THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

– FROM THE EDITOR –

With this issue we bid farewell to the *Writing Lab Newsletter.* Next September, we will be publishing under our new name, *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship,* and in a new format. What began as a newsletter has long since developed into a peer-reviewed journal, and our new name will honor that change. Also new is WcORD, a searchable database for your use when looking for writing center resources (see p. 6 for details).

This issue begins with Anne Canavan's account of their English Language Learners (ELL) tutoring center that shares space with her Writing Center. With minimum space and resources, Canavan developed the center to serve the needs of the ELL population—students who need more time and often, different forms of assistance. Another service some writing centers offer is the Dissertation Boot Camp (DBC), and Brandy Blake, Joy Bracewell, and Clint Stivers explain how they structured their STEM DBC to best accommodate their dissertation writers.

When we issued a call to reflect on Neal Lerner's well-known, widely read "Counting Beans" articles, Scott Pleasant's response turned into an extended discussion of how influential Lerner's article was because it encouraged Pleasant to gain the expertise needed to assess his center. Lauren Gregory and Frances Crawford offer their thoughts on Lerner's bean counting as well, and Neal Lerner responds to these reflections. Also, in this issue's Tutor's Column, Dory Hammersley and Heath Shepard argue for the value of generalist tutors working with writers' texts in various disciplines.

✦ *Muriel Harris, editor*

INSIDE

THEY SPEAK MY LANGUAGE HERE: AN ELL-SPECIFIC TUTORING PILOT PROJECT IN A MIDWESTERN REGIONAL UNIVERSITY

✦ *Anne Canavan* ✦
Emporia State University
Emporia, KS

In a time when the United States is becoming increasingly linguistically diverse, and colleges and universities see recruiting international students as an important opportunity for developing both cultural diversity and revenue, the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) who seek support from writing centers has sharply increased. This change has been seen at colleges across the country, and writing centers are seeing their already limited resources being stretched by student populations who may require more time and specialized knowledge than peer tutors feel able to offer. A potential way to increase student confidence and self-efficacy is through the use of academic support services designed especially for non-native (ELL) speakers.

The ELL Lab at Emporia State University (ESU) is an example of one way an effective ELL tutoring center can be established with few requirements in terms of space and resources. Other ELL-specific tutoring labs exist across the country, and while they are too many to mention, they are still a rarity in colleges and universities. Many of these labs exist in larger universities, such as Georgia State University, Northern Illinois University, and Brigham Young University; however, thes success of ESU's model indicates the potential for replica-

tion of such centers at smaller schools with comparatively few resources. Emporia State University, a mid-sized state university, is representative of the trend in international student population growth in many ways. With international students making up 8.6% of the total enrolled population of approximately 6,000 students (9.3% of the undergraduate population and 7.4% of the graduate population), we have the second-largest population of international students of Board of Regents schools in our state. In terms of formal support for ESU students, the university offers an Intensive English Program (IEP) for students who do not meet the minimum test scores (usually TOEFL or IELTS) to be fully admitted to the university. Our IEP offers tutoring, support, and conversation partners for students enrolled in the program. Upon receiving adequate scores in IEP speaking, reading, and writing courses, these students begin their credit-bearing coursework in the university. Once these students are taking their regular coursework at Emporia State, they have access to the standard support systems offered by the university—the Math Lab, the Reading Lab, a few subject area tutoring labs, and of course our Writing Center; however, these students no longer have access to the academic support offered by IEP.

When I came to Emporia State in the fall of 2012, the Writing Center was reporting a large percentage of their clients (75%, or approximately 900 of the 1,200 appointments the Writing Center held) as being ELL speakers, and the undergraduate peer tutors often felt overwhelmed by the needs of these students. In addition, there was some expectation on the part of some of the ELL speakers that the Writing Center would act as an editing service rather than as a tutoring lab. The Writing Center at Emporia State University is staffed entirely by undergraduate peer tutors who have received limited training in writing center theory and practice and who have no specific training in ELL tutoring theory. Based on successful ELL tutoring labs I had worked in during graduate school, I suggested beginning a similar program at ESU on a pilot basis. Following our proposal to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the ELL Lab was granted a pilot program of ten hours of tutoring a week in spring of 2013 and increased funding for twenty hours of tutoring per week for the 2013–14 academic year. Currently, I serve as the Lab's primary tutor and director, but I received limited funding in Fall 2014 to hire and train a student peer tutor.

Given the array of support services that colleges and universities currently offer students—writing, reading, and math labs; subject-specific tutoring; academic coaching; and combined learning commons areas—petitioning for an ELL-specific tutoring center can be seen, at worst, as redundant by administrators who don't teach these students or as exclusionary by those who do. Many people fairly state that ELLs already use the existing academic support units that are available for all students and that adding a separate unit for a certain population requires more funding, yet adds nothing to the education of these students. After all, aren't these students supposed to be studying on the same level as their native speaking peers?

These are valid arguments schools should weigh when considering the establishment of a separate tutoring center. An ELL-specific tutoring model may not be the best fit for every academic environment. In particular, schools that serve a large number of students who may not wish to be identified as second language speakers (e.g. U.S. resident ELL speakers, Generation 1.5, heritage language speakers, etc.) may find that it is more effective to train tutors in existing academic units to work with ELLs than it is to establish an additional support unit. However, ELL-specific tutoring labs can help ELLs in a directed way that allows other academic support units to function more efficiently. Situations well suited to these support services include schools with large numbers of international students, support services that are reaching their capacity or are seeing disproportionately high number of ELLs, schools with MA TESOL degrees that may have graduate students available for staffing a center, and those with thriving ELL instructional environments (sheltered mainstream courses, intensive English programs, etc.).

One of the primary advantages of an ELL-specific tutoring lab is that it can be tailored to a particular population's usage patterns. As anyone who has worked in a writing lab can attest, ELLs often use a writing center in very different ways from native speakers, and sessions with ELLs are often complicated by issues of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and cultural differences (Enders 2013; Meyers 2003; Blau

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

et al. 2001; Severino and Deifell 2011; Thonus 1993, 1999, 2003 and 2004; Harris and Silva 1993; and Powers 1993, among many others). Specialized tutoring centers, such as ELL labs, are able to effectively respond to the ways that student populations use the services provided. Meyers in particular notes that ELL students often want and need help with sentence-level corrections, which peer consultants in traditional writing centers are often explicitly trained to avoid. Blau, et al. also indicate that confusion about the assignment is a common feature of ELL tutoring sessions, and Enders' article emphasizes the need to get ELL writers into support centers early in the writing process to help these students focus on critical thinking rather than editing. While very little literature about the implementation of ELL-specific tutoring labs as separate academic support units exists, the idea that ELL speakers have different expectations for a tutoring session and benefit from (and in some cases may require) tutors with specialized training has been extensively covered in the literature. In addition to the earlier works cited, one can do no better than to look to Nick David's bibliography in "ESL Writers in Tutoring Centers," posted on the International Writing Centers website, for an overview of thought on this topic.

Judith Powers provides one of the primary motivations behind the establishment of an ELL-specific tutoring center: "To extend the benefits of conferencing and collaborative learning to ELL writers, writing center faculty must understand what these writers need from us and how their needs differ from those of native-speaking students" (45). Providing tutors with specialized training in issues of second language acquisition and providing longer times for consultations can lead to an improved tutoring center for the clients. These improvements simultaneously reduces the frustration of tutors who might otherwise feel they are faced with situations for which they have not received enough training. Rather than asking all writing center staff to become conversant in issues of second language acquisition, an ELL-specific tutoring center allows the staff of that center to develop techniques that work well for their targeted population, resulting in better service and less frustration on the part of both the tutor and the client.

Beyond the different usage patterns of L1 and ELL students, an ELL lab is able to offer more holistic support for ELLs. In particular, non-productive aspects of language learning (reading and listening) present a challenge for tutors not trained in ELL teaching, as difficulties in these areas are often easily masked. While many of the sessions I hold for students are primarily focused on questions of writing, there are often complications relating to a student's reading and listening comprehension as well, which may cause the writer to misinterpret what the instructor was asking for in a particular assignment (see Blau et al. for further discussion).

> ❝ *One of the primary advantages of an ELL-specific tutoring lab is that it can be tailored to a particular population's usage pattern.* ❞

This concern highlights the main aspect that distinguishes an ELL-specific tutoring lab from a writing center, which is the ability to focus entire sessions on non-productive aspects of language learning. As a result, students in the ELL Lab often bring assignment prompts and textbooks *before* they begin writing and have sessions devoted entirely to reading comprehension. The ELL Lab also provides listening support, during which students listen to radio broadcasts with a tutor and discuss main ideas after the segment, often re-listening to crucial parts to check comprehension or practice listening to key transitions.

Finally, by having a separate academic support unit for ELL learners, we provide a sense of "safe space" for these students. ELLs seem to be more comfortable asking questions about *why* language works the way it does, rather than simply seeking to have a paper fixed. Knowing they are working with a tutor with particular training and interest in TESOL and second language acquisition may also encourage these students to view their sessions as less about having a Band-Aid applied to their papers and more about having a safe space for questioning and exploration, increasing the student's comfort and confidence levels. The difference in usage patterns between the ELL Lab and the Writing Center highlights the value of this model; while the average appointment time for an international student visiting the Writing Center at ESU is 16 minutes, the average for an ELL Lab appointment is 48 minutes. This usage pattern suggests that prior to the ELL Lab's opening, the status quo was a series of micro-visits to the Writing Center,

indicating an expectation that specific problems would be addressed and quickly solved. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that because of the drop-in nature of our Writing Center, students did not want to feel like they were taking too much time from the Writing Center tutors, and sought to leave sessions quickly. With the one-hour appointments for the ELL Lab, students know that they have a set amount of time to discuss any questions they have related to their English language learning, and they are more willing to fully use that time to discuss topics beyond their immediate projects. Students may still come into an ELL Lab session with a piece of writing or a focused query, but they can expect the session to cover a wide variety of issues associated with English language learning.

Having distinct tutoring labs with very different tutoring models allows ELLs to choose what kind of assistance they want to seek at a particular point in their language learning and to feel more satisfied with the assistance they receive. ELLs who frequently visit the ELL Lab will often seek the Writing Center for issues related to strictly grammatical concerns or brief questions about citations, etc., and they reserve more complex problems for their ELL Lab sessions. Thus, the ELL Lab is able to meet student needs in a productive way while functioning as a valuable partner to the existing Writing Center rather than as a competitor.

Given that space is at a premium on our campus, a semi-private area in the rear of our existing Writing Center space has been dedicated to the ELL Lab. The Writing Center and ELL Lab occupy a large room on the main floor of the library, which contributes to the high volume of clients that both centers serve. The furnishings of the ELL Lab include a table for consultations, computer access and space for reference books (many of which were provided by publishers for the ELL Lab's use or purchased used) available for the students to borrow. The Lab is divided from the Writing Center proper by the furniture of the waiting area, which the Writing Center and the ELL Lab share, but visitors to the two centers can see each other, and, more importantly, tutors in the centers can communicate with each other easily.

Though having both centers in the same physical space seemed less than ideal initially, it has produced a number of benefits for the tutors in the Writing Center. The Writing Center holds hours on a drop-in basis rather than by appointment, and when tutors are not busy with other clients, they can observe the tutoring sessions occurring in the ELL Lab, providing them with a model for working with ELLs who come to the Writing Center for assistance. I also answer tutors' questions about how to work with ELLs more efficiently or explain basic concepts of second language acquisition for those who are interested. This interaction provides an excellent synergy between the ELL Lab and the Writing Center, which is beneficial to the clients of each.

RESULTS

While quantifying the results of a tutoring lab is always difficult, certain statistics demonstrate that the ELL Lab is providing an important and popular service for the ELLs at ESU. Since the ELL Lab's inception, it has operated at high capacity (117% of capacity in Spring 2013, when I was holding additional hours to meet emergency demand; 94% of capacity in Fall 2013; and 97% in Spring 2014). In Spring 2013, 71% of the 27 students who attended one session in the ELL Lab returned for at least one more session over the course of the semester, and in the fall that number increased to 80% of 55 students, with an average number of 4.55 visits per returning student. The ELL Lab also had a 96.5% rate of students attending their scheduled sessions in Spring 2014, with most appointments being booked one to two weeks in advance.

As in many tutoring centers, it is difficult to directly assess learning outcomes and success of tutoring. However, anecdotal data from both students and professors indicate that the ELL Lab is providing a valuable service, improving student success and increasing language confidence; usage data confirms that students who use the ELL Lab feel it is an important resource for furthering their learning goals. In Spring 2014, the ELL Lab partnered with the First Year Composition program's assessment protocol to generate quantitative data about ELL success in Composition I and II, and distinct improvements in organization, source use, and grammatical correctness were noticed in the writing of ELLs who attended

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

the ELL Lab versus those who did not, with these students often performing at the same (or higher) level as their native speaking peers.

The ELL Lab has also enjoyed increased partnerships with faculty from across campus as they encourage their students to visit "early and often," in the words of one professor. This relationship has allowed me to have conversations with faculty about the assignments students are working on while simultaneously serving as a resource for ELL-related questions that faculty members might have. In addition to their willingness to direct students to the ELL Lab, faculty have expressed relief and pride that ESU is providing targeted resources to support our ELLs beyond sending those students to the Writing Center or other subject-specific tutoring labs. Importantly for administrators who provide funding for this and similar ventures, ELL Lab models are easy to scale up incrementally based on the resources and response of the institution, which can minimize the initial startup resources.

As the demographic complexion of U.S. colleges and universities continues to change, the steady increase in ELLs using the support services of a school, particularly writing centers, will likewise continue. Writing Center directors continue to find creative ways to serve ELLs while still meeting the needs of L1 students, and tutors are becoming increasingly well-informed about working with diverse populations. However, for many colleges and universities, an ELL-specific tutoring center can serve as an important partner to a traditional Writing Center because an ELL lab can address all areas of language learning and production and respond to the usage needs of ELLs in a way that benefits both learners and tutors. ✦

Works Cited

Blau, Susan, John Hall, Jeff Davis, and Lauren Gravitz. "Tutoring ESL students: A Different Kind of Session." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 25.10 (2001): 1-4. Print.

David, Nick. "ESL Writers in the Writing Center References." *International Writing Centers Association.* 2014. Web. 11 Feb. 2014.

Enders, Doug. "The Idea Check: Changing ESL Students' Use of the Writing Center." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 37.9-10 (2013): 6-9. Print.

Harris, Muriel, and Tony Silva. "Tutoring ESL Students: Issues and Options." *College Composition and Communication* 44.4 (1993): 525-37. Print.

Meyers, Sharon. "Reassessing the 'Proofreading Trap': ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction." *Writing Center Journal* 24.1 (2003): 51-70. Print.

Powers, Judith K. "Rethinking Writing Center Conferencing Strategies for the ESL Writer." *Writing Center Journal* 13.2 (1993): 39-47. Web. 11 Feb 2014.

Severino, Carol, and Elizabeth Deifell. "Empowering L2 Tutoring: A Case Study of a Second Language Writer's Vocabulary Learning." *Writing Center Journal* 31.1 (2011): 25-54. Print.

Severino, Carol, Jeffrey Swenson, and Jia Zhu. "A Comparison of Online Feedback Requests by Non-Native English-Speaking and Native English-Speaking Writers." *Writing Center Journal* 29.1 (2009): 106-129. Print.

Thonus, Terese. "How to Communicate Politely and Be a Tutor, Too: NS-NNS Interaction and Writing Center Practice." *TEXT* 19.2 (1999): 253-280. Print.

---. "Serving Generation 1.5 Learners in the University Writing Center." *TESOL Journal* 12.1 (2003): 17-24. Print.

---. "Tutors as Teachers: Assisting ESL/EFL Students in the Writing Center." *Writing Center Journal* 13.2 (1993): 13-26. Print.

---. "What Are the Differences?: Tutor Interactions with First-and Second-language Writers." *Journal of Second Language Writing* 13.3 (2004): 227-242. Print.

✦

SOUTHEASTERN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Feb. 18-20, 2016
Columbus, GA
Columbus State University
"Writing Center Inclusivity"
Keynote speaker: Margaret Price

For the 2016 conference, we invite presentations that explore inclusivity and related issues, including but not limited to tutor recruitment, administration and assessment, outreach, space layout, technology, linguistics and literacy, and research.

Types of presentations include individual presentations, roundtable discussions, workshops, ignite sessions, poster presentations, and multimedia installations. Deadline for proposals: Oct. 19, 2015. Conference chair: Eliot Rendleman: <rendleman_eliot@columbusstate.edu>; Conference website: <www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html>.

WHAT'S WcORD AND HOW DO YOU PRONOUNCE IT?

✦ *WLN Editorial Staff*

WcORD is the **W**riting **C**enter **O**nline **R**esources **D**atabase, and it's a new way for writing center folk to find information and collaborate in building our own database of writing center resources. You can decide how to pronounce WcORD; we refer to it as "wick-erd." But more importantly, you can use it to find writing center and writing studies information. Instead of searching for writing center/writing studies information through listserv archives, articles in online journals or open-access archives of journals, blogs, podcasts, websites, etc., you can go to WcORD and search many of those sources at once. More importantly, you can help WcORD grow and make research more accessible. *WLN* staff and volunteers have already tagged hundreds of links at WcORD, but if you know of links to sites you use on your writing center's website, in an open-access online journal or journal archives, in a blog, etc., you can help make WcORD as useful as possible by adding links you know about.

WHAT IS WcORD?

WcORD is an online database of links to writing center resources that are available on the web. If you're familiar with CompPile, you'll find WcORD somewhat familiar, though our database attempts to account for additional types of resources available electronically (e.g. blogs, websites, handouts, etc. in addition to peer-reviewed journals). And WcORD does not deposit files. Instead, it links to online materials.

HOW DID WcORD ORIGINATE?

After the *WLN* editorial staff discussed such a resource in our session at the 2014 IWCA Collaborative, *WLN* Development Editor, Alan Benson, chose a free social bookmarking platform, Diigo, and began to develop our site. Then, *WLN* Associate Editor, Lee Ann Glowzenski, took over, spent far too many hours, and with help from WcORD volunteers, bookmarked hundreds of links into the database. Each entry is listed with multiple "tags" (another word for a clickable keyword) to enhance WcORD's searchability. We decided to name this database WcORD.

HOW DO YOU USE WcORD?

To search WcORD, go to the *WLN* website and click on WcORD. Or go directly to the group with this URL: <groups.diigo.com/group/wln-resource-archive>.

HOW CAN YOU ADD LINKS TO WcORD?

Check out the "To add additional resources" section of the WcORD page on *WLN*'s website if you want to support this project by adding links to the Google Form. Or go directly to the online Google Form at <goo.gl/forms/z4dVVtBglp>.

You can also request an invitation to join the group, which will allow you you to add and edit your own resources. But when you are adding to WcORD, use the pull-down window for "Share to a Group" and select WcORD so that the resources you add will be visible to all users. For more information on joining WcORD, check out the User Guide on the WcORD page at the *WLN* website, or go directly to this link: <writinglabnewsletter.org/diigo.pdf>.

HOW CAN YOU GET MORE INVOLVED WITH WcORD?

To join the project as a WcORD Contributor, contact Lee Ann Glowzenski at <laglowzenski@gmail.com>.

✦

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

REFLECTIONS

Editor's note: The following are responses to the *WLN* call for readers' reflections on Neal Lerner's "Counting Beans and Making Beans Count." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 22.1 (1997): 1-3.

IT'S NOT JUST BEANS ANYMORE; IT'S OUR BREAD AND BUTTER

◆ *Scott Pleasant*
Coastal Carolina University
Conway, SC

After serving on a number of hiring committees over the years, I have heard more than my share of interview answers that sidestep difficult or litmus-test questions. So when I interviewed for my current job as coordinator of the Coastal Carolina University Writing Center in 2010, I gave a direct answer when asked, "What do you fear most about giving up your faculty position and coming in to direct the Writing Center?" I could have bobbed and weaved around that question by saying that a well-lived professional life means embracing all kinds of unfamiliar challenges, but I didn't. Instead, I gave a direct, one-word answer: "Assessment." And then I watched every head in the room nod in agreement. There were no follow-up questions, probably because all of the committee members had struggled to assimilate into a culture of assessment. With an accreditation review coming in just two years, the University had recently directed all programs to begin rigorous assessments, but very few people on campus had had adequate training or experience in designing such programs.

In my previous position as an English Department faculty member, I hadn't been impacted to any great degree by the University's development of assessment programs. Sure, I wrote a long annual report each spring and submitted a few name-redacted student papers each semester so that administrators could put together bullet points and numbers on an even longer annual report, but as an instructor, I was only vaguely aware of the inner workings of the University's assessment machine. After becoming the Writing Center coordinator, I was not insulated from that system anymore. While confident I could train and manage a tutor staff, I was not sure I could demonstrate the effectiveness of the work they (and I) did. Teachers of composition and literature—which is to say, people who often think of narratives, anecdotes, argumentation, and various types of word play as the most useful rhetorical strategies—can get a little nervous when asked to provide "quantifiable evidence" that they have achieved specifically-stated goals. Before interviewing for the job, I had never seen a specific model for effective writing center assessment, so I couldn't tell the hiring committee I was confident in conducting such an assessment. Fortunately, they selected me for the position even after I expressed my reservations. My fears were, after all, very common on our campus at the time.

Five years later, I am in a position I never imagined I would be in. I routinely collect empirical data on various aspects of our center's operations, and I have received three grant awards for quantitative writing center assessment. Although I have never had a course in statistics or assessment design, I have become the assessment coordinator for University College (the college that houses the Writing Center and all of the Learning Assistance Centers on our campus) and a member of the university-wide assessment committee. In short, it's fair to say I have turned a weakness into a strength, and if I can do that, I feel sure other writing center administrators who still have qualms about quantitative assessment and research can, too.

Near the end of my first year in the coordinator position, I began searching writing center literature for assessment advice because I was unhappy with the kinds of data I had provided in my first annual report and wanted to develop a better plan for the following year. Neal Lerner's "Counting Beans and Making Them Count" from the *Writing Lab Newsletter* was one of the first articles I read, and one lesson I took from it was that others were in the same situation I was in. In fact, Lerner expressed precisely the same fear I had when I contemplated assessment: "What happens if we find we aren't making that much of a difference?" (1). Exactly. Anyone can count the number of individual sessions and workshops a center conducts in a year. If those numbers go down, we might assume there are problems we need to address, and if they go up, we might argue we must be doing well. Neither of those conclusions is necessarily logical or true, however, and I knew enough about the University's rubric for evaluating assessments to realize that simply counting contacts wouldn't mean much to the committee that rates assessment reports anyway. If our job in the writing center, in the oft-repeated words of Stephen North, is "to produce better writers, not better writing" (438), a directive that now might be seen as dated or overly simple, how could we prove in a year-end assessment report that we'd done that?

In his first "bean-counting" article, Lerner took an approach to answering that kind of question that somehow seemed obvious and innovative at the same time. He compared the first-semester writing course grades of students who visited the writing center with those who did not. In his study design, Lerner essentially borrowed from the sciences the control group vs. test group model, but he didn't use those terms exactly. Instead, he referred to writing center tutoring as an intervention, which would make the students who visited the writing center the intervention group and those who didn't the non-intervention group. He then broke these groups down into smaller sub-groupings according to their incoming SAT verbal scores. Writing center proponents might expect that if we look at a group of students at similar SAT verbal levels, those who come in for one-to-one tutoring in our centers would receive higher grades than those who don't. However, Lerner found that "most students' mean grades were quite similar whether or not they came to the Writing Center" (3). This result seems not only counterintuitive but potentially damaging to the reputation of writing center pedagogy, but Lerner also found that students at the lowest end of the SAT scale who visited the Writing Center did have higher grades in first-year composition than those who didn't. While Lerner's overall results were mixed, his study produced evidence that writing center tutoring is helpful for the very students who most need help. Writing centers proponents who work against the perception of writing centers as remedial might not always welcome these results, but in presenting his data, Lerner was doing what a scientist is trained to do: follow the evidence wherever it leads.

Lerner collected his data in an attempt to prove a simple hypothesis: Visiting the writing center leads to better grades in first-year composition. Reading Lerner's article—which argued in part for and in part against this hypothesis—was a "Eureka!" moment for me because it made me realize that what I had primarily worried about wasn't how to assess the work of the Writing Center but whether I really wanted to assess it or not. I could have thought of a number of appropriate research questions and relevant accompanying studies, but what if I didn't get the answers I was hoping for? Faced with this same dilemma, many writing center directors choose that approach I took in my first year: Instead of constructing rigorous assessments that look for more direct measures of student achievement, they track the number of one-to-one tutoring sessions and group workshops and collect answers to can't-miss survey questions like "On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your tutor's helpfulness?" I think these kinds of indirect measures are often used in our field for two reasons: Collecting this kind of information is easier than looking for "hard data" on writing center effectiveness, and such raw number counts can feel safer than looking for data on true effectiveness. Lerner had every reason to fear the same things I feared when I started coordinating the Coastal Carolina University Writing Center, but instead of hiding potentially negative data or going to extreme rhetorical lengths to explain that data away, he presented it with a kind of warts-and-all objectivity.

Lerner's approach to his subject—in the "Counting Beans" article and in all of his subsequent work—is not just grounded in the methods of scientific inquiry but adopts a scientific view of evidence as nei-

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

ther good nor bad, welcome nor unwelcome. Ideally, scientists use data they gather not just to answer questions but to develop follow-up questions and better ways of seeking answers to them. As the son of a mathematics Ph.D. who talked about little else other than quantitative methods and evidence-based reasoning at the dinner table, I was familiar and comfortable with the scientific model of investigation. In what may have been to some degree an unconscious act of adolescent rebellion, though, I went into a humanities field after both of my brothers got their degrees in computer science. I may have been the only one in my family who had read *Paradise Lost* or who regularly used terms like "discourse community," but because I came from a STEM household, I knew how and why to quantify, and I knew enough to realize that empirical and statistical methods could play a crucial role in designing a study and verifying the validity of any data gathered in that study.

Before beginning my second year as a writing center coordinator, I applied for and received an internal assessment grant to study writing center effectiveness. The protocols of the study I proposed called for the collection of pre-intervention and post-intervention versions of student papers. This pre- vs. post-intervention methodology is quite similar to the approach used by Luke Niiler in two studies published in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* in 2003 and 2005. If intervention (i.e., a one-to-one writing center tutorial) is effective, we would reasonably expect to find that rubric-based ratings of post-intervention revisions would be higher than ratings of pre-intervention drafts. I included measures to safeguard against bias—removing student and teacher names from drafts, not identifying drafts as pre- or post-intervention, using raters who did not work for the Writing Center, and ensuring that no rater read both the pre- and post-intervention version of the same paper. I also arranged for a professor with several years' worth of experience in holistic rating techniques to serve as a "table leader" and train other raters and conduct "norming sessions" that helped the panel of raters achieve consensus and consistency in their ratings. In an attempt to guarantee valid and reliable data, I also consulted with a statistics expert on campus, who gave advice both on study protocols and on the design of the spreadsheet into which that study data was entered.

In the first study I conducted, and in others that have followed, I have tried to adopt and embrace methods more common in natural and social science fields than in the humanities, and our assessments have been quite successful on the whole. Results have shown that tutoring in our center is effective in helping students improve as writers. In the first and second semesters of the pre- vs. post-intervention study, average ratings on post-intervention papers were consistently higher than ratings on pre-intervention papers. On a nine-point holistic scale, average ratings increased .55 points (from 3.70 to 4.25) in the first semester and .58 in the second semester (from 4.21 to 4.79). These results were confirmed to be statistically significant by the statistics expert who assisted with the study. (That is, the p-values for both semesters were below the .05 threshold for statistical significance—.034 in the first semester and .014 in the second.)

Similar to Lerner's mixed results, though, the data generated by our studies have not always been entirely positive. For example, an intervention vs. non-intervention study that compared rubric-based ratings on papers written by students who visited the Writing Center for assistance with papers from students who did not visit the Writing Center yielded virtually no difference between the two groups. In fact, the non-intervention group slightly out-performed the intervention group. On a three-point scale, ratings of non-intervention papers averaged 1.89 while papers from the intervention group averaged 1.88.

I have not been deterred by these kinds of unexpected or seemingly contradictory results., however; in fact just the opposite. In the social sciences, findings are often mixed and aren't interpreted by the stricter standards that are applied in the natural sciences. (That is, one contradictory result might invalidate or at least call into a question a hypothesis in the natural sciences, but in the social sciences, data are rarely 100% replicable or consistent.) Results from writing center studies can be skewed not only by potential biases (including rater bias and the self-selection bias inherent in visiting a writing center) but also by a variety of confounding outside factors that can be difficult or impossible to control for (factors like teacher-student interaction, student background, and at what point during the semester a study is performed). Thus, we should not be surprised when some of our assessments yield what appear

to be inconsistent and even contradictory results. In the conclusion section of his 2003 study report, Niiler remarked, "Far from deriving conclusive answers . . . my study actually created more questions than it resolved" (7). Writing center researchers who adopt quantitative methods must learn to accept partial answers and conflicting evidence from their studies and should view these kinds of results as Niiler does—opportunities to rethink and redesign their assessments. Of course, administrators who make budget and space decisions might tend to give more rewards for consistently positive results than for mixed data, so writing center directors would be wise to present any potentially negative data carefully. Still, we must recognize that the value of developing assessments that generate meaningful data for the writing center field at large outweighs the day-to-day concern in any individual writing center. No research is ever practiced in a completely politics-free or hierarchy-free vacuum, but the ultimate goal of any scientific study has to be a search for truth, not an argument for institutional commitment.

In the years since their studies were published, Lerner and Niiler have remained committed to quantitative methods and have continued to refine their questions and seek better answers. That is to say, they have responded to their results as good researchers should be expected to do. Luke Niiler and I have recently worked together on a lengthy article that reports on the data from a series of studies in my center and provides a thorough overview of the literature on quantitative measures of writing center effectiveness. Lerner, of course, has since published numerous articles and chapters on the subject of empirical methods in writing center research.

When Niiler and Lerner first published their work, they were rarities in the writing center field, but in 2015, they are far from alone. There have been a number of recent calls for quantitative research on and well-designed assessments of writing center effectiveness. Perhaps the most prominent and important of these has been Ellen Schendel and William Macauley's *Building Writing Center Assessments that Matter*, in which Macauley offers three crucial questions writing center researchers must ask before choosing to assess an outcome: 1. "Can it be measured or counted?" 2. "Can it be measured or counted consistently?" and 3. "Is it clearly a reflection of the value to which you have attached it?" (52).

The first two of Macauley's questions are fundamental to quantitative studies in any discipline and form the basis of scientific and empirical inquiry. If an outcome can't be counted and measured with consistency, it is probably not a researchable outcome. All forms of scientific investigation—both natural and social—proceed from this axiom, but consistency can be a difficult goal to reach in some fields. In our pre- vs. post-intervention studies, we sought to improve the consistency of ratings with extensive rater training, but of course we couldn't guarantee absolute uniformity in ratings. It is difficult to ensure that any outcome in a writing center assessment is always measured consistently, but we must do our best to work toward that kind of consistency.

I said above that reading Lerner's article was a "Eureka!" moment, but thinking about it now, I realize I could have just as easily called it a "duh" moment because that article was not really important for what I learned by reading it, but for what I realized I already knew: Assessments of writing center effectiveness must proceed according to well-established rules for investigating any phenomenon. We can't persuade "outsiders" to believe that writing centers do good work simply by relying on testimonials and anecdotes or on a numbers-served approach. We have to adopt the methods of science—supplemented by the narrative approaches we are so familiar and comfortable with—if we want to convince anyone but ourselves that writing centers are an integral and essential element of the educational services offered by the schools we work in.

Four years after reading Lerner's article and beginning a series of quantitative assessments, I would like to close with three pieces of advice for anyone considering an empirically-based study or studies. I have distilled these tenets not only through the experience of conducting a series of quantitative assessments, but after reading everything I can find on the subject of quantitative writing center studies. I would be more than happy if someone has a "duh" moment after reading the following:
• Embrace some core elements of scientific approach: Pick an observable, measurable outcome

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

and design a study that collects and quantifies these observations.

- Strongly consider consulting and working with outside experts as you design and implement your study. A statistician with experience working on educational research can be invaluable in this kind of project, as can an education professor who understands how to construct a good rubric, or, as in our case, a table leader with experience in training others to do holistic ratings.
- Prepare yourself for surprising and sometimes disappointing data and don't let the data—no matter what it says—deter you from reformulating your questions, rethinking your approach, and trying again because that's what scientists do.
- Don't assume that everyone on your campus shares your views about the value, methods, or goals of assessment. Learn how assessment is approached at your school and be prepared to explain how your assessments fit into that assessment framework and how your results will help your center contribute to the overall missions of your institution.

The writing center field is edging toward becoming the kind of discipline that does true social science research. If, when we conduct writing center quantitative research or assessment, we commit to Macauley's three questions and to the four principles I suggest above, our research and assessments will inevitably improve, and we will take an important step toward the kind of legitimacy we all crave. ✦

Works Cited

Lerner, Neal. "Counting Beans and Making Beans Count." *Writing Lab Newsletter.* 22.1 (1997): 1-3. Print.

Niiler, Luke. "The Numbers Speak: A Pre-test of Writing Center Outcomes Using Statistical Analysis." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 27.7: 6-9. Print.

-----. "The Numbers Speak Again: A Continued Statistical Analysis of Writing Center Outcomes." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 29.5: 13-15. Print.

North, Stephen. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *College English* 46.5 (1984): 433-446. Print.

Schendel, Ellen, and William J. Macauley. *Building Writing Center Assessments that Matter.* Boulder: U P of Colorado, 2012. Print.✦

REFLECTING ON LERNER'S BEAN COUNTING ARTICLES

✦ *Lauren Gregory*
Florida A&M University
Tallahassee, FL

Neal Lerner's articles on quantitative writing center research serve as good foundational pieces for those of us who are new to writing center administration and who are trying to get a grasp on the types of research we should conduct for both our institutions and the larger community of writing centers. Though there were already data-collection measures in place before I began working at my current center, Lerner's articles are a reminder that our staff must question (and tweak, if necessary) what we are measuring and how that information is disseminated. My writing center, in particular, is organizationally situated alongside other student retention efforts, and it is crucial for us to explore ways to present data to our university that most accurately represent how we aide in student success. It is also beneficial for new administrators to see the progression Lerner made between his early research and his follow-up article on the flaws of his initial study, reminding us all of the processes of planning, conducting, and reporting research. Our reflections on these articles are timely, too, with a recent issue of the *Writing Center Journal* and the 2015 IWCA Collaborative @ CCCC focused on quantitative research, particularly that which is replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD). This push for RAD research in writing center studies only adds to the depth of the individual writing center narratives that make up our community, and I think we need to continue looking for ways to share our research with those inside (and outside) our spaces. ✦

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tweet *WLN*? "Like" *WLN*?

If your writing center and/or tutors have Twitter accounts and/or Facebook pages, we invite you to "follow," "tweet," "like," and/or "post" on our Twitter account and Facebook wall. We invite you to post news of your writing center, photos, online resources, conference notices, other news you wish to share, and links other writing center folk would be interested in.

@WLNewsletter

Writing Lab Newsletter

✦ ✦ ✦

International Writing Center Blog

CONNECTING WRITING CENTERS ACROSS BORDERS

"Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders" is a blog intended for those of you in writing centers around the world to share blog entries, photos, questions, resources, and comments about topics relevant to your work. There is a link on the *WLN* home page, or connect directly to it at <writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/>.

Blog entries this semester have included a profile of the physical space at the Jackson State University writing center, a profile of Dr. Molly McHarg in Qatar, the IDC Herzliya Writing Center in Israel, tutors with international backgrounds, and more! Editor Josh Ambrose would love to hear from YOU—contact him via <JAmbrose@mcdaniel.edu>.

REFLECTION ON LERNER'S BEAN COUNTING

✦ *Frances Crawford*
University of Mary Hardin Baylor
Belton, TX

Neal Lerner's "Counting Beans and Making Beans Count" was the first article I read when I was researching assessment, and I continue to go back to it as I envision an assessment evolution. When he first published "Counting Beans," Lerner was making an effort to solve a dilemma that every writing center director faces at some point in the center's existence: prove the writing center is needed and useful. As a community, our standard fall back assessment model has been to conduct satisfaction surveys and keep headcounts. Counting beans and making beans count was a clear effort to stimulate an assessment evolution, moving writing center assessment from headcounts and surveys to meaningful institutional research. Interestingly, "Choosing Beans Wisely" is also very symbolic of our assessment evolution efforts. We get started and make some headway, but then we take two steps back.

Lerner's call "for us to be evaluated on our own terms, to lend our expertise to discussions of outcomes assessment, and to pursue our goal to make writing—and writing centers—central to improvement of teaching and learning" is timeless and still relevant today. We can and should use assessment to define what we are. I do not know one writing center director who wants to be identified as anything other than a professional, and it's time that we assess like we are. We need our organization's support and leadership to bring about this evolution—an advancement that includes certification and peer reviewed self-studies. ✦

NEAL LERNER RESPONDS

Let me start by thanking Muriel Harris for the opportunity to fire up the time machine and allow me a few moments to reflect on my 1997 *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, "Counting Beans and Making Beans Count," and what the last 18 years have meant to writing centers when it comes to assessing the impact we might have on students and on our campuses. It is extremely gratifying for me to know that "Beans" might have had some effect on the ways that writing center professionals have approached assessing the work of their writing centers.

In 1997, I was less than a year removed from completing a Doctorate in Education degree and was charged with creating a brand-new writing center at a college of pharmacy and health sciences. That first year, I had been hired part-time, initially a 50% appointment that I was able to expand to 75% by also teaching a section of first-year writing. I describe these circumstances to offer an idea of the exigency for my study: If I wanted that part-time employment to continue and perhaps even become a full-time job, I needed to show some measure of "success" for the writing center I had just recently created. I was very fortunate to have the support of my department chair, who helped me gather the data—first-year students' SAT scores and grades in first-year writing—that went into the initial "Beans" study. It did not occur to me at the time that such data is hard to gather or not readily made available by college and university registrars. In fact, I distinctly remember an e-mail conversation that Mickey and I had in which she expressed amazement that I did have easy access to such data! But, fortunate I was, even if it meant seeing that some of my colleagues gave all of their students A's without fail (a finding that my chair told me in no uncertain terms would not be released for public consumption).

Here's what I have learned in the last 18 years (Can it really be so long ago that I published this article? It was two children, three jobs, and many grey hairs ago!): My then-fortunate circumstances are altogether too rare for the many writing center directors who occupy tenuous positions at their schools, colleges, and universities. I applaud Scott Pleasant's thoughtful account of his coming-to-numbers experience, and certainly agree with his four tenets for embracing writing center assessment and quantitative approaches. But I also wonder how many writing center directors simply are not in positions to be able to do so. It is partially a matter of a lack of access, autonomy and authority. It is partially a matter

of lack of exigency (i.e., some writing centers have a comfortable niche and no need to assess—or so they hope). It is partially a matter of lack of specific skills to conduct evaluative work that will be valued by those holding and apportioning the beans. This dilemma is certainly frustrating for many of us, despite lots of fine guides for assessment work, such as Schendel and Macauley's *Building Writing Center Assessments that Matter.* The opportunity lost here is not merely assessment of our particular centers, but research on writing centers more generally, the essential knowledge we need to build an academic field.

I want to be hopeful, however. I want to believe that the next 18 years will see writing centers turn outward and connect to assessment efforts coming out of institutional research or from teaching and learning centers or other university partners. I hope for a future when writing centers directors will more clearly see themselves as part of larger conversations, such as those around the Association of American Colleges and Universities' High-Impact Practices and Essential Learning Outcomes. And, in turn, I hope for a time when our schools, colleges, and universities look to our writing centers as models for learning and teaching that are not merely assessed, but celebrated. ✦

Works Cited

Lerner, Neal. "Counting Beans and Making Beans Count." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 22.1 (1997): 1-3. Print.

Schendel, Ellen, and William J. Macauley. *Building Writing Center Assessments that Matter*. Boulder: U P of Colorado, 2012. Print.

✦

"JUST WRITE?"…NOT QUITE: WRITING "PROCEDURE" FOR STEM-FOCUSED DISSERTATION BOOT CAMPS

✦ *Brandy Blake, Joy Bracewell, and Clint Stivers*
Georgia Tech
Atlanta, GA

Like graduate students at other universities, many Georgia Tech students face numerous day-to-day challenges from grad school and life, making it difficult for them to finish their dissertations. In order to help our doctoral students make some headway toward that goal, the Communication Center, Tech's multimodal writing center, researched and piloted the school's first Dissertation Boot Camp (DBC). In implementing our own DBC, we found that the techniques that worked well at other research institutions did not necessarily translate to our context. Therefore, we argue that DBC leaders need to be sensitive to the context in which the DBC is created. Though we started with a process-based approach, we quickly modified it into a procedure-based approach, specifically focused for the largely STEM-oriented students at Georgia Tech. This procedure-based approach emphasizes goals, motivation, and wellness. To focus on a singular group of students with specific needs, Georgia Tech's Communication Center (Assistant Director and a Professional Tutor/Postdoctoral Tutoring Coordinator) collaborated with the Communication Specialist from the Stewart School of Industrial and Systems Engineering (ISyE) for the pilot DBC, which included nine ISyE students and one student from the School of Literature, Media, and Communication's Digital Media program. This group created a fairly realistic microcosm of the Georgia Tech Ph.D. population—mostly STEM fields with a few humanities students. The Assistant Director and Postdoctoral Coordinator of the Communication Center worked with the ISyE Communication Specialist to solicit advisor referrals for potential participants and to open the application process to all interested ISyE Ph.D. candidates. Students were chosen first based on their commitment to attend the Boot Camp and second on their preparedness to write for the entirety of the camp. Our Dissertation Boot Camp ran from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday–Friday. Each day, students wrote and edited for the bulk of that time, while also participating in workshops, goal-setting sessions, and stretch breaks.

CURRENT DBC SCHOLARSHIP

In our early efforts to establish a plan, we found current DBC scholarship focuses on the two models specified by Sohui Lee and Chris Golde in "Completing the Dissertation and Beyond: Writing Centers and Dissertation Boot Camps":

- The "Just Write" model: "the productivity-driven … model presumes that students will write productively, if they are given space, food, and monitored time. 'Just Write' DBCs sometimes include presentations on writer's block and 'stand-by' tutors, but extended writing support is not offered" (2).
- The "Writing Process" model: the model "introduce[s] students to the benefits of structured writing time, quiet space, and productivity logs. In addition, 'Writing Process' DBCs work under the assumption that students' writing productivity and motivation are significantly enhanced by consistent and on-going conversations about writing" (2). Such a model could include dissertation writing groups and frequent sessions with writing consultants.

With the "Just Write" and "Writing Process" models in mind, we began our first DBC experiment prepared to borrow from both. We wanted to find out how students responded to "monitored time" and how productive they might be. However, we wanted to focus on process: we planned workshops, discussed how to emphasize long-term changes to the writing process, outlined numerous conversations about writing, and explored the benefits of dissertation writing groups. Excited by Lee and Golde's descriptions of "Writing Process" Boot Camps, we aspired to follow this model. Like them, we too held the belief that "DBCs should offer more [than 'Just Write' Boot Camps] because the primary mission of most writing centers is to cultivate writing awareness with a focus on long-term writing success. DBCs can help graduate students reflect on their own writing even as they rush to finish their theses" (4). Because our interests overlap with Lee and Golde and because of our need for a foundation from which to begin, we followed their model for boot camps.

EXISTING APPROACHES AND OUR CONTEXT

Once our DBC began and we had interacted with our students, we realized the "Writing Process" model did not fit our program needs or work efficiently for our students. Because we recognized the value in Lee and Golde's "Writing Process" model, we wanted to encourage "long-term changes in writing process behavior," as Steve Simpson suggests in "Building for Sustainability: Dissertation Boot Camp as a Nexus of Graduate Writing Support" (2). However, after examining the challenges faced by our staff and students, we decided to take a goal-oriented approach to DBCs that would nonetheless allow us to emphasize aspects of Lee and Golde's model.

We quickly realized our greatest challenges originated in the perceptions and (particularly) the training of the students themselves. While students with undergraduate majors in the humanities likely have enough experience writing to understand the basic need for process, STEM Ph.D. students may come from programs that do little-to-no writing after fulfilling undergraduate writing requirements. These students often have misperceptions about writing, misunderstanding its value, dismissing process and audience, and seeing writing centers as fix-it shops. The divide in expectations between STEM and humanities students likely derives from differences in how writing is treated in major classes, the perception of its purpose, and the regularity of its use in assignments. Many STEM graduate students experience high-level writing problems, but because they are so specialized in their fields and because many have years of distance between their current work and their last writing-intensive course, they resist some tutoring methods humanities students often readily embrace. Thus, STEM graduate students do not inherently value conversation and discussion as a way to work through writing processes, and we found many "Writing Process" DBC methods (one-to-one consultations, writing groups, etc.) a hard sell.

Not surprisingly, our first DBC problem was our mandatory consultation requirement. Like Lee, Golde, and Simpson, we did not want our DBC to perpetuate the "fix-it" stereotype, but the consultations we offered either frustrated our students (and tutors) or perpetuated the stereotype. One-to-one consulta-

tions were largely unwanted by the "Just Write" students who wanted to focus and write without inter-ruption, not engage in one-to-one consultations. Additionally, the content of STEM dissertations can often confound tutors with humanities backgrounds. STEM dissertations, featuring formulas, special-ized vocabulary, tables, and other conventions unfamiliar to many tutors, will inevitably take time for the tutor to work through. We realized that mandatory one-to-one sessions could be dominated by the time required for reading alone—not helpful for anxious Ph.D. students wanting to make progress during the DBC. Tutors could read the work beforehand, but that strategy negates the ability to converse about the work during the initial reading and could cause the tutor to dominate and point out "problems" that he/she recognizes, which reinforces the writing center fix-it shop stereotype—even if the "fixes" focused on higher order concerns. So we switched to offering one-to-one sessions on a volunteer basis and instead focused on process during workshops and beginning/end-of-day writing discussions.

OUR APPROACH

Similar to Elizabeth Powers' description in "Dissercamp: Dissertation Boot Camp 'Lite,'" our DBC showed both that students needed "an environment that facilitated productivity" (14) and that writing consultations and discussions of writing groups elicited lukewarm responses. Our graduate students want to finish, often have plans on how to finish, but are interrupted by life. Teaching assistantships, extra research work piled on them by professors, housework, the demands of children or other de-pendents, and more responsibilities constantly get in the way, and finding time to write becomes a serious issue. So once we began our DBC, we came to recognize that our primary goal needed to be helping students who have been interrupted by the life circumstances surrounding grad school to make significant progress on their dissertations. Our secondary goals became helping them improve long-term perceptions of writing, of writing assistance, and of places that support these endeavors—writing centers. Additionally, because many STEM students misunderstand or do not see the immediate value of "Writing Process"-oriented concepts, we wanted to change their perceptions. Rather than immediately fighting their assumptions about writing and writing centers, we did not pressure our DBC participants into consultations or writing groups. Like Powers, we realized we "could best serve the group by provid-ing time and space for dissertators to shape and embody practices they could carry through the entire dissertation writing process" (14).

Thus, having noted challenges our staff and students faced, we committed to a Goal-Oriented DBC, tak-ing a middle ground between the "Writing Process" and "Just Write" models. We focused on process as procedure—a simple change in vocabulary that our procedure-oriented STEM students could relate to—and followed a procedure that emphasized goal-setting, motivation, and wellness. Our DBC, as Lee and Golde suggest, "cultivate[s] writing awareness with a focus on long-term writing success" (4), and we emphasize writing management strategies: changing behavior throughout the writing process in order to alter perceptions of writing and writing success. To address writing praxis within specific frameworks related to students' aims, we modeled positive writing strategies through the structure of the daily "work" routine and incorporated ways for students to discuss, hear about, and reflect on time management techniques and goal-setting. Throughout the week, we formally and informally discussed writing techniques with students. We tried to shape the writing process and production into procedures STEM students could better relate to. Our approach was, at least superficially, very formulaic. We used analogies to the scientific method and formulas as a way to show how the writing process could work, mirroring habits of thought and orientations familiar to our students. Consonant with our shift towards goal-setting, one of the most sustained discussions devoted to writing focused on apps, advice, and techniques for regularizing writing habits. We workshopped time management methods, including tools that freeze social media and the internet (e.g. Freedom, Self-control, Anti-social) and techniques for reorganizing the desktop to reduce "cluttered" thinking (e.g. Spaces). This discussion brought atten-tion to the benefits of focused writing as a way to produce material that can later be revised.

We also emphasized the importance of regular breaks to our highly driven, goal-oriented students, an idea Phyllis Korkki explains in this way:

> Mental concentration is similar to a muscle…. It becomes fatigued after sustained use and needs

a rest period before it can recover, he explains—much as a weight lifter needs rest before doing a second round of repetitions at the gym.

Consequently, we shared anecdotes within our own experience, including narratives of productivity from accomplished writers who took time to step away from their computers. Our Postdoc Coordinator shared his dissertation writing struggles, explaining that he'd sit at his computer 10 hours a day—making little progress—believing that if he did anything besides work on his dissertation, he would not finish on time. But a member of his committee learned of this mental block and insisted he take writing breaks to hang out with friends, watch a movie, whatever. His advisor explained that breaks can recharge the brain and that mental progress is made during writing breaks. Once he began taking breaks, he began making more effective progress. To practice these anecdotal suggestions, we modeled regular breaks throughout the program and highlighted alternatives such as the Time Out app to force students to take breaks so their writing routines would be structured and also manageable. Time Out alerts readers after a certain period of time, sometimes forcing a "micro-break" by dimming the screen. Other applications use alarm noise and visual effects to encourage users to change their focus, as with techniques that divide work into 25-minute chunks and enforce a short break between those chunks. Such applications increase focus, help users divide large tasks into manageable pieces, and emphasize the importance of breaks.

Our daily schedule included time for physical activity and interaction: we took two 10-minute stretch breaks, and at lunch students had to leave their work and the scene of writing. We used YouTube clips to both allow students a mental refresher and show them ways they could find limited "escape time," i.e., "a two-video break." We hoped students would realize that occasionally getting away from the computer can actually increase productivity. We also made changing students' ways of thinking about writing part of our goal-setting. We surmised that heuristics measuring students' progress would fit in with their approach and mindset, and our feedback affirmed that conjecture. While time management, productivity strategies, and forced breaks might allow students to take control of their writing sessions rather than letting the sessions get out of control (leading to procrastination or intimidation), we found that one strategy, specifying and tracking goals, had an immediate effect on the students' general attitudes. This strategy was S.M.A.R.T. rules for goal-setting, a concept attributed to George Doran, identifies five key rules:

- Specific • Measurable • Achievable • Relevant •Time-bound

We correctly predicted the specificity of the ruleset would appeal to STEM students. We gave students a worksheet at the beginning of the week so they could develop long-term writing goals related to their dissertations. We then workshopped S.M.A.R.T. goal concepts with them, allowing them time to revise those goals. Following this revision and at the beginning of every DBC day, the students listed their short-term goals—what they actually wanted to accomplish that day. At the end of each day, we discussed their goals, whether they had fulfilled any or all of them, and how they might revise their goal-setting methods the next day. On day one, students vastly overestimated (or underestimated) their writing abilities. Following that day, they became more specific about goals, began to understand how empowering goal-making can actually be, were better able to prioritize and, at the end of the day, could celebrate their successes. When they didn't accomplish something, they were inclined to examine why rather than just berate themselves or dismiss the lapse without making any changes to their process. The clear and easy to follow SMART rules give students prescribed boundaries. By taking control of their writing, our students seemed energized, enthusiastic, and extremely motivated. At the end of the week, we could barely get them to go home.

Besides the students' enthusiasm, student, faculty, and institute response to the program was quite positive. Because the DBC was a pilot project, we could only measure our success in limited ways. We received unsolicited requests for additional DBCs from graduate students in ISyE and other disciplines. The ISyE faculty accepted the DBC as a much-needed graduate student resource and pledged funding for future DBCs. Additionally, we advertised the program's goals to STEM faculty outside of ISyE, who

expressed genuine interest in our methods. Finally, the Graduate School Director hopes to contribute funding and space to further the program's development. Now that we have facilitated a DBC and have a general idea of what worked, what did not work, and what we can accomplish in a week, we plan to hold future DBCs, during which we will specifically examine the following:

1. Does altering the vocabulary of writing (from process to procedure) also alter perceptions about writing held by our participating STEM students?
2. What goal-setting, time management, wellness, and reflection strategies do students use in their writing procedure before the DBC?
3. How do students' perceptions of these strategies change by the end of the DBC?
4. Do students propose to implement these strategies after the DBC?
5. Do students' ability to specify and develop attainable goals grow during the DBC week?

In future DBCs, we plan to conduct short-term studies that examine documents used by students throughout the week to self-report on participation, goals, and progress, which will allow us to better evaluate the success of our DBC methods.

We plan to follow a similar process in our next DBC, although this time emphasizing our focus on goal-setting, motivation, and wellness from recruitment to conclusion. We will incorporate more structured break and exercise time, discuss techniques for regulating writing habits earlier, and encourage students to try different apps or time management techniques throughout the week. We will still offer writing consultations and, at the end of the week, discuss the option of dissertation writing groups after we have "buy-in" from the group and can promote these concepts and their benefits more successfully. With this plan of action, we can more methodically determine the benefits of our approach.

Based on our pilot DBC experience and the enthusiasm of its participants, we have concluded that, while process-based writing is conventional and comfortable to those in humanities-related fields, this approach was less familiar to many of the STEM-oriented Georgia Tech graduate students. However, our students responded well to our modified procedure-based approach to writing, an approach focusing on goals, motivation, and wellness. We eschewed vocabulary that would confuse and disorient students, instead focusing on actions that would replicate the process-oriented goals that produce good writing. We accommodated the students by recognizing their needs and aims for participating in a week-long commitment to writing. Although productivity-based DBCs based on the "Just Write" model have been interpreted as sidelining the importance of writing process, they can emphasize changes in writing behavior that lead to a more process-based approach to writing. Such DBCs can provide administrators and writing center personnel a method by which to tailor the practices of their programs to the competencies and experiences of their participants. As we progress forward with our DBCs, we plan to continue adapting according to our students' needs and looking to continue a balance between "Process," "Procedure," and "Just Write" methodologies that can best help them while also changing their behaviors and attitudes toward writing. ✦

Works Cited

Doran, George. T. "There's a S.M.A.R.T. Way to Write Management's Goals and Objectives." *Management Review* 70 (11): 35–36. Nov. 1981. Print.

Korkki, Phyllis. "To Stay on Schedule, Take a Break." *New York Times.* New York Times Company, 16 June 2012. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.

Lee, Sohui, and Chris Golde. "Completing the Dissertation and Beyond: Writing Centers and Dissertation Boot Camps." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 37.7-8 (2013): 1-5. Print.

Simpson, Steve. "Building for Sustainability: Dissertation Boot Camp as a Nexus of Graduate Writing Support." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 10.2 (2013): 1-9. Web. 17 Feb. 2015.

Powers, Elizabeth. "Dissercamp: Dissertation Boot Camp 'Lite.'" *Writing Lab Newsletter* 38.5-6 (2014): 14-15. Print.

✦

TUTOR'S COLUMN

TRANSLATE–COMMUNICATE–NAVIGATE: AN EXAMPLE OF THE GENERALIST TUTOR

✦*Dory Hammersley and Heath Shepard*
Boise State University
Boise, ID

Writing center consultants are typically trained to work with a diverse group of students on a variety of writing projects from many disciplines. As many universities (like ours) are adding Writing Across the Curriculum requirements to existing courses, we've seen an increase in students bringing in writing from majors we know very little about. As centers search for solutions to these changes, the debate over generalist and specialist tutoring rages. Sometimes papers—from physics to chemistry to engineering to business classes—seem like they are in a different language, and in these instances it is helpful to know the subject matter. However, it is not always necessary. As consultants who have experience working with students writing papers in these disciplines, we propose a way of looking at generalist tutoring that can be very helpful in working with writers from these various disciplines. As a case study, we will use a consultation that one of us, Dory, had with the other, Heath.

Dory was taking an upper-division French literature class and was working on a literary analysis. She considered whether she should bring her latest paper into the Writing Center since she often had trouble with these papers. She was confident writing in English, but when she transferred her thoughts into French, her writing lost much of its finesse. Dory had been making slow progress as she experimented, but was disheartened by consistently low grades on her papers. She found herself in the unfamiliar situation of disliking writing and stopped putting much work into it. Her writing began to have issues not just at the sentence level, but also in its content. She shared her frustration with our Assistant Director, Melissa Keith, who encouraged her to bring her next assignment in to the Writing Center to brainstorm. Dory thought it might be too much of an obstacle because the text she was analyzing, the paper she would be writing, and even the assignment sheet were in French, but eventually pragmatism won out. She made an appointment with Heath, willing to try despite her reservations about language.

This consultation is an example that can open the door to understanding how diverse our skills as generalist tutors can be. In her article "A Tutor Needs to Know the Subject Matter to Help a Student with a Paper: __Agree __Disagree __Not Sure," Susan Hubbuch says, "the ignorant [generalist] tutor, by virtue of her ignorance, is just as likely—perhaps even more likely—than the expert to help the student recognize what must be stated in the text" (28). Rather than preventing us from helping a student writing in an unfamiliar subject, our "ignorant tutor," generalist approach is effective and valuable. As generalist tutors, we bring our knowledge of writing to the consultation while the writer brings his knowledge of the subject matter. In most cases, this combination gives us everything we need for a successful consultation.

Sitting down to talk, neither Heath nor Dory knew exactly how the consultation was going to proceed, but we started like we typically start any consultation. Heath asked questions about the assignment, and we discussed different approaches to the paper. Our training emphasizes the non-directive approach, which worked especially well in this situation where the content was unfamiliar. Dory acted as a translator of her own ideas and of the rhetorical strategies needed in her subject area. This fits into what Jeff Brooks tells us in "Minimalist Tutoring," that "the student, not the tutor, should 'own' the paper and take full responsibility for it" (83). In our consultation, Dory was literally translating for Heath, but this mindset can apply even in consultations that occur exclusively in English. When relying on writers to translate subject matter that is unfamiliar to us, we help them to better understand and write in their own field of study.

In this consultation, Dory worked as the translator to communicate not only the information in French, but also her own ideas to Heath. Dory explained that the text she was analyzing, a letter in an epistolary novel called *Lettres Persanes,* was sarcastic, and from there we were able to brainstorm a thesis. She came up with the ideas: Heath was simply the guide to help her get everything out of her head and onto the paper, all without speaking a word of French. For a better idea of how this worked, here are some illuminating moments from the consultation:

- Dory had a particular letter from the book picked out to analyze, and Heath asked her why she had chosen it. She said that there was a difference in tone from the rest of the book that was interesting. This section had also sparked a debate in class, and she was still trying to pinpoint what she thought about it. She had decided to focus on this letter in order to work through her own ideas and come to a conclusion.

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

- Heath asked what parts were the most interesting, so Dory pulled out the book, held it between them on the table, and started pointing out and translating quotations and explaining how they related to her ideas. She marked them in the book for later reference.

- Heath requested background information, and Dory explained the plot and cultural and historical elements that were important to understanding this passage, solidifying them in her own mind.

- Dory eventually felt comfortable enough to generate a thesis in English. She translated it into French later when she wrote her paper.
These snapshots show how Heath was able to facilitate a consultation in a subject he would not be able to work in without Dory as a translator. In any appointment, consultants often have to rely on the knowledge of the writer in order to have a successful consultation. We fall back on a minimalist approach, asking questions like these:

"I'm having trouble understanding this concept. Could you explain it to me?"

"Is this word one that someone in your field would immediately understand, or do you think it needs more explanation?"

These types of questions rely on the writer's knowledge and empower her to bring her own content-area expertise into the consultation, as well as help her become more aware of the conventions of writing in her own field of study. These are exactly the kinds of questions Heath asked during this consultation. Though this particular paper was a literary analysis, a genre the consultants in our English-major-dominated writing center are comfortable with, the language issue made the subject matter quite foreign. Dory, with her knowledge of French, knew that the ways ideas are expressed in that language are different, and had to allow for that. Heath relied on Dory as a translator, and the conversations went like this:

Heath: "You were talking about the tone of this letter being different than the others in this book. What made you think that?"

Dory: "Well, right here Rica sounds really sarcastic, talking about his own culture as 'simple' and 'naïve.' In the other letters, he isn't as caustic."

This consultation allowed Dory to develop her thoughts as she figured out how to explain them clearly to Heath. After her appointment with Heath, Dory went home actually feeling excited to write, put a good amount of work into the paper, and got it back a week later with an A-. Dory proudly showed Heath and Melissa her paper, with her professor's big "Bien!" scrawled next to the thesis statement, and we exchanged high-fives.

Every day, consultants meet with students who range from ELL to graduate-level. The writing is different not only due to the writer's abilities, but also due to the range of disciplines that come in to seek our help. The thought of separate training for each of these scenarios is not only daunting, it is unrealistic for most writing centers. Consultants who listen and ask the right questions, no matter what the content, have the ability to navigate these diverse situations by focusing on the writing process through conversations with the writer. Both participants—consultant and writer—bring their own knowledge to the table in a collaboration. If the consultant thinks of the writer as the translator of his or her own ideas from thought form to written form, the writer is empowered and the consultant has the proper non-directive, guiding role. ✦

Works Cited

Brooks, Jeff. "Minimalist Tutoring: Making Students Do All the Work." *The St. Martins Sourcebook for Writing Tutors.* Ed. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood. New York: St. Martin's, 1995. 83-87. Print.

Hubbuch, Susan. "A Tutor Needs to Know the Subject Matter to Help a Student with a Paper:__Agree __Disagree __Not Sure." *Writing Center Journal* 8.2 (1988): 23-30. Print.

✦

THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER IS ABOUT TO CHANGE NAMES!

WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship: Volume 40 | Sept. 2015

CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

May 29, 2015: Canadian Writing Centres Association, in Ottawa, ON, Canada
Contact: <Lucie Moussu: moussu@ualberta.ca>; Conference website: <cwcaaccr.wordpress.com/2015-conference-university-of-ottawa/>.

June 1, 2015: Montana Writing/Tutoring Center Conference, in Bozeman, MT
Contact: <kelly.webster@umontana.edu>; <406-243-2470>.

October 8-10, 2015: International Writing Centers Association, in Pittsburgh, PA
Contact: Russell Carpenter: <russell.carpenter@eku.edu>; Conference website: <writingcenters.org/events-2/past-conferences/iwca-2015-writing-center-revolutions>.

October 23-24, 2015: Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association, in Spokane, WA
Contact: Jared Anthony: <Jared.Anthony@sfcc.spokane.edu>; Conference website: <www.pnwca.org/2015-Conference-CFP>.

October 28-29, 2015: Latin American Writing Centers Association, in Bogota, Colombia
Contact: Conference website: <http://programadeescritura.uniandes.edu.co/index.php/congreso-latinoamericano-de-centros-y-programas-de-escritura>.

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

Contact: E-mail: <ncptw2015@gmail.com>; Conference website: <ncptw2015.org>.

February 18-20, 2015: Southeastern Writing Center Assocation, in Columbus, GA
Contact: Eliot Rendleman: <rendleman_eliot@columbusstate.edu; Conference website: <www.iwca-swca.org/2016-Conference-CFP.html>.

March 3-5, 2016: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Cedar Rapids, IA
Contact: Laura Farmer: <lfarmer@cornellcollege.edu>, <319-895-4509>; Conference website: <www.midwestwritingcenters.org>.