were answered on a 1-10 scale, including "On a scale of 1-10 (1 not difficult at all, 10 extremely difficult), how difficult is it for you to write about something you are not interested in?" and "On a scale of 1-10, (1 not difficult at all, 10 extremely difficult) how difficult do you find it to focus on a writing task?" There were also open-ended questions such as "Describe your writing process", "what strategies do you use that help you when writing?", and "what is your favorite thing you have written? Why?" that were used to get ideas for the tools we were to compile later, and to find possible explanations for any discrepancies between groups. We assume the assumptions for a one-way ANOVA were met; each test run was a one-way ANOVA test. Differences with p-values less than 0.100 were considered significant (90.0% confidence).

We each conducted a one-on-one interview as well. Interviewees were subjectively selected based on known significant experience with neurodivergence. The interviews were conducted, one in person and one over Zoom, to gain a more in-depth view of two different perspectives on neurodiversity in the classroom, particularly related to writing tasks. Questions that guided these interviews included "What is your experience as a neurodivergent writer/working with neurodivergent writers?", "What effects do you think neurodivergence has on writing or education and why?", "Do you have any suggestions that you believe would help neurodivergent writers/students be more successful?" and others.

The survey population consisted of 39 Eastern Michigan University students and personnel, both affiliated and unaffiliated with the University Writing Center; respondents remained anonymous. Of the 39 participants, 5 were assigned male at birth and 34 were assigned female at birth. The average age of participants was 19.6 years, with seven outliers between the ages of 28 and 75 years. Regarding the two interviews conducted, the two participants were a neurodivergent college student, age 20, and a high school English teacher with experience teaching

neurodivergent students. They were selected because we knew them as people who had personal experiences with neurodiversity. Subjects' responses were recorded as contemporaneous notes, including quoted statements of special significance.

Results

Neurodivergent respondents constituted approximately 33% of the sample, neurotypical respondents constituted approximately 41%, and suspected but not diagnosed neurodivergent participants constituted approximately 26% of the sample. The mean $\bar{x}$ reported difficulty of writing about a topic in which participants are interested for each group was: neurodivergent, $\bar{x}$ = 1.54; neurotypical, $\bar{x}$ = 3.19; suspecting, $\bar{x}$ = 3.10 (see Table One). There was no significant difference between neurodivergent participants' and neurotypical participants' perceived difficulty of writing about a topic in which they are interested (p= 0.147, df=1), nor between neurodivergent participants' and participants who suspect they are neurodivergent (p= 0.164, df=1), nor between neurotypical participants' and participants who suspect they are neurodivergent (p= 0.915, df=1).

The mean reported difficulty of writing about a topic in which participants are not interested was: neurodivergent; $\bar{x}$ = 7.38; neurotypical, $\bar{x}$ = 6.44; suspecting, $\bar{x}$ = 8.50. There was a significant difference between neurotypical participants' and neurodivergent participants' perceived difficulty of writing about a topic in which they are not interested (p= 0.053, df=1), and between neurotypical participants' and suspecting participants' perceived difficulty of writing about a topic in which they are not interested (p= 0.021, df=1). There was not a significant difference between neurodivergent participants' and suspecting participants' difficulty of writing about a topic in which they are not interested (p= 0.626, df=1).

There was a significant difference between neurodivergent participants' perceived difficulty of writing about a topic in which they are interested ($\bar{x}$ =1.54) and a topic in which they are not interested ($\bar{x}$ =7.38) (p< 0.001, df=1), as well as between neurotypical participants' difficulty of writing about a topic in which they are interested ($\bar{x}$ = 3.19) and a topic in which they are not interested ($\bar{x}$ =6.44) (p< 0.001, df=1), and between suspecting participants' difficulty of writing about a topic in which they are interested (= 3.10) and a topic in which they are not interested ($\bar{x}$ = 8.50) (p< 0.001, df=1).

The mean difficulty of focusing on a writing task for each group was: neurodivergent, $\bar{x}$ = 6; neurotypical, $\bar{x}$ = 6.38; suspecting, $\bar{x}$ = 7.4. There was not a significant difference between neurodivergent and neurotypical participants' difficulty of focusing on a writing task (p= 0.680, df=1), nor between neurodivergent and suspecting participants' difficulty of focusing on a writing task (p= 0.154, df=1), nor between neurotypical and suspecting participants' difficulty of focusing on a writing task (p= 0.250, df=1).

The mean amount that being neurodivergent was perceived to inhibit writing ability for the two relevant groups was: neurodivergent, $\bar{x}$ = 5.58; suspecting, $\bar{x}$ = 6.38 (Table One). There was not a significant difference in how much being neurodivergent is perceived to inhibit writing ability between neurodivergent and suspecting participants (p= 0.477, df=1).

The neurotypical and neurodivergent groups differed significantly in perceived difficulty of writing about a topic in which they are not interested, and neurotypical and self-suspecting (no official diagnosis) groups differed significantly in the same respect. There were significant differences within each group in the perceived difficulty of writing about a topic in which they are interested versus a topic in which they are not interested.

Table 1
Response Means for Neurological Groupings to Selected Questions

Neurological Grouping Means	Question 8	Question 9	Question 13	Question 19
Neurodivergent	1.54	7.38	6	5.58
Suspected Neurodivergent	3.10	8.50	6.38	6.38
Neurotypical	3.19	6.44	7.4	N/A

Note. See Appendix for question details.

Discussion

This study was limited by a relatively short time frame over which survey results were collected, and a small sample size. This sample group consisted of the members of the population that the researchers had access to without needing to gain authorization for a larger sample group. We operated under the assumption that the self-reported neurodivergent conditions were correct.

This survey may be seen as a pilot study for more representative, controlled, and in-depth research. Surveys of much larger, more diverse populations would be beneficial to gaining knowledge of the true extent of these experiences. It would be beneficial to do an in-depth analysis of whether the ANOVA assumptions were met, as this was not done. Experimental studies may also provide interesting results, perhaps assigning two randomized groups to separate writing conditions or assignments, and studying the differences between neurodivergent writers and neurotypical writers. One might also explore online education/writing center experiences. Especially in recent years, online options have been deeply integrated into higher education; it might be worth looking at how neurodiversity is affected by this in different contexts as well. Another direction might be to move from the effects of neurodivergence to students in general, classroom environments, and assignments other than writing tasks. More research on the effectiveness of UDL is also warranted. Finally, the effectiveness of the strategies we gathered could be tested in different contexts with different populations. We invite other researchers to replicate our survey to improve and expand the database in this area.

We intend for the focus of this article to remain on the scientifically objective approach to data interpretation that we took in our research. However, there is

value in our personal perspectives as neurodivergent thinkers regarding the broader scope of our discussions. Our personal experiences were the motivation behind this research, and having insight into some of the invisible struggles that exist in education was crucial to the connections and conclusions that we made. Moving forward, this does not have to be the case. As interest in this topic emerges, all perspectives and experiences may be crucial to the change for which we are advocating.

Next Steps and Conclusion

After studying the survey results and interview conversations, we dove into the literature to find strategies and tools that could be used in writing centers to improve consultations, to send writers to use on their own, and that can be used in other education environments to improve the overall learning experience. Inspired by both the existing literature and our experiences as consultants and writers, the strategies we found fell into the three main areas of concern that could greatly benefit neurodivergent writers and students, as well as provide some assistance to neurotypical people who find themselves struggling in the same areas.

Focus

The survey results indicated that all participants struggle to focus on a writing task. There is not sufficient evidence from this survey that neurodivergence specifically affects focus; however, as all three groups scored above 5 on the 1-10 scale of difficulty, it is important to address the issue of focus regardless of whether we know the underlying reasons for any given individual. Before performing the statistical analyses, seeing the higher means of neurodivergent and suspecting participants led us to look for strategies used by disability communities that we could transfer to the writing center context. This may be an example of where concepts from UDL could be implemented. Many of the guidelines listed for UDL on the website called "CAST" align with the strategies we learned about, including offering multimodal assignments, getting students interested in their learning, and controlling environmental factors. However, UDL is not accepted as effective by everyone. Boysen (2021) points out that the framework is not supported by adequate research, that it is concerningly similar to the "discredited concept of learning styles," and that it overgeneralizes neuroscience research to support it. Considering this and other criticisms of UDL, we advise readers to consider it as an option, rather than the answer.

A tool recommended by many survey respondents as well as National Autism Resources (2023) was allowing access to fidget or stimulation toys. Having somewhere to focus their physical energy allows students to better focus their mental energy. This can include fidget cubes or spinners, anxiety rings, an atomic ball, pop its, stress balls, and tangles. Some of these are better suited to different environments depending on how much noise they make or their size, but there is a wide enough variety of affordable options to choose from. This is a great opportunity for writing centers and classrooms to practice inclusion; by having these things available, it shows the neurodivergent student that their needs are understood and they are in an environment in which it is safe to be themselves.

The survey results support that it is more difficult for all writers to write about something they are not interested in. Neurodivergent-suspecting writers found it

significantly more difficult than did neurotypical writers. Especially in writing center or tutoring contexts, a solution to this difficulty could be to help the writer make the experience interesting by connecting the assignment or topic to something they are passionate about or can relate to. Many answers to the open-ended question "What is your favorite thing you have written? Why?" indicated that participants enjoyed writing about things that they cared about or were interested in. Using the phrase "interest-based nervous system" Dodson (2022) explains that focus in people with ADHD is reliant on interest, competition, novelty, and urgency, rather than what is expected to be important or prioritized. One of the interviewees discussed how, in their experience, students with ADHD or ASD often engage in hyper fixation, where they learn a tremendous amount of information and details about a specific topic due to intense interest. The interviewee expressed that this should be seen as a strength and used to benefit the student's learning experience whenever possible. Showing students how something is meaningful in relation to their life and interests can open their minds to more ways the information can be useful, and may give them stronger motivation to engage in the task.

If the writer and tutor struggle to find personal connections, an alternative strategy might be to make the task fun. Turn the writing session into a game or creative activity to jumpstart interest in the task or topic, such as setting a short timer for the writer to come up with as many related ideas as they can. This can help the writer overcome the barrier of disinterest by taking away the option of time to mull over the reasons they do not want to do the task. Being as creative and involved as the writer/student needs when working through this struggle can open both the tutor's and the writer's minds to the writer/student's strengths that might be hidden behind that barrier.

Along the same lines, using visuals might help a writer or student understand assignments better, organize their thoughts, and generate creative ideas. In the writing center, if a student is having trouble putting their thoughts into words, have them draw what they are thinking or feeling in regards to the writing task. This can be as minimal or as creative as suits them-- simply drawing lines between boxes to represent connections between ideas, an entire scene with specific details, or something in between, like a comic strip to put thoughts in order-- as long as it helps them move forward. In the context of the classroom, this could mean adding helpful pictures and diagrams to lecture slides, as opposed to only text, as well as drawing out connections between ideas as they are taught, such as on a white board or chalkboard. Seeing the information take a physical shape, or having something to hold visual attention, can promote engagement for those students who struggle to focus for long periods of time.

Another struggle with focusing for long periods of time, as explained by an interviewee, relates back to physical energy: sitting still for an entire class period or the length of an entire writing consultation can be very difficult for neurodivergent students. Fidget toys are a great way to reduce the need to move, but if that is not enough, consultants or instructors can allow short movement breaks (Honeybourne, 2019). Finally, many of the answers to open-ended questions mentioned listening to music helping participants focus while writing. While this may not be practical to apply during a consultation or lecture, it is still a useful tool for writers to be aware of. There

may be ways to incorporate this, such as playing quiet classical music, or, if during a class there is quiet writing time, allowing students to listen to music during that period. Music can also inhibit focus, so learn what works best for individuals before making a decision.

Environments

A large part of what makes focusing so difficult for neurodivergent people is the physical environment they are in. Lots of background noise, fluorescent lights, and cluttered spaces all provide ample opportunities for distraction (Honeybourne, 2019). One of our interviewees stated that classrooms are built for neurotypical brains, and neurodivergent people are expected to fit the mold. Performance might be affected by distractions in the environment, rather than a lack of ability to complete tasks (Honeybourne, 2019).

Solutions to environmental barriers include finding spaces that have natural light, or installing non-fluorescent lighting in writing centers and classrooms. If a student has an issue with the noise level, offer a more secluded space for them to work. In writing centers, this could mean finding a private study room or empty hallway in the building; in classrooms, this could mean allowing the student to spend time out of the classroom during in-class work. If those are not options, resources such as Loop earplugs can block out background noise while still allowing the wearer to hear what is going on. Cluttered spaces tend to pull visual attention away from what the student or writer is supposed to be focusing on, so keeping spaces organized and avoiding unnecessarily attention-grabbing decorations or posters can give the student less to look at. In some cases, cluttered visual fields or particularly noisy areas can cause sensory overload, which will make it very difficult for the student or writer to be productive and can induce intense frustration or anxiety. Finally, model organizational strategies. If the writer is struggling with organizing their thoughts or their physical space, show them options for how they might keep things uncluttered or organize their thoughts on paper (eg., mind mapping can be modeled by hand or through websites such as Lucidchart.com). This can help all writers control environments outside of classrooms and writing centers as well.

Collaboration

The final main area of writing and learning affected by neurodiversity is collaboration. Part of this, one of the interviewees explained, comes from the assumption that everyone will conform to neurotypical behavioral expectations. According to Cecil-Lemkin (2020), neurodivergent students actually value collaborative work more than their neurotypical peers do. However, neurodivergent students are also more likely to be anxious at the idea of a group project. One could infer from the work of Rentenbach et al. (2017) that this may be because of struggles effectively communicating with or connecting with group members, or due to fear of being judged for needing accommodations. The best ways to help with this struggle that we came up with is to one, provide a safe space for neurodivergent students to operate naturally, and two, educate their neurotypical peers. If a student feels safe and supported during a consultation, that feeling of having someone who understands them may help them

to advocate for themselves in a group setting, or they may feel comfortable bringing their group to the writing center itself. This includes making sure that consultants are well-educated on the different ways the neurodivergent brain can work and are adequately prepared to offer accommodations that allow neurodivergent students to do their work in the best way for them. Often in group project settings, some students are seen as slacking off or not contributing. By educating their neurotypical peers, we can show that neurodivergent students simply need to do things differently, but can still be productive participants. In classroom contexts, instructors being open to mediating within groups might be a useful way to ensure that each student gets responsibilities that play to their individual strengths and that challenge them but do not hinder their success or the success of the group. It will also be helpful to teach neurodivergent students to advocate for themselves, and to not be afraid to ask for what they need in order to be successful.

The responsibility of educating about and implementing these strategies falls to every party involved, neurodivergent and neurotypical: writing center employees, educators in general classroom settings, administrators who have the power to implement change, and the students themselves. Everyone working together to educate themselves and those around them will have the greatest impact on creating accessible spaces and successful teaching and learning experiences.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

Writing and Neurodiversity

The following survey will ask you questions regarding neurodiversity and your writing experiences. This study's purpose is to find similarities and differences between neurotypical and neurodivergent writers in order to create tools for tutors and writers to use to make tutoring in the University Writing Center more inclusive. Your answers will be completely anonymous. If you choose to complete the survey, know that at any time you have the right to stop if you feel any reason to. You also reserve the right to skip any questions that you do not want to answer, for any reason, with no consequence.

If you choose to participate, please answer the following questions as truthfully as possible.

1. What is your age?
2. What is the sex you were assigned at birth?
3. What gender do you identify with?

Writing Experiences

This section asks about your experiences with writing. Please answer as truthfully as possible.

4. Describe your writing process.
5. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being you don't enjoy it at all, 10 being it's one of your favorite things to do), how much do you enjoy writing?
6. What type of writing do you engage in most often? (examples include creative writing, research, class essays, legal documents. etc.)
7. What kind of things do you struggle with when writing?
8. On a scale of 1-10, (1 being not difficult at all, 10 being extremely difficult), how difficult is it for you to write about something you are interested in?
9. On a scale of 1-10, (1 being not difficult at all, 10 being extremely difficult), how difficult is it for you to write about something you are not interested in?
10. What strategies do you use that help you when writing?
11. For approximately how long are you able to focus on a writing task before you lose focus or get distracted? Mark only one oval.
    - 0-5 minutes
    - 5-10 minutes
    - 10-15 minutes
    - 15-20 minutes
    - 20-30 minutes

- 30-45 minutes
- 45+ minutes

12. Do you find yourself struggling more the longer a writing task is? (in pages/words)
    - Never
    - Sometimes
    - Often
    - Always
13. On a scale of 1-10, (1 being not difficult at all, 10 being extremely difficult) how difficult do you find it to focus on a writing task?
14. What is your favorite thing that you have written? Why?

Neurodiversity

This section focuses on neurodiversity, the differences in the ways our brains work. If you do not wish to answer any question for any reason, you reserve the right to skip it with no consequence. You may also skip any questions you feel do not apply to you. Definition: Neurodivergence is when someone's brain works differently or processes information differently from what is socially accepted, which is known in some circles as being neurotypical.

Here is a list from the Cleveland Clinic (2022) of the most common conditions:

- Autism spectrum disorder (this includes what was once known as Asperger's syndrome)
- Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) This also includes anyone who was diagnosed with ADD, before or after the name changed
- Down syndrome
- Dyscalculia (difficulty with math)
- Dysgraphia (difficulty with writing)
- Dyslexia (difficulty with reading)
- Dyspraxia (difficulty with coordination)
- Intellectual disabilities
- Mental health conditions like bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and more
- Prader-Willi syndrome
- Sensory processing disorders
- Social anxiety (a specific type of anxiety disorder)
- Tourette syndrome
- Williams syndrome

15. Have you been diagnosed with anything falling under the category of neurodivergence? Mark only one oval.
    - Yes
    - No
    - No, but I suspect I might have one or more of these conditions

16. If yes, what is your diagnosis?
17. If you suspect you might have one or more of these conditions, please specify which one(s).
18. Do you take medication for your diagnosis? Mark only one oval.
    - Yes
    - No
19. On a scale of 1-10, (1 being not at all and 10 being as much as it possibly can), how much do you feel being neurodivergent inhibits your writing ability?
20. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being extremely easy, 10 being extremely difficult), how easy is it for you to focus on a writing task you are not passionate about?
21. What, if any, strategies or tools have been offered to you (by therapists, teachers, tutors, friends, etc.) to help with focusing/writing?

Kaycee Johnson

Kaycee is currently a senior double-majoring in Psychology and Creative Writing. She has worked at her university's writing center for three years, the first of which was the avenue that allowed her to do this research. She is a student-athlete on EMU's rowing team and strongly values both physical and mental health. She plans to begin pursuing a master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling some time in the next couple of years, with the goal of becoming a therapist. She enjoys engaging in artistic activities, such as painting and writing poetry. She hopes to have poetry published eventually, and plans to also write and illustrate her own children's books. She is passionate about both creativity and science, especially in writing, and hopes both will be present throughout her future.

Lake Braendle

Lake used to be a student of Women's and Gender Studies at Eastern Michigan University, but was recently diagnosed with rare genetic condition. They have had to drop out of school, but remain passionate about writing.

Center Spotlight: The Purdue OWL

The inspiration for our first issue comes from the host of the 2023 ECWCA Conference, the Purdue Writing Lab. Located at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, the Purdue University On-Campus Writing Lab is dedicated to helping students and faculty from the West Lafayette campus with any and all genres of writing during any and all stages of writing. This lab also supports the local community via coordinating local literacy initiatives. Globally and off-campus, the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) provides world-class resources and services that reached a total of 39,989,111 site users during the 2022-2023 academic year. The center is staffed by undergraduate and graduate consultants from a variety of programs. When asked about their center, consultants shared that:

> "Working at the writing lab has given me professional work experience that undergraduate students rarely have the opportunity to experience. I get to work in an office setting with clients. On top of that—the work environment is cozy and academic. Two of my favorite vibes." – Zack H., undergraduate tutor

> "Students come in stressed and worried about their writing, but by the time they leave, they feel like they know what to do next and the revision process is under their control. As a writing tutor, I help make this change happen, one student at a time. This is the most fulfilling part of my job. – Eliana D., undergraduate tutor

Given the Purdue's Writing Lab's long history of innovation—they were the world's first online writing lab, after all!—it's no surprise they selected a conference theme of "Innovation Hub" centered on how writing centers can innovate across their theories and practices, become hubs of accessibility, and deploy new technologies in their spaces.

Presentations focused on a wide array of topics including supporting first-generation writers, enhancing writing center accessibility for neurodiverse writers, considering the need for unlearning, addressing the concerns of justice-involved writers, expanding programming beyond one-to-one consulting, and developing strategies to support STEM-related literacies. In addition, the keynote speakers Doris Correa, Sergio Urrego, and Juan Carlos Montoya shared their journey of starting the Center for Multiliteracies at Universidad de Antioquia.

We hope you'll enjoy the continuation of a few of these conversations in the inaugural issue of the *ECWCA Journal*.

Call for Papers:
ECWCA Journal

Our 2025 issue will feature articles that explore the theme of the 2024 ECWCA conference, "Leaping Ahead: Embracing the Gift of Time in Writing Centers." This issue encourages writers to engage with questions like:

- How can writing centers reflect on practices new and old? What impact have concepts like online tutoring, inclusive practices, evidence-based methods, and flexibility had on our centers?
- How has technology helped us optimize our time for communication, scheduling, collaboration, and more?
- Additionally, how can we as Writing Center scholars find time to prioritize institutional and political change, and to give voice to diverse perspectives.
- How can Writing Centers offer space for building supportive relationships that foster learning and student development?
- In what ways can Writing Centers seize opportunities, whether through innovative programming, fostering collaborations, or exploring new avenues for support and development?

While anyone is welcome to submit, we strongly encourage submissions from those who attended or presented at the 2024 ECWCA Conference.

In addition to transcripts of conference addresses, this issue will feature 3,000-8,000 word articles that grow from sessions at the conference. If you gave a presentation or sat on a panel—or even if you are just inspired by a session you attended at the conference—you are strongly encouraged to "write up" your work and send it in for editorial and peer review.

Please note: The 2025 issue could also include book reviews, a Back to the Center piece, and a Consultant Insight article. Submissions for these types of manuscripts do not have to be connected to the 2024 ECWCA Conference theme.