– FROM THE EDITOR –

With this issue of the *WLN*, we close up shop for the summer and plan to resume with the September issue. Combining this May and June issue is the result of both a plan to save funds (in the face of impending postal rate increases) and an informal poll on WCenter where almost everyone who responded to my question said they aren't on campus in June. So a June issue would languish in people's mailboxes.

In this issue Kurt Schick and his co-authors offer a new model for tutor training; Seth Reno explores the identities of online tutorial participants; Jackie Grutsch McKinney offers a close look at various computer platforms for audio-visual-textual conferencing; and Kristi McDuffie reflects on working with students whose dialects are not Standard Written English.

Janet Auten and Mike Mattison, our hard-working Associate Editors who handle the reviewing process for essays that come in; Richard Hay, whose company handles subscriptions, printing, mailing, and the website; and I will be spending some time this summer thinking about how to create a more interactive space on the *WLN* website so that your voice can be heard too. We're not sure yet what the website will expand to include, so we welcome your suggestions.

Have a pleasant, relaxing summer, and best wishes for some high-quality R&R.

✦ *Muriel Harris, editor*

THE IDEA OF A WRITING CENTER COURSE

✦ *Kurt Schick, Olivia Mankowski, Karen McDonnell, Tiffany Bryant, Alicia Wendt,* and *Michael Moghtader*
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Writing centers inevitably evolve. Ours, like most, has adapted over time to shifting literacies, an expanding university, and a maturing discipline. Our most recent growth spurt occurred a few years ago when our small cadre of full-time professional consultants retired and a new group took the reins. We substantially reconfigured the center: rather than tutoring full-time, we also teach writing classes; and perhaps more significantly, for the first time in the center's history we have integrated graduate assistants and peer tutors into our faculty.[1]

With these changes, we also sought to preserve the best of our heritage. In order to continue providing excellent services, we needed to develop an effective educational program for our graduate and undergraduate tutors. We also wanted to preserve the close-knit, collegial identity enjoyed by our predecessors. We realized that, despite many potential benefits, growth and change brought a significant risk that our center—meaning our faculty—would become a fractured confederation of part-time shift workers rather than an integrated team of highly qualified professionals.

We decided to address these challenges together by creating a tutoring class *for* and *of* the entire writing center. Rather than conducting crash course *training* for new peer tutors in tutoring tips and office procedures, we chose to create a three-hour upper-division academic course that blends practice with theory and invites participation from everyone in the writing center—a tutoring course designed to renew our center's culture by continually integrating and educating our professional faculty and peer educators. We think our model will be useful to others seeking reliable yet dynamic means to sustain and rejuvenate their writing centers.

Every newcomer to our writing center now begins by taking Tutoring Writing. "Taking" the course differs somewhat for each participant. Technically, one or two of our more experienced professional consultants serve as instructors of record, but everyone bears some responsibility for teaching. For the "instructors," the course fulfills their classroom teaching obligation. New professional consultants and graduate assistants both audit and help lead the seminar; their time in class counts as professional development, which we've made part of everyone's weekly routine. Undergraduates take the course for credit, but we've designed assignments and activities that quickly build and then employ their expertise as apprentice tutors. Anyone not currently "taking" the class (teaching, auditing, or earning course credit) participates by mentoring—and often learning from—the classroom participants via an extensive internship process.

Tutoring Writing shares familiar characteristics and objectives with most courses offered across the country: combining theory, practice, and professionalization (Gill). What makes our class unique has been a vision to make tutor education the centerpiece of professional development for our entire writing center faculty. Tutoring Writing creates curricular space for old and new faculty, grad students, and undergrads to learn about tutoring together, as colleagues. The course now serves as an incubator for our center's culture—one that not only cultivates a common understanding of tutoring writing but also nurtures collegiality and ongoing professional development. We believe that this article—co-authored by professional consultants, peer tutors, and a graduate assistant—exemplifies how successful our course has been at integrating our entire faculty while preserving the integrity of the diverse perspectives that comprise our center. In what follows, we integrate a mix of voices that illustrates how class participants navigate this unique experience.[2]

COURSE SETUP

Tutoring Writing blends practice with talking, thinking, and writing about tutoring. We initially borrowed ideas and elements for the course structure from presenters at the 2007 IWCA Conference (Price, Liggett, & Jordan). In particular, we adapted Sarah Liggett's model for the practical internship portion of the course, which proceeds in four phases: student-as-tutee for three sessions (one for invention, one for revision, one for editing), four observations, four collaborative tutorials, and four independent sessions. Students complete a portfolio that includes session reports/analyses, an interview with an experienced consultant, and summative reflections at the end of each phase. To amplify this intensive internship, participants meet weekly in a classroom seminar that features readings on practical technique and writing studies scholarship. We offer the course in the fall, when we're busy enough to support many internships, then hire for spring so neophyte peer tutors can gain more experience before the fall rush—and before they become mentors to the next generation of tutors.

Peer tutor apprentice Olivia Mankowski describes how the class progresses from theory into practice:

> The course begins with a structured seminar format that focuses on writing center scholarship and the specific philosophy of our center. By reading articles and discussing them in class, we collectively begin to imagine how a writing center should work. Most of us have never previously

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

been tutored at the center, so that's how we begin our internship. As we progress from tutee and observer to participant and practitioner, our class sessions progress from merely theoretical (that is, how published "experts" say we should tutor and why) to scenario-based discussions based on our actual experiences. Listening to others talk about problems they face helps us gain a different perspective on how we would react if these situations ever happened to us. I attribute most of the success of these discussions to the in-depth, written reflections about our experiences, which we submit at the end of each phase of the internship. Analyzing and reflecting on our experiences makes it easier to participate more effectively in class discussions.

Professional consultant Karen McDonnell explains how the seminar helps her to integrate tutoring practice and design:

> The course provides a wonderful outlet for those of us already working in the center. Hearing about others' practical struggles has been liberating for me and instructive, I'm sure, to the tutors-in-training. Our vantage point as practicing consultants allows us to bring to the table concerns that needed immediate attention, to raise questions about real sessions, and to interrogate the gap between theory and praxis. It's all too easy for the classroom to become a place where romanticized ideas can untether tutors from the complex realities of working one-to-one with writers.

INTEGRATING OUR CULTURE

Our course has effectively counteracted the typically hierarchical nature of college classes. Olivia describes this unique experience from a student's viewpoint:

> A quick look at the class dynamic immediately showcases its diversity. Alongside me are writing center professionals, graduate students, and an educationally diverse body of undergraduates. Everyone sits alongside each other as colleagues—respected equally because of the perspectives and experiences we each bring to the class. This mutual respect and non-hierarchical structure truly sets it apart from a typical classroom.

Tiffany Bryant, a graduate assistant, reflects on how the culture created within the class evolves into a more closely integrated writing center culture:

> Our workplace now mirrors that classroom dynamic. Undergraduates, graduate students, and professors tutor alongside each other. We act as colleagues, despite varying levels of academic accomplishment, while still providing different insight from our respective levels of expertise. Tutoring Writing was where we all learned new ways of seeing our own writing while helping others with their processes.

" It's all too easy for the classroom to become a place where romanticized ideas can untether tutors from the complex realities of working one-to-one with writers. "

Reflecting back a year later, peer tutor Alicia Wendt discusses how the social integration that began in the course gives her confidence and minimizes distinctions between professional consultants and peer tutors:

> I'll admit, sometimes my ten scattered hours a week hardly seem to do the profession justice. Overall, though, it's hard to maintain an inferiority complex when the people classified as your superiors are also your classmates. The Tutoring Writing course ensures that every consultant in the writing center cultivates similar expertise, effectively eliminating any explicit distinctions between novice and veteran. For me, it's a constant reassurance to walk past the offices of practiced colleagues and hear them implementing strategies that I used in a session the day *before*.

The uniquely collaborative atmosphere that is fostered by the Tutoring Writing course encourages a sense of professionalism among peer tutors that is unparalleled by any other student employment position on campus. While most undergraduates are limited to providing supplementary assistance to professors and administrators, I am expected to offer the same quality of instruction to the students I tutor as they would receive from one of my more experienced colleagues. Ultimately, this responsibility requires considerable confidence that, without the Tutoring Writing course and the support of professional peers, would not be attainable for a typical undergraduate student.

MIXING IDENTITIES

Because the course so effectively helps to assimilate new faculty, newcomers inevitably become more aware of the identities they bring into the center. For professional consultants, the course repositions them somewhere between student and teacher. As Karen notes,

The prospect of my sitting in on the Tutoring Writing class first seemed a little odd. After all, as certified by my position title, I was already a "professional." But take the class I did. At the time, I had under my belt one year's experience consulting with writers in our center. Still, although I had immersed myself in the scholarship, subscribed to *WLN*, joined the WCenter listserv, and presented at the IWCA conference, my rookie year of tutoring underscored how much I still needed to learn. Admittedly, too, I relished the chance to escape from the center. I knew that I'd be a more engaged and focused consultant if I could get up out of my chair, take a break from tutoring, change scenery, and most importantly, participate regularly in conversations about issues that arise in the center.

Karen embraced the unusual course dynamic comfortably. For other participants, the course highlights tensions between the disciplinary and professional identities they bring and the new writing center culture they help to create. Tiffany Bryant, an English graduate student, explains:

My literary education did not include discussions about how to teach writing. Our Tutoring Writing course has been my first real exposure to many things writing- and rhetoric-related. The course creates an interactive space where we openly talk about the concerns that writing center faculty face, which helped me feel comfortable when tutoring college students for the first time.

One of the main reasons why I think the course has been successful and intellectually stimulating is the dynamic range of individuals who have taken it. Each of us brings a different academic perspective, and thus meaningful depth, to class discussions. Interestingly, I find myself in a precarious "tween" position. The class represents individuals in different academic places in their lives. The undergraduates balance a myriad of general requirements and major classes while deciding on their future endeavors. The faculty members juggle their own classes with publications, presentations, and committee involvement. Graduate students fall somewhere in the middle—still students (with plenty of homework), but now developing professional levels of knowledge akin to the faculty members' positions.

My experiences in the course and in the writing center have reshaped my perception of what classrooms and professional environments can look like, and also my perception of my hybrid identity as both a graduate student in literature and a tutor of writing.

Tiffany's perspective illustrates the tensions that most writing center newbies face, such as the contrasting roles and identities of student and teacher, or the competing value systems inherent in diverse disciplinary approaches to teaching writing. Blurring the roles of class participants reduces but does not eliminate the anxiety of integration

into our writing center culture. For some class members, like our visiting faculty colleague Michael Moghtader, these tensions raise some important questions about the role of a writing professor versus a writing consultant:

> Early in the semester, I understood those tensions as a natural byproduct of assimilating new knowledge into my existing identity as a writing teacher. But as the semester progressed, that assimilation became increasingly difficult. Who was I in this Tutoring Writing classroom—a "disciple" of the "tutoring profession"? Is that what I'm becoming in this course? And, if so, does that mean there is a tutoring studies discipline that's distinct from writing studies? After all, tutoring seems to have all the trappings of a discipline—a discrete body of knowledge and research methodologies used to create new knowledge, a set of "best practices" to apply that knowledge, professional organizations that support tutoring work, etc. And of course, there are the disciples—those of us in this classroom who will eventually tutor in the center.

> Despite the persistence of these questions and the cognitive dissonance I've felt since the course ended, I'm grateful for the experience. The course has dislodged my assumptions about what it means to teach writing and has opened up new possibilities. What are these new possibilities? I'm not yet certain, but I recall catching glimpses after each class meeting. Just imagine: It's twenty minutes after the tutoring class, and I have a teacher-student conference with one of my own writing students. As we talk, I feel my tutorial knowledge informing my conference work with this student. For example, his draft reads like he hasn't thought much about it. Should I set aside the "teacherly" guilt trip he deserves in order to work with what he intended to say, as a tutor would? How do I turn off the evaluative side of my teacherly brain to engage him in "tutorly" talk? As his writing teacher, how might I have revised my assignment to mitigate the procrastination wafting from his draft? What advice might a tutor have given me to clarify the directions and outcomes of my own writing assignment? The questions, like my cognitive dissonance, keep coming. But with them are occasions to think more complexly about my professional identity and the impact I can make—as teacher and tutor—to developing student writers.

Our writing center course helps us recognize dissonance as an inherent and potentially productive quality of our center. After all, writing centers are intrinsically dynamic: writing consultants and tutors come and go, literacies evolve, technologies expand, and academic and student cultures progress. In a professional setting devoted to excellence, we believe that our course has created a harmonic balance that leverages change and enables us to accumulate, revise, and pass on our expertise.

Indeed, the Tutoring Writing course never really ends. Our peer tutors continue gathering weekly to discuss issues that arise during tutoring sessions. Professional consultants and grad students join those sessions when they can—sometimes offering a more experienced perspective, but often learning from the growing expertise and unique perspectives of their younger colleagues. As new professionals and peer tutors—faculty and colleagues all—move into and through our writing center, they, too, will take from and add to the course and the culture it creates. The voices within this article are just part of that process. What these reflections about our experiences reinforce is that taking an experimental and collaborative approach to teaching, learning, and ongoing faculty development upholds and celebrates what's best about writing center work. It's plain to see that this

TAKE NOTE

NEW YORK METRO WRITING CENTERS

May 14, 2010
2-4 p.m.
St. John's University
Manhattan Campus:101 Murray Street.
NYC

The meeting will focus on discussions of several articles, plus other areas of interest. Contact Harry Denny for articles to be discussed at the meeting: dennyh@stjohns.edu; 718-990-6919.

very project enacts and extends the idea that began as our writing center course.

Notes

[1] We've always used the term "faculty" to refer to our professional consultants, even before they had classroom teaching obligations. Here we describe a transformation of our professional faculty from full-time consultants to faculty who consult part-time and teach (classes) part-time. With the addition of grad students and peer tutors, we're still *all one faculty*. We occupy a spectrum of levels of experience and expertise—but we all tutor, we're all committed to ongoing professional development, and we all recognize that we can learn from each other. (We plan to explore the special connections we've made between classroom and writing center instruction.)

[2] You can find more information about the authors, including photographs, at the James Madison University Writing Center website <http://www.jmu.edu/uwc/>.

Works Cited

Gill, Judy. "The Professionalization of Tutor Training." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 30.6 (2006): 1-5. Print.

Price, Steve, Sarah Liggett, and Kerri Jordan. "Effective Strategies for Tutor Preparation: Determining Needs, Designing Assignments, Arranging Experiences." IWCA Conference. Houston. Apr. 2007. Address.

MORE WRITING CENTER PROMOTIONAL AND INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS

In the March 2010 issue of WLN (Vo. 34.7), page 13, there was an extensive list of promotional and instructional videos developed in writing centers and available on the Internet. If yours are not listed here or in the March issue and you wish to have your online multimedia projects listed, please e-mail me, Muriel Harris, harrism@purdue.edu. Please indicate in which category you'd like your URL to be listed:

- promotional video
- multi-media instructional materials
- text-based instructional handouts in your OWLs

Please include the title of the material and the name of your institution

Promotional Videos:

John Brown University: <http://acadweb.jbu.edu/writing/>

Ball State University: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/video/video.php?v=1031438383965>

Texas A&M:
- <http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/podcasts/write-right/episode-22-tour-of-the-writing-center/>
- <http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/podcasts/episode-39-west-campus-library-video/>
- <http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/podcasts/write-right/episode-5-welcome-to-the-university-writing-center/>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJ-J2dD7eoc>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m14HhHp9jw&feature=related>

Instructional videos

Texas A&M:many videos, e.g., writing abstracts, citing sources, peer review workshop, public speaking, etc.:<http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/tag/video/>

Leeward Community College: a video on how to Skype for online tutorials and a video on note taking: <http://www.youtube.com/user/OWAPatLCC#p/a/u/1/p_kdXfRxlUo>

Arizona State University—West
- "Writing Tutoring—The Wrong Way": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWs1JkpLmQI&NR=1>
- "Writing Tutoring—The Right Way":< http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqVb_JTOVaU&feature=related>

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

THE WORLD OF IDEAS AND THE WORLD OF PRACTICE: ROMANTICISM AND ONLINE WRITING CENTERS

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In a writing center, theory, criticism, and practice often work simultaneously in an interdependent relationship with each other. To tutor a client is to consciously put theory and criticism into practice and to bridge what Matthew Arnold once called "the world of ideas and … the world of practice" (243). Writing centers, moreover, inhabit a unique space in colleges and universities by means of working with and drawing from a diverse range of disciplines, and so tutors, who also study in a diverse range of disciplines, often apply their own unique (inter)disciplinary approaches to tutorials. For example, literary theory and criticism can help (perhaps surprisingly) to inform and shape tutoring practices. When I began writing this essay, I had been a tutor for less than a year, and I was heavily immersed in both online writing center theory and Jerome McGann's renowned 1983 book, *The Romantic Ideology* (as my primary field is British Romanticism). I began to use McGann's theory regarding the Romantics' "escapist" poetic language as a lens through which to inform my online tutoring practices, especially with regard to clients' online writing styles.

Online tutorials in Ohio State's Writing Center are live and conducted in a private chat room that is created via a university-provided course management system called Carmen. Clients upload their papers to the site one hour before the tutorials begin so that both the tutor and client can view and modify the paper simultaneously during the tutorial. The problem I consistently run into during these tutorials is clients' use of "Internet-speech," that style of online writing that ironically disregards capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar, coherence—many of the same issues that students have problems with in their more formal, academic papers. There is often a distinction between clients' own "natural" language of common, everyday use (to borrow Wordsworth's phrase) and the "artificial" or academic language in which they are required to write their papers. This distinction intensifies during online tutorials as clients tend to use Internet-speech rather than formal English. In the first half of this essay I will provide an overview and analysis of this online dynamic, and in the second half I will offer new ways to more effectively tutor online clients.

LIT AND WRIT CRIT

Reading McGann's work on the Romantics, I was struck by the way his ideas comment on our own online virtual reality. In his book, McGann argues that the Romantics, disillusioned by the disastrous consequences of the French Revolution and the inability of politics to effect positive social change, escape from the material world into an ideal world of poetry. McGann claims that "The idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free from the ruins of history and culture is the grand illusion of every Romantic poet" (91). Thus, the Romantics inhabit a second, poetic world—an illusory world—from which they can critique the material reality they have left behind. The problem for McGann is that the Romantics "trick" themselves into believing they can effect political and social change in the "real" or material world by means of writing poetry in the "ideal" or immaterial world.

McGann's work has taken on new significance in the twenty-first century with regard to virtual reality or any of the other types of electronic realities made possible by the Internet and the digital revolution. We now have the capability to actually create virtual worlds online, to inhabit those worlds, to interact with other virtual individuals, and, in the case of writing centers, to create virtual spaces in which to hold tutorials with our clients (spaces such as MUDs, MOOs,[1] and online writing centers and labs in a variety of forms). Unlike MOOs, where a client can create a completely fabricated identity, Ohio State's

online tutorial system identifies clients by their university usernames (which reveal both first and last names). Similar to MOOs, however, this system allows the clients to deviate from their "regular" identity by inhabiting a virtual space. There are no visual aspects: no facial expressions, no body language, no oral expression. What constructs the virtual client is her or her name and the text he or she types during the chat.

In my experience, the most striking and consistent aspect of online tutorials is the Internet-speech used by the clients. The majority of my online clients communicate to me in this language, and I have increasingly come to see this use of language as both a reassertion of "regular" identity within a virtual space (Internet-speech reflects or recreates common, everyday language) and a form of escapism similar to that which McGann describes. The client "escapes" academic conventions by using an Internet-speech that recreates his non-academic (or "authentic") identity. I wonder if a client truly expects to become a better writer while writing with this online language, if a client truly effects a change in his academic writing in the "real" world of academia while conversing with Internet-speech during a virtual tutorial.

For me, virtual online worlds correspond with the secondary and illusory poetic worlds of the Romantics, and, like these poetic worlds, virtual worlds have the possibility of becoming ideal worlds (in an artificial or constructed sense). The client can create an ideal identity for herself in a world in which academic language is not a prerequisite for good academic writing, and the tutor can likewise create an ideal world in which formal academic discourse is the norm. Over the past year I have constantly asked myself the following questions in light of McGann's theory: Are our clients trying to escape or evade the "real" world of college and academic writing by using Internet-speech? If so, how do we as tutors modify our practice to accommodate this new type of client and tutorial?

AUTHORIAL IDENTITIES AND ONLINE ESCAPISM

I suggest that many online clients disengage themselves from the "real" world—from direct interaction with paper and tutor—by opting for a virtual rather than a face-to-face tutorial and that their use of Internet-speech acts as a reassertion of their "normal," non-academic identity. There are of course many factors at work in a client's decision to choose a virtual tutorial, and this escape from one's academic identity may be played out for the most part on the unconscious level. In a recent article, R. Evon Hawkins discusses a similar problem of identity in terms of the client's "working authorial identity," a conception of identity that rests on the understanding that "writing involves a complicated series of cognitive tasks which are always already influenced by non-cognitive elements" (2). Hawkins points out that "Academic writing is a performative act of self-representation" and "how clients represent their writerly academic identities to themselves … may influence writing processes" (5).

Virtual clients often construct second authorial identities during online tutorials as an attempt to escape their formal academic identities; they remove themselves from the physicality of academia and, similarly, from the standards of academic writing. The following client-tutor exchange from an online tutorial demonstrates such an escape:

> *Client:* my prof wants me 2 give more analysis here but i dont know what 2 say :-)
> *Tutor:* Okay, let's take a look a closer look at this section. As a general rule for academic writing, you should always follow textual evidence (a quote or citation) with your own analysis, interpretation, or explanation of that evidence—and your own analysis should be of equal or greater value than the evidence :-) So, why did you include the quote at this point in the paragraph?
> *Client:* i just thought i need something from the book…how should i explain?
> *Tutor:* You're right—you do need textual evidence from the book to support the claims you make in your paper. So, what is the central claim you assert in this section?
> *Client:* oh okay so i need 2 say more about my claim?

In this case, the client's passivity is reflected in the Internet-speech that continually defers the kind of academic writing that the tutor is attempting to explain and establish (despite the virtual happy face). This particular client is working on a formal research paper for an introductory composition course, yet the client's language is more suitable for a cell phone text conversation with a friend. The client distinguishes her "normal" identity from the academic identity she must assume when writing the paper by using Internet-speech; in effect, she represents her writerly academic identity to herself as artificial and undesirable. As the tutor, I attempt to establish a more formal discourse through a brief explanation of

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

the relationship between claims and evidence, but the client does not enter into this discourse. The client retains her "normal" identity by adhering to Internet-speech and thus escapes the conventions of academia.

The client, however, may not see this as an escape at all; in fact, the client is often more comfortable with Internet-speech than formal academic language, and so the tutor runs the risk of idealizing the virtual space as one in which the client will embrace academic writing. Formal academic writing is difficult, and writing with Internet-speech on-line during a virtual tutorial can be another performative way for the client to distance herself from the anxiety caused by the pressures of academia. In this virtual, illusory world, the client gains the freedom to recreate and reassert a "normal," non-academic identity by using Internet-speech. Echoing McGann's critique of the Romantic poets, I think it is difficult for a client to truly effect any kind of substantial change in her identity as an academic writer by removing herself from the academic reality in which this identity exists. The client may not perceive this gap between her virtual and academic identity, but the tutor must be aware of this gap in order to work effectively during an online tutorial. As Hawkins stresses, "peer tutors can help clients negotiate the complex, interactive web of cognitive, non-cognitive and self-regulatory processes which result in a written product" (5).

The separation of the client's identity as academic writer from the client's virtual identity creates a problematic dynamic exemplified by McGann's theory of escapism from material reality to illusory world. It is accordingly difficult for the tutor both to correctly read the client and to effectively establish an academic discourse (especially if the client uses Internet-speech). As tutors, we need to be aware of this separation when working with virtual clients, and the ultimate aim would be to bridge the client's academic identity with his or her virtual identity. Possible methods include mirroring the client's behavior (i.e., responding with similar Internet-speech in the same way a tutor would "read" whether a client expects a more formal or informal face-to-face tutorial), emphasizing the academic qualities of the client's writing during the tutorial (in a way that attempts to make academic conventions and standards desirable or at least "normal"), or even bringing up the purpose(s) and effect(s) of conversing with Internet-speech during a tutorial.

BRIDGING THE GAP

It is only after we acknowledge the possible gap between academic and virtual identities that solutions can be formulated and implemented. The next step, or "solution," is to bridge the gap, and I would first like to offer an example of a successful bridging of the gap with a non-academic client. One of my most satisfying online tutorials to date involved a creative writer who was producing a quasi-autobiography of his childhood growing up with two parents who were professional writers. The client was not writing the piece for a course but rather was revising an essay he had previously written for his own pleasure and for possible publication. The client did not resort to Internet-speech but instead communicated to me in the same type of language used in the piece we were discussing—he understood the "correct" writerly discourse, as it were. I, too, mirrored the style of conversation the client established (which I would describe as controlled stream-of-consciousness), and we were both able to engage with his text in a collaborative and productive way. In this case, there was no gap between the client's virtual identity and his identity as a writer, and this seemed to be a major factor in the success of the tutorial.

The bigger challenge, however, is to determine the best practices and methods for online tutorials with clients who forgo their academic identity while writing an academic paper. [2] One practice we have developed at Ohio State that has proven successful with academic writing involves creating an annotated draft with the writer before having an in-depth discussion of the paper and the client's concerns. During the first fifteen minutes or so of the tutorial (after introducing ourselves and establishing the agenda), I read the client's draft and use the comment function in Word to "speak" to the client. I do not "fix" the paper or correct grammatical errors; instead, I pose questions regarding the writing process (organization, structure, style, transitions, etc.), point out sections that are confusing or unclear, and identify (and applaud) successful academic writing. Once I have finished reading the paper, I then e-mail the annotated draft to the client so that we can both engage with the draft during the tutorial. This method not only establishes a collaborative tutorial with a heightened presence of the other, it also creates continuity between the client's academic and virtual identities. In my experience, clients are less likely to use Internet-speech after receiving the annotated draft, and they become more confident in their ability to write academic papers. The tutor establishes

an academic discourse through the comments, which in turn establishes an academic audience for the client. In most cases, the client responds to the comments in a more formal and serious way, often answering and asking questions in response to the comments and rewriting sentences and sections without being prompted to do so. For example, the following client-tutor exchange took place after the client had received the annotated draft (the conversation picks up on a question of academic vs. informal language):

> *Tutor*: Okay, let's move on to comment #5. Do you understand why I have marked the word "neat"?
>
> *Client:* Yeah, it's kind of informal. I'm not sure what would be more formal.
>
> *Tutor:* Yes, you're right; to say that something is "neat" does sound a bit more informal and conversational than the tone you are establishing in the rest of your paper. A few synonyms that come to mind are "fascinating" and "incredible."
>
> *Client:* Those words sound a bit strong in my opinion
>
> *Tutor:* Okay, good point, I was not sure how forcefully you want to stress this claim. Perhaps you could use a more subtle word such as "interesting" or "refreshing"? Using a thesaurus is helpful in these types of situations if you want to take a look on Word or online?
>
> *Client:* Okay, I will keep that all in mind when I go back to revise this section. . . .

This particular client, whose tutorial began in the same way as the less-successful example I cited earlier, is more directly engaged with the issue of academic language in her paper due in part to the method of annotating her draft. Although the client ultimately postpones revising the section during the tutorial (the tutorial was nearing its end and there was another annotation the client wanted to discuss), she enters into the academic discourse that the tutor has established. The client thus embraces and develops the academic aspects of her working authorial identity. The tutor constructs an ideal academic world through the online tutorial and annotated draft that can move the client closer to the world of academia with a better understanding of her working authorial identity.

CONCLUSION

Every client who visits the writing center inevitably presents different challenges and issues for tutors, and as a result we continually modify our techniques and practices. Online tutorials are especially challenging, as there is less time, less discussion, and less direct interaction than in face-to-face tutorials. McGann influenced my approach to online tutoring by presenting a separation of poetic language from material reality that I have applied to the separation of Internet-speech from academic writing. In my case, McGann's work allowed me to think more deeply about issues of language, textual identity, and metacognition with regard to writing center theory. Moreover, as academic writing continues to become more based in digital technology, online tutorials will continue to become more common in writing centers, and online writing will continue to become more significant in writing center research and theory. Yet writing centers can and should still uphold traditional writing and writing processes in the wake of the digital revolution, and the method of annotating drafts for online tutorials is one effective way to bring the virtual client closer to formal, academic writing. ✦

Endnotes

[1] MOOs (Multi-user domain Object Oriented) are online virtual realities in which multiple users interact with each other at the same time using identities the users themselves create and maintain. MOOs are often adopted by academic scholars, programs, and courses in order to communicate and collaborate. See MediaMOO for a representative example of an academic MOO.

[2] I use the term "academic" in the sense of formal essays, research papers, theses, and dissertations—texts that are required to follow specific academic standards, guidelines, and conventions.

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

GEEK IN THE CENTER

AUDIO-VIDEO-TEXTUAL CONFERENCING (AVT) OPTIONS

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In a recent *Kairos* article, "Expanding the Space of f2f," Melanie Yergeau, Katie Wozniak, and Peter Vandenberg make the case for online synchronous tutoring. Though arguments for online tutoring, synchronous or not, have been made frequently over the last fifteen years, what is different about this piece is an emphasis on what they called "audio-video-textual conferencing" or AVT tutoring. Yergeau, Wozniak, and Vandenberg argue tutorials that include these elements, through video chat and digital document exchange, come closer to replicating what is good about face-to-face tutorials than asynchronous tutorials do. Though asynchronous tutoring has its own appeals, there is no arguing that AVT tutorials will look more like face-to-face (f2f) tutorials. Many writing center professionals, for this reason, might prefer AVT over asynchronous tutoring, yet find themselves with one stubborn question: *How do we do that?*

For their part, Yergeau, Wozniak, and Vandenberg encourage readers "to engage the processes of digital design as you mix and match various applications of technology and the semiotic practices they make available, writing and rewriting the possibilities of the writing center." One reason they refuse to endorse a particular program is that they do not think there is a single product appropriate for all centers. Another reason, perhaps, is that it is actually difficult to find one product that does A, V, and T; many centers that provide AVT tutoring now must mix and match.

Thus, for this month's Geek column, I decided to investigate different programs that might enable AVT tutoring in writing centers. At my center, we have conducted AVT tutoring for a couple of years now, yet I was curious about the mixing and matching we've been doing and if there were options I wasn't aware of. I looked to find programs that would allow tutors a way to chat with audio and video and to view "live" documents. Though a center could provide synchronous tutoring by having students e-mail a document and then using the phone or instant messaging to chat about the paper, that approach misses the visual element of being able to see the person and to see how the text evolves as the conversation does. Thus, there seem to be many, many ways a center could do synchronous tutoring, but fewer platforms for AVT tutoring.

From my investigation, I settled upon six possible configurations for AVT tutoring to compare: WCOnline, Adobe Connect, Wimba Pronto, WizIQ, Elluminate Live, and Google Docs (see Figure 1, on page 13, for a side-by-side comparison). By no means would I call this list inclusive; many other programs are available publicly, and many schools have in-house custom programs as well.[1] However, each of the programs on the list could enable AVT tutoring by pairing video chat with an ability to see "live" documents, and these have all been adopted by different writing centers already (with the possible exception of WizIQ, a relative newcomer). In the chart, I describe the different ways that users interact with the digital texts, whether a program requires a user to download software before using, and the cost for operating each. As you can see, most of the programs have a free version; however, the paid versions are typically more robust and would likely provide better technical support.

Though my center has used only two of these six programs, I was able to try out the others in the process of researching for this column. On program websites, one can find overview and how-to videos and immedi-

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ate, free, online demos. I recommend that a director or designee try out the demos, talk to representatives, and then do a brief pilot with the staff from the programs that look most promising. I would not recommend signing a contract or paying for a year upfront without testing the programs with real tutors and real students. This testing will alert you to any user, interface, compatibility, or campus security issues. I do know from experience, though, that short pilot programs cannot indicate long-term buy-in of users.

Also, I think it is wise to look at your campus resources before adopting an AVT program. It is possible that your campus or school has already purchased an enterprise version of one of these programs or a similar one. Wimba, for example, can connect with Blackboard, so campuses that use Blackboard may have also purchased Wimba. Further, each of these programs will require material resources: computers, webcams, speakers/headphones, and microphones. Beyond that, each will have slightly different system requirements that should be taken into consideration, not just for the writing center in-house technology, but also for tutors who might engage in AVT tutoring offsite and for all of your users. It would be wise to check your campus statistics on student technology usage beforehand. In designing your AVT tutoring protocol, it would be useful to know, for example, how many students own their own computers and have regular access to high speed Internet.

I find myself convinced about the possibilities of and for AVT tutoring. If the history of writing centers reveals anything though, it is that there is no one way of tutoring that works for every center or for every student. It makes sense to think both about how AVT tutoring comes close to being f2f and also about the ways it differs. Those differences are not failings, necessarily, because those differences might just appeal to users in unexpected ways. Twenty-first century writing centers will likely be marked by the plurality of approaches to support writing, not just in how they use technology to replicate established ways. ◆

Author's note: If you have ideas, comments, or suggestions for future Geek in the Center columns, please e-mail me (jrmckinney@bsu.edu) or find me on Twitter (jrgmckinney).

Notes

[1.] I browsed web-conferencing applications such as DimDim, WebEx, and GoToMeeting; each would offer some of the features on this list, but the textual element is less central in their designs. Scribblar and ShowDocument have nice platforms for meeting and collaborating on documents online, but lack the video component.

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	WConline Online Tutoring Module	Adobe Connect	WizIQ	Wimba Pronto	Elluminate Live	Google Docs with Google Talk or Skype
desktop or application sharing: this feature allows for users to give others access to view their desktops (to see what is on their screen) or to view and use an application with them.		x	x	x	x	
whiteboard: this is a box which both users can view and add to; text or images can be uploaded or copy and pasted; includes drawing tools for marking or sketching.	x	x	x	x	x	
shared document editing: document is online and users can view/edit simultaneously, seeing changes instantly						x
audio and video chat	x	x	x	x	x	x
text chat (important if user does not have webcam)	x	x	x	x	x	x
download required for users?	Users may need to download a plug-in for video chatting	Users need Flash player; to share screen, they will need to download a plug-in	No	Yes	Yes	Yes: Google Talk and Skype both require downloads
cost	$35/month for WConline users (total cost for WConline and the OTM is $100/month)	Connect Now is free; Connect Pro is $45-55/month	$0-50/year	basic version is free for some Blackboard users; contact Wimba for pricing on full version	vRoom is free; vOffice is $499/year	Google products are free; Skype incurs a per minute use charge when calling to a phone number

Figure 1: Comparison of AVT Approaches

TUTOR'S COLUMN

HELPING STUDENTS NEGOTIATE DIALECTS IN THE WRITING CENTER

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During a consulting session last semester, I made an exciting connection. I was reading through a first-year student's personal essay for a composition course, and I noticed that he was using plural verbs for singular subjects and that his possessives were often incomplete. But after pointing out a few missing s's, I recognized it was a pattern.

The week before I had learned in my linguistics class that "dropped s's" are a dialect feature of African American English. I realized that I was not helping the student correct his mistakes—I was helping him translate his paper into Standard Written English. Although I was excited about applying this information, it created another problem: How was I going to address this issue with the student?

Many of us who work in composition studies might agree with Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes that "there are no 'good' or 'bad' dialects; dialect is simply how we refer to any language variety that typifies a group of speakers within a language" (3). However, I could not immediately see how I could reconcile this ideological position with my practice in the writing center. Because tutors are tasked with helping students learn how to write papers that will be successful in an academic environment, we often need to help students learn how to write in Standard Written English.

Sitting there with that student, eager to share this knowledge, I said that he was consistently not using s's to show possession and in subject-verb agreement, and that such forms are a dialect feature of African American English. He didn't know how to respond. He seemed interested, but he wanted me to get through his whole paper during the session. So I showed him how to make a change and suggested that he look for those s's during his revising and proofreading process. Then we moved on.

Afterwards, when I had time to contemplate the experience, I realized that the approach I had taken was risky. It may not have been prudent for me to make a judgment about the student's dialect, as I may have sounded patronizing despite my enthusiasm and good intentions. Since that session, I have researched scholarship on this issue, and this article explores how this dilemma can be handled in the writing center.

What I learned is that my first instinct was right—it is important to validate dialect differences as grammatical patterns rather than as grammatical mistakes. As Rebecca Wheeler points out, "Longstanding student performance and research show that the traditional correction methods fail to teach African American students skills of standard English usage" (239). If writing tutors label dialect differences as errors, not only will they probably fail to help students write in Standard Written English, but they may also make students feel inadequate and frustrated. Therefore, as consultants we have the precarious job of validating students' own language while helping them learn strategies for translating their thoughts and words into Standard Written English. Beth Bir and Carmen Christopher acknowledge the importance of identifying dialects in the writing center when they advocate that tutors study dialect features in order to recognize dialects in consulting sessions. The vital next step is to outline strategies for helping students understand that they are writing in a legitimate dialect that has systematic features that are different from Standard Written English.

Most tutors I have talked to about this challenge recommend using a variation of, "You're writing informally; how can you make this more formal?" Many professors and consultants also value this approach, as I found out during my presentation on dialects in the writing center at the East Central Writing Centers Association last April. Certainly this technique is useful to provide students with an entry-level introduction to discourse communities because the students learn that it is beneficial to use different languages for different audiences. However, I do not

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

think this is the solution to discussing dialect differences. This approach assumes that students understand the grammatical forms of Standard Written English, so all that students have to do is adjust their writing to the audience. Consultants may still continue to label certain dialect features as errors and fail to show students that they speak a valid dialect with systematic features.

An improved variation of the approach described above could be, "There are certain grammatical forms evident in your papers that you may use when you talk to your family and friends; can I show you what forms are required for an audience of your teacher and classmates?" This sentence links the student's writing to the student's speech and thus is closer to acknowledging a dialect. This approach is a solid compromise for tutors who are worried about sounding judgmental when discussing students' language. Tutors can then point out the systematic choices that students make and encourage them to look for these choices in all of their writing. Tutors often point out patterns of error in student writing. The difference here, then, is to point out that those differences are not errors but systematic choices that stem from a dialect other than Standard Written English.

I recommend taking the last approach one step further and incorporating the idea of a dialect into discussions with students so that we validate and educate students about their language in addition to discussing audience awareness. Using the general term "dialect" rather than naming a specific dialect is a way to avoid labeling a student's dialect based on race, ethnicity, or region. This term is also useful because a student's writing might have features of a dialect that are unfamiliar to tutors. A student might use multiple dialects or use only some characteristics of a given dialect. Although consultants would ideally have training in the dialects most prominent in their writing centers, this training may not always be possible. But by engaging in discussions such as the one described in this article, tutors can become more linguistically sensitive and better prepared to help students negotiate dialects in their writing.

If I could rewind and re-do that consulting session last semester, this is how I would revise my response: "I have noticed that there are a number of places in your paper where you do not use s's that are required in Standard Written English. This may mean that you speak a dialect with your family and friends that does not require these forms. Would you like to make a list of what is required in Standard Written English, like these s's, so that you can look for these things when you write and revise academic papers?" Of course it is possible that the student I encountered last semester still would not have wanted to spend time having that discussion. But maybe, just maybe, he would have been open to a discussion about his language. And maybe he would have been empowered by my validation of his dialect and enthused about learning how to maneuver in Standard Written English. As tutors all we can do is try to help each student. By sharing my investigation of these issues, I encourage other tutors to become more aware of the distinction between dialect features and errors and use that knowledge to empower student writers. ✦

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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

May 25-28, 2010: European Writing Centers Association, in Paris, France
Contact: E-mail: Ann Mott: amott@aup.fr. EWCA website: <http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/eng/>.

November 3-6, 2010. International Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Baltimore, MD
Contact: Barb Lutz and John Nordlof. E-mail: IWCAconference2010@english.udel.edu; conference website: <http://www.mawcaonline.org/iwca>.

Feb. 17-19, 2011: Southeastern Writing Centers Association, in Tuscaloosa, AL
Contact: Luke Niiler: e-mail: lpniiler@ua.edu; phone: 205-348-9460.