Chapter 5. Expanding Pedagogies: The Productive Tensions of ePortfolio Pedagogies and Peer Consultant Specialists in the Twenty-first Century Writing Center

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In the summer of 2014, when I arrived to begin my first tenure-track appointment at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), which included a position as the coordinator of the writing center, I learned I would also coordinate the college's ePortfolio initiative. Therefore, in addition to revitalizing a writing center in disrepute, I would also need to learn about and integrate ePortfolio pedagogy, *assessment*, and best practices into the writing center. Although my academic background is in rhetoric and composition and I had prior experience with assessment, I had not used or learned about ePortfolios during my graduate coursework. It is an understatement, then, to say that this new addition to my job induced anxiety. And I dealt with that anxiety in the way most academics do: through research.

While research on ePortfolios as assessment tools is plentiful, I did not find much that discussed the intersection of ePortfolios and writing center pedagogies. Debates surrounded assessment, effectiveness, and digital literacy, but I needed insight into ePortfolios as a part of writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) pedagogies; equally importantly, I struggled with considering how to marry this writing center's pedagogy of non-directive, non-evaluative consultations with what first appeared to be a medium in which students and faculty would require directive help. By "directive help," I mean that students and faculty needed help not just with the concept of ePortfolios but also with how to use the WordPress interface, which cannot be taught through traditional writing center pedagogies and must be taught through directive tutoring, which I distinguish from consulting, which I suggest is non-directive in practice.[1]

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1.   In directive tutoring, tutors direct students through the session; in other words, tutors tell students what to do. In non-directive tutoring, or consultations, tutors engage in various methods, including the Socratic, to help students learn how to improve their own work. In writing centers, non-directive tutoring may look like consultants providing reader-response reactions (e.g., "As a reader, I interpret this passage as . . .") or asking questions. They may also teach and model rhetorical strategies for students to practice in a session. The purpose of non-directive tutoring is to emphasize learning rather than prescriptive answers.

More specifically, the overwhelming majority of the student and faculty populations had little to no experience with WordPress web platforms, despite excellent efforts in the past by several previous ePortfolio directors to create buy-in and provide basic literacy of the platform. Therefore, whatever staff I would hire would seemingly violate the VMI Writing Center's pedagogy (which previous administrators had established as non-directive before I had arrived) by directly telling clients where to go and what to click on the dashboard. VMI's stringent, single-sanction honor code informs this non-directive approach as well. Cadets agree to live and submit work as outlined in the honor code and a policy called "work for grade." The honor code states that cadets will not tolerate lying, cheating, or stealing, while "work for grade" policies provided by the institute, departments, and instructors outline approved avenues for student support. Editing and proofreading are not permitted avenues. In writing center practices, editing and proofreading are considered directive practices. Telling students what to write or writing content for them is both directive and forbidden for students to seek out. Therefore, the VMI Writing Center does not provide such services; however, integrating ePortfolio instruction into the writing center complicated the center's alignment of the honor code and work for grade policies and the center's own pedagogy, because consultants would need to engage in directive tutoring when telling cadets how to use the interface.

In this chapter, I discuss the successes and failures of coordinating a team of peer consultants to facilitate the expansion of ePortfolios at a small liberal arts college. I will argue that peer consultants can be effective ePortfolio ambassadors to faculty and students and, with the appropriate continuing training and engagement, effective consultants of digital portfolios in writing centers. Moreover, integrating ePortfolios expands a writing center's scope as a student resource into the digital realm, which, for centers still focused on traditional, print-based papers, can help introduce tutors, students, and faculty to digital pedagogies and environments. Additionally, I assert that integrating ePortfolio pedagogies and outcomes into writing centers creates opportunities for writing center administrators (WCAs) and consultants to confront and challenge the tensions between directive and non-directive pedagogies and discover ways of wedding the two practices.

Peer Consultants, ePortfolios, and Disrupting Writing Center Pedagogies

Peer consultants hold a contested place at VMI, although less so within the broader field of writing center scholarship and pedagogy. The college's mission celebrates providing opportunities for leadership for their students, or cadets. In its preparation to build cadets into "citizen soldiers," VMI purports that its aim "is to produce men and women educated for civilian life and also prepared to serve their country in the Armed Forces. . . . All cadets participate in service opportunities at some point during their cadetship. Classroom experiences and hands-on

participation in community projects give cadets an awareness of the importance of service to others" (Civic Engagement, 2018). Faculty and cadets were skeptical, however, of the integration of cadet consultants into the VMI Writing Center, despite their academic background acquired through completion of a three-credit "Teaching Writing" course and ongoing pedagogical training while working in the writing center. Because of the faculty's general resistance to ePortfolios and peer consultants, I expected increased skepticism directed toward a team of cadet consultants who specialized in WordPress ePortfolios.

Peer consultants, however, are a staple of writing centers.[2] The International Writing Centers Association annual convention and its regionalized publication, *Southern Discourse*, elevate undergraduate tutors and their labor in writing centers. In "Training and Using Peer Tutors" (1978), Paula Beck, Thom Hawkins, and Marcia Silver, with contributions by Kenneth Bruffee, Judy Fishman, and Judith Matsunobu, call integrating peer consultants in writing centers "the promising 'new' way of applying the principles of collaborative learning" into traditional learning environments (p. 432). Ongoing research into peer tutors both validates the importance of peer consultants' presence in writing centers and extends this research into questions of peer authority in writing centers and the academy.[3]

In the VMI Writing Center under my leadership, peer consultants epitomized the learner-teacher identity that writing centers often develop among their staffs. First, it is important to note that writing center scholars Steven J. Corbett (2005), Peter Carino (2003), Patricia Rizzolo (1982), Teagan Decker (2005), and Melissa Ianetta and Laura Fitzgerald (2012), among others, have acknowledged the uncomfortable paradox of peer tutors, noting that while writing centers seek to destabilize hierarchies, consultants still often rely on traditional models of authority to bolster their own ethos in writing centers and to build trust during consultations. Moreover, several scholars have critiqued nondirective tutoring as a myth of writing center dogma, especially in peer consultations. In "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring" (2003), Carino parses the slipperiness of nondirective peer

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2. In this chapter, I will use "consultant(s)" rather the "tutor(s)" to refer to non-administrative writing center employees. I use this term because it is consistent with the workplace titles used in the writing center I coordinated. Moreover, because consultants' work extends beyond tutoring of prescriptive rules of grammar and mechanics and because consultants do not own a students' work and are not "correctors," the word "consultant" better implicates the study and practice of writing center laborers. When I use the words "tutor" or "tutoring," or its variants, I suggest the directive pedagogical models in which the tutor directs the tutee through prescriptive processes.

3. For additional reading about peer authority in writing centers, see Steven J. Corbett's (2005) chapter "Bringing the Noise: Peer Power and Authority" in *On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring* edited by Candice Spigelman and Laurie Grobman and Peter Carino's (2003) chapter "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring" in Michael A. Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead's collection, *Center will Hold.* I draw from both of these chapters throughout my argument here.

tutoring, suggesting that nondirective tutoring practices—or at least claims of practicing them—mystify and obscure the intersections of authority, ownership, and hierarchies that exist in writing center work.[4]

On the surface, such a discussion may seem irrelevant to integrating ePortfolios into writing centers, but to me, it is a central issue. The writing center I coordinated at VMI adheres closely to the nondirective, nonevaluative pedagogies consistent with many small liberal arts colleges (SLAC) writing centers. It is so central to the center's core mission and unit description that many departmental faculty and students assume—and not without reason—that the VMI Writing Center does not provide assistance with lower-order concerns, such as grammar and mechanics. ePortfolios discomfit this position and the idea of "peerness" for a variety of reasons.

Part of this discomfiting that I note comes from how peer consultants will have to direct clients' navigation of the mechanics of setting up ePortfolios. Because setting up an ePortfolio requires a rote set of steps, tutors will have to use directive strategies with clients. Whether setting up an ePortfolio on a blog-based platform, such as WordPress, or on a learning management system (LMS), such as Canvas' internal ePortfolios, students and faculty creating their portfolios need to learn the correct ways to set up menus, posts, and pages, as well as attach media, among other actions. Such knowledge, in this case, requires directive and evaluative consultations in which the consultant (a peer, in the VMI Writing Center's case) tells other cadets what they need to do to begin to customize their ePortfolios. Because there are specific "clicks" that content-creators must make to build their portfolios, the consultant will tell the clients where to point and click—directive instruction at its finest.

I struggled with this conflict as a professional trained in non-directive pedagogies and as a writing center administrator (WCA) training her own staff in these pedagogical principles. I wondered how I could help the peer consultants balance clients' needs while staying true to our pedagogy and the spirit of the VMI Honor Code. Through multiple conversations with the ePortfolio team and by receiving my own consultations from cadets to teach me how to use WordPress and build my own ePortfolio, I realized the answer was complex, yet obvious. First, the ePortfolio team I would cultivate would have to be directive in their consultations, at least when clients came with technical questions. Cadets need to know what to click to enable them to write a post. They need to know what to click to publish a post after they have written it. If they want a post to

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4.   For more critiques of peer consultants and nondirective pedagogies, read Shamoon and Burns' "A Critique of Pure Tutoring" (1995), Carino's "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring" (2003), which provides an excellent literature review of the issue up to the early twenty-first century, Corbett's chapter "Bringing the Noise: Peer Power and Authority" in *On Location* (2005), and Lori Salem's "Decisions . . . Decisions: Who Chooses to Use the Writing Center?" (2016).

include media, they need to know how to add the media (much like one adds an attachment to an email). They need to know how to organize the posts and pages they have created into a menu. They need to know how to add media, especially Word documents and PDFs, to a post or page. They need to know what to do to edit a post. These are not questions that can be answered through the Socratic method or conversations about global concerns; they must be answered through a combination of telling and showing and learned through repetition. Thus, I had to loosen the restriction against directive tutoring.

The second part of the answer complicated the approach above by reintroducing traditional writing center pedagogies. Teaching web and ePortfolio design weds point-and-click tutorials and learning about global concerns, some of which we may rarely discuss in traditional, paper-based writing center consultations, such as navigation, layout, content arrangement, and visual rhetorics. We might talk about copyright with content borrowed from stock images, videos, gifs, and other digital files, adding more nuance to conversations about intellectual property and plagiarism. Hyperlinking and other tasks provide opportunities to make concepts such as Kenneth Burke's (1973) parlor[5] more concrete and prescient to twenty-first century audiences. As consultants work with cadets developing web sites and web content vis-a-vis ePortfolios, they may extend consultations into conversations about public content and digital identities. Consequently, as students approach graduation, they likely have developed opportunities for joint conversations with their faculty, career services, and writing centers about adapting their portfolios for the job market (see Polly et al., this collection).

Thus, ePortfolios can, under the right conditions and with the right training, offer new opportunities for writing centers. In addition to the opportunities I outlined earlier, I also assert that ePortfolios expand writing center pedagogy through training. When ePortfolios and, by extension, basic web design are integrated into writing centers' purview, WCAs have new avenues to discuss the relationships and differences between tutoring and consulting. In my experience, comparing approaches between tutoring students on learning how to use an interface with consulting on the global concerns of web design have helped peer consultants, in particular, understand the difference between tutoring and consulting and how to navigate between the two. Perhaps most importantly, the WCA will contribute to consultants' learning—and perhaps the WCA's as well—by adding digital literacies to their toolbox.

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5.   In *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (1973), Kenneth Burke introduces what scholars now call "the Burkean parlor." Through the metaphor of the parlor, Burke illustrates scholarship as an ongoing conversation that began before a student enters and will continue after the student leaves. The parlor helps students understand the importance of listening (or researching) to other voices and strategize ways to enter the conversation.

I want to pause here to remind readers that WCAs should not and cannot assume that twenty-first century consultants—whether they are younger Millennials or Generation Z—are fluent in digital literacies. The VMI Writing Center, for example, employs a staff across four generations—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Gen Z. Not surprisingly, the staff demonstrate varied digital literacies. One Gen X-er is skilled with digital tools, from Photoshop to web design. Several, though not all, of the Millennial peer consultants use social media platforms, especially Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, as well as word processing interfaces such as Microsoft Word; however, in my experience at this particular institution, students admit that they know to use these platforms only in basic ways. When I teach them applications that I consider "old" (i.e., something I learned as a college student myself in the early 2000s), they express surprise and, in a first-year writing class, students suggested that the college offer a for-credit course to teach them how to use common programs such as Word and Excel, as well as Google docs and Google drive.

I am illustrating here gaps that the WCA may need to fill through consultant training. Because WCAs should not assume that their peer consultants are literate in ePortfolio platforms and should acknowledge that they may be only superficially familiar with other software, WCAs should plan to provide introductory and ongoing training in the software and platforms students will use as they create and maintain their ePortfolios. In my case, I, too, had to learn along with the peer consultants and, sometimes, from them. For me, this was an exciting opportunity to demonstrate learning as a continuing and collaborative process. By sitting and learning among them, the WCA takes on "peerness" with the tutors; when two of the first members of the ePortfolio Cadet Team taught me how to build my own ePortfolio, they continued to destabilize the teacher-student relationship by tutoring me in the points-and-clicks I needed to complete the process and offering their advice for my content. Rather than create an uncomfortable situation between administrator-faculty and the student, this process allows the student to cultivate teaching skills and learn how to perceive their "clients" as people not in need of remediation but education. The educator learns to sit as a student, to ask questions, and to reengage with a role they may have long abandoned. Such events provide opportunities for reflection on the concept of "peerness," the WCA/consultant relationship, and peer authority in the writing center.

In "Bringing the Noise: Peer Power and Authority" in *On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring* (2005), Stephen J. Corbett reflects on his own participation in student peer groups as a tutoring administrator and first-year writing teacher. Corbett draws from Teagan Decker's concept of "meta-tutoring" to explain the results of his peer-teacher activity and its results. In "Diplomatic Relations: Peer Tutors in the Writing Classroom," Decker (2005) explains that even when instructors seek to help students learn how to give advice

in peer-review situations, students often do not achieve the metadiscourse and actions needed to provide helpful advice. However, when peer writing consultants participate in these groups, students learn how to become tutors through "meta-tutoring" (p. 27). Corbett notes that by working in the classroom or within peer groups (which may include the teacher/administrator), peer consultants learn how to become better tutors through the modeling that happens in the group (see Terry & Whillock, this collection). Thus, Corbett notes, "[peer consultants] model for students and teachers how to talk about what they're learning" (2005, p. 109). I take Corbett's and Decker's observations further, suggesting that by working together with the WCA in peer groups where the consultants and WCAs learn together and explain ePortfolios to each other, both WCAs and peer consultants become better teachers.

Thus far, the only faculty-peer consultant relationship I have discussed is the one between the WCA and peer consultants. Yet it is likely that teaching faculty, too, will draw on ePortfolio peer consultants as resources, should they adopt ePortfolios into their curricula. For example, faculty did invite ePortfolio peer consultants to lead workshops during course meetings. Some faculty came to the writing center or invited an ePortfolio Cadet Team member to their offices to help them learn how to create and maintain their own portfolios. These opportunities to work with faculty, whether collaborating to design workshops or helping faculty feel more comfortable integrating portfolios into their own professional lives, redefine "peerness," as students transition into collaborators and developers.

Although I see the ePortfolio work providing opportunities for professional development and new opportunities to understand what "peer consultant" means, it would be unwise not to consider the ways that students and peer consultants will still be constrained by the realities of working in traditional higher educational environments. First, I feel it necessary to point out that while ideally students should have freedom and agency to design their ePortfolios in ways that represent the identities they want to project and that foster occasions for authentic reflection about learning (see Terry & Whillock and Coleman et al., this collection), students will still contend with faculty *rubrics* for their portfolios. By rubrics, here, I refer to the various requirements that instructors, departments, and other stakeholders may place on how students use their ePortfolios. For example, as of this writing, the VMI English department requires students to curate an "English Major Showcase" in compliance with various rules for collecting their work. Students must keep an archive of work from classes in their major (which, in this case, include art, art history, philosophy, as well as traditional literature, creative writing, and rhetoric courses encountered in most English departments). In their last year, students move work from their archives to their showcase. Additionally, the department requires students to add certain common documents to their ePortfolio, such as the reflective essay they write in response to their capstone project.

Additionally, in my experience,[6] instructors—especially those who are less familiar with web design and current practices to create content navigation—often dictate how students should set up class portfolios. This tendency is even more evident for instructors who do not understand that a student may use their single ePortfolio platform to house multiple course portfolios; these instructors therefore write rubrics that govern how students design their entire portfolio, which often will lead to students creating an ePortfolio dedicated to one class only. Thus, while there may be no one "right way" to organize a website, students may have to adapt their plans to fit instructors' expectations for their portfolios. In these cases, peer consultants will likely help students negotiate digital assignments in much the same way they help students navigate their goals with instructors' expectations in traditional written assignments.

Despite such challenges when negotiating relationships with peer clients, WCAs, and faculty, peer consultants who specialize in ePortfolios in writing centers have unique opportunities to build confidence and model academic conversations for their peers. Corbett (2005) argues as much when he discusses Kenneth Bruffee's scholarship on collaboration and peer tutoring. Corbett posits that students who negotiate directive and nondirective approaches to consultations with students, faculty, and administrators are a different breed: "But it takes a directive, confident tutor to be able to share valuable information with students and teachers. A tutor satisfied with playing a strictly minimalist role may learn a lot but lose out on important opportunities to teach" (2005, p. 110). Corbett concludes that confidence and teaching include, but are not limited to, directive informational transactions. I concur with Corbett that these traits benefit all the constituents involved in the educational relationship, and I go further to suggest that ePortfolios provide a rich avenue wherein students can more easily navigate the tensions between directive and nondirective practices, develop confidence, and complicate—in positive ways—the relationships among students, faculty, and administrators.

Peer Tutors as ePortfolio Ambassadors

Writing center scholarship has increasingly advocated for empowering peer tutors by extending to them authority and collegial status both in their centers[7] and in higher education. Molly Wingate reminds us in "Writing Centers as Sites of Academic Cultures" (2001) that "a writing center is full of talented, bright, and academically serious people" and that, because of the qualities that writing center employees bring to the university, they enrich "the academic culture of

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6.   Which is, admittedly, limited and influenced by my time as a WCA at a military-styled college.

7.   I would suggest here that peer consultants, especially at SLACs, are already afforded such collegiality and status in their centers, in the most general terms.

our schools by getting more people engaged in the academic enterprise of critical thinking and writing" (p. 8). This is especially true of peer tutors, who bring to their centers and classrooms models of students enacting academic cultures for their peers to study.

Modeling, as I have discussed earlier, is critical work of peer consultants. Corbett (2005) explains, "When tutors enter classrooms, they can bring profound knowledge of how to maneuver within disciplinary discourses" (p. 110). By extension, when peer consultants come to classrooms to teach ePortfolios to their peers, they can speak from experience about the challenges of building ePortfolios to please multiple audiences and fulfill various strictures (see Terry & Whillock, this collection).

Beyond these benefits, peer consultants can help create buy-in (see Richardson et al. and Summers et al., this collection), much in the same way they do in their traditional roles in writing centers. This is especially true, I would argue, at SLACs. In their article "SEUFOLIOS: A Tool for Using ePortfolios as Both Departmental Assessment and Multimodal Pedagogy" (2016), Ryan S. Hoover and Mary Rist remind readers that students adopt ePortfolios more readily when they recognize the usefulness of technology. Administrators' and instructors' insistence that ePortfolios are useful rarely persuades students that they are, indeed, relevant and valuable to them.

This is where peer intervention—or ambassadorship—proves useful. Peer consultants who have bought into ePortfolios and are excited by them can help generate interest among their peers. Peer consultants interrupt the administrator- and instructor-centric approaches to talking about and marketing ePortfolios to students. Perhaps most importantly to students, peer advocacy distances ePortfolios from many administrators' end goal—assessment. Moreover, peer ambassadorship centers the student as part of the process rather than the instructor, administrator, or abstract goals.

Ideally, through this student-centered process of ePortfolio creation, students will develop a sense of ownership over their ePortfolios. At St. Edward's University, Hoover and Rist (2016) report that their student population feels that sense of ownership over their WordPress ePortfolios, despite the fact that the university has shifted interest to LinkedIn profiles. Again, this is why I made students, rather than me, the faces of ePortfolio at VMI. Cadets own very little at VMI and have even fewer opportunities for individualism and self-expression. ePortfolios provide cadets with opportunities to develop public personas apart from their cadetship and think of themselves as part of larger communities. While VMI is a unique educational environment that encourages homogeneity, many colleges and universities would benefit from providing opportunities for students to develop and control ePortfolios in which they develop individual expression outside of classroom expectations. As noted previously, researchers at St. Edwards, a college VMI's population would call "ordinary" and that does not have an orientation towards homogeneity, have identified benefits from students' sense of

ownership over their ePortfolios. Differentiating themselves from other students likely creates parallels with social media, where users may often customize their accounts, and could serve them well on the job market when they need to set themselves apart from other candidates.

Additionally, peer leadership, such as the ePortfolio Cadet Team in VMI's Writing Center, can complement an institution's commitment to peer leadership. Despite the uncertainty about adding peer consultants to the VMI Writing Center's staff, such positions are essential to student development as leaders and teachers. Moreover, peer-driven ePortfolio resources (see Appendixes) allow students to think about their own positionality as learners, not just students, and as teachers within a community of learners. In their ambassadorships of ePortfolios, they share the teaching stage with instructors, lead new trends in using the media, and help the WCA keep abreast of student perceptions of ePortfolios. Ambassadors, of course, unite two communities through their work.

Approaches: Successes, Challenges, Failures, and Suggestions

Building a community of ePortfolio student consultants and seeking to bridge multiple communities is challenging work, and it certainly comes with its stories of successes and failures. I have shared at length my advocacy for employing students as ePortfolio consultants and the benefits I saw emerging from their work. But it is important to discuss practical matters, including the challenges, failures, and successes the team and I experienced, and the new approaches I identified for future cadet teams.

Successes: Resource Creation and Curation

Because of my inexperience with WordPress and ePortfolios, I needed people in the Writing Center to offer support; additionally, those people needed to help me learn WordPress design while I *curated* and shared ePortfolio research with them. Moreover, the support people needed to be familiar with VMI's distrust of online platforms. Based on these factors, I decided to recruit an "ePortfolio Cadet Team" to the Writing Center staff. They would not consult on written documents because they did not have the course work to qualify for a writing consultant position, but they would help their peers design ePortfolios in response to instructors' assignments.

The team, especially in its first two years, was particularly successful in creating new and updating existing tutorials, adding to the wealth of multimedia resources that the previous ePortfolio Director, Howard B. Sanborn, had created. The first two cohorts of the team, each led by an "ePortfolio Cadet Team Manager," bonded together as they wrote and curated a variety of resources for student audiences. The cadets learned to write instruction sets, include illustrations vis-a-vis screenshots, and anticipate audience questions. These two cohorts were

particularly invested in the ePortfolio project; it was used for X-designated "civilizations and cultures courses" (see Sanborn & Ramirez, this collection), which cadets took across the curriculum, and they had mastered the prescribed reflective essay required at the end of all such courses at VMI. Many of these ePortfolio peer consultants demonstrated independent curiosity about digital humanities. Two cadets in particular, both English majors, used some of their personal time and scheduled shifts to learn coding independently to enhance their ePortfolios. One of these cadets has even secured a career in the digital humanities.

This success crystallizes the importance of curiosity and initiative as ideal qualities for strong ePortfolio peer consultants. These students were enthusiastic about spearheading a new initiative and being the first of a new cohort of consultants in a reinvigorated writing center. These students also had previous experience with the WordPress platform and were eager to teach each other what they learned as they developed their resources and researched the FAQs for the platform. These cadets had also taken Digital Rhetorics or other courses that included theories and practices with respect to the digital humanities. This means that they had already studied theories, trends, and practices that would serve them in the writing center, similar to the three-credit writing pedagogy course the peer writing consultants take before applying for their positions. These students brought their prior experiences and education to bear on resource creation.

The English department also included this cohort in discussions about assessment; thus, even when the peer consultants disagreed with the way the English department wanted to proceed with using ePortfolios (and disagree they did), they understood firsthand the rationale behind the tasks they were assigned and had opportunities to ask questions of the departmental assessment committee about resources rather than have those questions and answers mediated through the WCA. These students thus felt included in decision-making (see Richardson et al., this collection), even when the committee decided to take directions other than the ones the peer consultants recommended, and they understood their role in producing resources for both cadet and faculty audiences.

Failure: Training

While the initial two cohorts had great success, which I mostly credit to their own initiative and experiences, I learned more from them than I wager they learned from me. Over the years, new members joined the team. Many of these students were more interested in working in the writing center in general than expanding the existing ePortfolio resources or singling themselves out as ePortfolio peer consultants. I want to point out here that I do not blame this attitude on the cadets. I believe I generated this attitude when I sought to recruit more broadly and intended training sessions to make up for gaps in background knowledge. The problem, here, rested on the absence of curiosity and interest in ePortfolios and/or web design.

With the third cohort, I scheduled regular meetings for training and discussion. I oriented training from a purely instructor-centered and academic approach because this team was less familiar with ePortfolios and I was interested in introducing them to pedagogy. These cadets were supposed to read scholarship I had gleaned from writing center publications to introduce the tensions between directive and nondirective practices I had anticipated and addressed with previous cohorts, and to provide research about ePortfolios and assessment, as well as the digital humanities. Regrettably, I often had to cancel the biweekly, evening meetings because the cadets had competing obligations that interfered with our training sessions. When we did meet, the peer consultants were focused on my agenda for meetings rather than their own questions and experiences. Additionally, these students were not using ePortfolios in any of their own courses; thus, their investment in ePortfolios was lower than the first cohort that had designed ePortfolios in many of their own previous courses. The academic curriculum I designed for training thus focused the cadets on scholarship over their own experiences and questions. While I would, in the future, continue to introduce ePortfolio peer consultants to writing center work with traditional readings, such as Stephen North's seminal work, "The Idea of a Writing Center" (1984), and consultant training texts, I would also make student concerns and expertise central. Furthermore, I would try to motivate curiosity and interest among the team. Because I directed the meetings, I did not carve out opportunities for cadets to contribute their insights or to explore ePortfolios beyond the topics of pedagogy and assessment.

In hindsight, I realized that the third cohort of cadets also did not recognize what they were contributing to the writing center and institution, both in terms of progressing ePortfolios and providing academic support. The first two cohorts had already written the most-consulted resources, so the third cohort did not have an obvious gap in resources to fill and to occupy their time. Additionally, in training, I too had difficulty explaining what they were adding to our existing archive of resources and what they were contributing that was new and original, especially in light of the decline of interest in ePortfolios outside of the English major and a few select instructors in other departments. The department's assessment committee had also stopped inviting the ePortfolio peer consultants to assessment meetings; therefore, I would report back to them decisions made about them and their work by the committee. These cadets consequently had minimal agency as decision makers and contributors to the ePortfolio initiative, the department, and writing center work. Without concrete goals for development and engagement in institutional conversations, the students were aimless. I blame my leadership for this.

Suggestions

First and foremost, I want to advocate for stronger digital pedagogical training for peer consultants specializing in ePortfolios. I advocated unsuccessfully that the VMI Writing Program should require students interested in working as ePortfo-

lio consultants to take the 200-level Digital Rhetorics course, so that cadets hired in the writing center would have backgrounds both in using digital media to create content and in responding to peers in partnerships or groups. In my mind, this is the minimum requirement for students interested in working as ePortfolio consultants in writing centers.

The importance of course work cannot be understated because it provides essential pedagogical and experiential foundations for future peer consultants. Drawing from Joanna Goode (2010) and Lindsey Jesnek (2012), Joy Bancroft (2016) reminds readers that with the myth of the problematically-termed "digital native" debunked, higher education instructors cannot and should not assume that students in their courses have encountered explicit and directive instruction on using the technologies that they will be required to use, and they are not likely to encounter such education in a higher education classroom.

Prospective peer consultants should be introduced to learning and composing in digital environments. I suggest, too, that the WCA should be the instructor-of-record for any gateway course for peer ePortfolio consultants, and the instructor should require the creation of an ePortfolio as part of course requirements and integrate outcomes and aims connected to ePortfolio assessment in their syllabus. ePortfolio integration in a course on digital composition should include transparent discussions about pedagogy. In addition to developing basic design and writing skills, the course assignments should engage students in research about digital environments.

In addition to coursework as a prerequisite, I would suggest that WCAs require that students submit their own ePortfolios and reflections of them as part of the application process. Thus, the WCA and whatever consultants confer with them to make hiring decisions would have evidence of proficiency. Such a requirement would encourage student applicants who are interested in digital humanities and student resource work. I would couple this submission requirement with mock tutorials, which I would suggest for all recruiting interviews. Rather than "screening out" potential consultants, this process would allow the WCA to identify applicants' strengths and areas for development in order to build a community in which staff members complement each other and help each other grow as professionals.

To foster curiosity, the WCA should ask prospective peer ePortfolio consultants to consider how their research from their previous coursework and experiences might contribute to the writing center's body of knowledge about ePortfolios, digital topics relevant to undergraduate students, and to their own professional development. Thus, the WCA could help the prospective consultant align the job not just with consulting but with professional development and continuing education. The WCA should work with new ePortfolio consultants to identify unique areas of ePortfolio or digital learning for the consultant to research as a focus of their professional development while also including the consultant as a facilitator in the staff's training.

Secondly, I suggest that WCAs strongly encourage ePortfolio peer consultants to take writing pedagogy courses. To me, such coursework is critical because at VMI the cadets who had not taken the writing pedagogy course could not consult on written work, such as reflective pieces. They were not allowed to offer consultations on actual content, that is, because if they had not taken the course, they were not allowed to offer responses to other students' writing. Therefore, cadets' work with their peers' ePortfolios was limited to directive sessions on using the platform and dialectic conversations about the global concerns of web design. In other words, they were limited to directive tutoring about using the interface and could not extend their conversations to address the ePortfolio written content.

Training must include presentation and large-group workshop training. VMI prides itself on its one-credit public speaking course (also offered through the English department) as a core requirement for all cadets; however, we should not assume that peer consultants are ready for classroom visits even if they are the brightest students or the sharpest peer reviewers in our courses. These training sessions should draw from the meta-tutoring and collaborative peer response group models Decker (2005) and Corbett (2005) discuss in their respective chapters in *On Location*. Training that draws from ePortfolio, digital literacy, writing center, and WAC pedagogies cultivates opportunities for consultants to encounter an array of pedagogical possibilities and develop an innovative approach to consulting that is more flexible than traditional writing center pedagogies. Consultants should also receive training in effective public speaking and presentations. Then, with the WCA, they can facilitate script writing and presentation materials while developing their individual teaching identities. The writing center, then, becomes the metaphorical and intellectual

> bridge as a location inhabited by bodies and minds [, which] better describes new media writing where the reader/participant does not approach the text from without, but from the center, from within. The bridge as a dwelling, however, further describes the reader/participant's ability to pause and reflect and to claim that location as a place of social connection and pleasure. (Davidson, 2018, pp. 76-77)

Through training and research, the WCA can help the consultants build and inhabit this bridge and invite the campus community to visit this dwelling place.

Moreover, writing centers need technology to make them flexible spaces for ePortfolio consultations. In addition to computers with fast network and Wi-Fi speeds, the computers must come equipped with software necessary for photo, video, and podcast editing and production, as well as graphic design software. All of the software I mention is necessary for basic and advanced content development, and learning to use and teach these programs will enhance the consultants' digital literacies and pedagogical offerings as consultants. Facilities at VMI included two studios in the library that had been locked and inaccessible to cadets

for some time and an additional lab in the computer information sciences department, but both spaces are located in buildings separate from the writing center. Students could check out hardware and use software for projects, but the lab had to be scheduled for appointment times and accessed with a faculty keycard. Cadets who wanted to include multimedia work had to go to multiple departments before they could come to the Writing Center for support, which is why I suggest that WCAs have a small collection of hardware and software in the writing center space to support students.

Conclusion

Peer consultants are clearly valuable members of writing center communities. Integrating ePortfolio peer consultants, who specialize in helping peers and faculty with building and maintaining ePortfolios, adds layers of nuance and complexity to writing center practice. As ambassadors for ePortfolios and the face of writing centers' digital opportunities, peer consultants can chart new territory by creating new collaborations and professionalizing themselves as novice teachers. ePortfolios as medium and text challenge existing pedagogies and practices and challenge writing center administrators to reassess the interplay between directive and nondirective pedagogies. Adding ePortfolio peer consultants to this mix carves out new possibilities for writing center work, professional development, student leadership, and campus outreach. Unsettling the writing center produces new avenues for training, pedagogies, and student ownership of campus resources and their work.

At VMI, ePortfolios have not been widely accepted or adopted across the curriculum, for a variety of reasons I will not explore here. My colleagues editing and contributing to this book, particularly Dr. Dellinger and Dr. Sanborn, have adopted varied and engaging uses for ePortfolios in their courses, and the English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies department, the department with which I was affiliated, is moving forward with Canvas LMS-based ePortfolios for their mandatory "English Major Showcase" ePortfolios. The peer consultants who specialize in ePortfolios have uncertain roles in the VMI Writing Center, but I am hopeful that they will continue to exist as a team in some form after the department transitions from WordPress to Canvas ePortfolios. Regardless of their future at VMI, they have certainly disrupted pedagogy in the writing center in the very best ways by challenging outdated pedagogies and highlighting areas for potential growth and development for the space.

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Appendix A. Creating a Menu

Creating A Menu

Creating a menu helps you organize your blog, and it helps others navigate your blog. Menus will look different from each other and have different locations on the blog depending on the theme that you use. Some themes may allow you to use multiple menus on the same page. Try to keep your menus organized

and easy to read. You can attach pages, categories, and links (including links to posts!) to a menu.
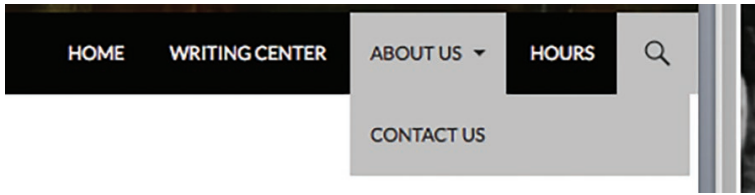
A Sample Menu

## Getting to your Menu Workspace

1. Go to your **Dashboard**.
2. Hover over **Appearance.** Then click on **Menus.**
3. This is your menu workspace. From here you can enter a name for your menu (which is important if you maintain multiple menus), add content to your menu, and reorganize your menu.
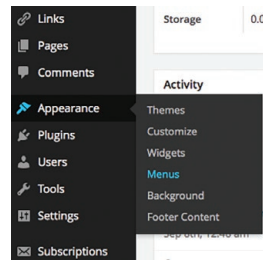
Getting to the Menu Workspace

Adding a Page or a Category to Your Menu

1. Click either **Page** or **Category**, depending on what you want to add.
2. You will see a bank with all of your pages and categories. If you many, you may need to click **Search** and find the page or category by name.
3. Click the box next to the page/category you want to add.
4. Click Add to Menu.
5. Your menu item will now be in the menu workspace on the right.
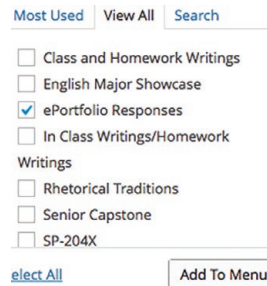
Adding a Page or Category

Adding a Link (internal or external) to Your Menu

On your menu, you can link to an outside source, like another blog you are running. You can also link to a place within your own site, like the home page or a specific post.

1. To add a link to your menu, click **Links.**
2. In the text box labeled **URL,** enter the url of the website to which you're linking.
3. In the text box labeled **Link Text,** type what you want the link to appear as (ex. Home)
4. Click Add to Menu.
5. Your menu item will now be in the menu workspace.

Organizing Your Menu

Once you upload your menu items, it is very simple to organize them.

1. Just drag menu items around in the workspace to change the way that they are ordered.
2. To create a sub-heading on a menu item, just drag the item to the right beneath another menu item (see **Contact Us**) in the figure below.
3. To choose where your menu will be seen, check a box in theme locations. In many cases, the default menu location should be **Primary Menu**. If you are having problems getting your menu to work, this is usually what the problem is.

Organizing Your Menu

Appendix B. Inserting Media

Inserting media into your site positively reflects on you and makes the site more distinctive.

One way to insert media is by inserting pictures. Remember: ePortfolio is a

social medium. You need to remember to use appropriate and professional Internet etiquette. In other words, only post appropriate pictures.

Inserting / uploading a picture into your post:

1. Sign into ePortfolio using your VMI Post View I.D.
2. On the left-hand menu, click "Dashboard."
3. From the Dashboard, scroll your mouse over to the top menu where it says "+NEW."
4. After hovering your mouse over "+NEW," a dropdown menu will appear. On that menu, you will see an option for "Post." Click "Post."
5. Now you will be in the new post page. On the menu above the text, box click on the "Add Media" button.
6. You should see two tabs: "Upload Images" and "Media Library." Click on "Upload Images." From here you can upload any image that you have saved onto your computer or other media (flash drive, Google drive, etc.).
7. After you have uploaded the image, click "Insert into Post" at the bottom right portion of the screen. Doing this will bring you back to the post page where your image should appear.
8. Make sure to click "Publish" or "Update."

By uploading images onto your post, you make your site better by engaging more with your view-ing audience on a personal level. Your profile stand out from the rest.

Appendix C. Using Comments

For your class, you may want to look at your peer's work and give them feedback on it through the comment system. This guide will teach you how to use the ePortfolio comments.

Posting a Comment

1. Navigate to either a page or a post on your peer's blog. (ex: sites.vmi.edu/smithjw12)
2. Select a post to which you want to respond. There should be a comment box near or under-neath the post.
3. Fill in the comment box (location will vary depending on theme) and click post.
4. During this time you may be given the option to subscribe to the post which means you will receive e-mail notifications when others make posts after your.

Managing/Deleting Received Comments

Your peers can also make comments on your posts and pages. As the moderator of your blog, you can control what your peers can post. If you want to delete a comment from your post, you can do it from the page or post itself just by finding their post and clicking delete.

If you want to manage or approve comments on your blog you can do it through the comment manager:

1. Hover your mouse over "My Sites" and hover over the blog you wish to manage comments for.
2. Click "Manage Comments."
3. From here you can look at all the comments that on your posts and pages and approve/disapprove them, delete them, reply, or edit comments that you have already published.

Changing Comment Settings

While managing your ePortfolio site, you may decide that you want to change settings for comments made on your posts. However, we suggest that you use default settings.

1. Go to your dashboard and over your mouse over "Settings."
2. Click "Discussion."
3. You will now be able to view various privacy options for your comments on your blog.

Help

If you continue to experience any problems with making and managing your comments on posts and pages, please schedule an appointment with the Writing Center ePortfolio Team at https://vmi.mywconline.com/.

Appendix D. Exporting Your Blog After You Graduate

While at VMI, your blog exists on VMI's network where people need to have VMI network cre-dentials (username and password) to access your blog.

Upon graduating or leaving VMI, you may want to keep your blog as a net-working tool to show-case your past work, remember what you have done, or continue developing the work that you started at VMI.

To keep your blog when you leave VMI, you may create a new Wordpress blog, export your exist-ing VMI blog, and import the data from the VMI blog onto the new Wordpress blog you've creat-ed.

Creating a New Blog

Creating a new blog is easy and allows you a variety of options to customize your online identity and accessibility (e.g., privacy settings). Creating a new blog will separate you from the VMI sys-tem:

1. Go to https://wordpress.com
2. Enter your username/desired url into the text box and click "Create Website"
3. Fill out all of your personal information to make an account
4. Since you are no longer on VMI's system, you will no longer have all of the same accessibility options, memory, and functionality you had before and may choose to pay for a subscription.

Exporting Your Blog Information

You will now need to log into your VMI blog to export all of the information from it:

1. Hover your mouse over "My Sites".
2. Hover your mouse over the blog you wish to export information from.
3. Click "Dashboard"
4. Hover your mouse over the "Tools" icon
5. Click "Export"
6. From here, you can choose what you want to export and what you do not. You may decide you want everything, but you may run into the problem that you do not have enough memory to carry everything over onto your new blog. You will be given the opportunity to keep certain posts/categories and to choose certain types of content from a certain date range. (ex. Your first class year)