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Review: *Re/Writing the Center: Approaches to Supporting Graduate Students in the Writing Center*

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Re/Writing the Center: Approaches to Supporting Graduate Students in the Writing Center, edited by Susan Lawrence and Terry Myers Zawacki. Utah State UP, 2019. $34.95.


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Readers of Susan Lawrence and Terry Myers Zawacki's *Re/Writing the Center: Approaches to Supporting Graduate Students in the Writing Center* will encounter a collection of essays engaged with the contemporary development of graduate writing centers. Balancing theory and practice with a mix of research-driven and narrative styles, the authors articulate and grapple with the field's most pressing issues. Paula Gillespie's prologue sets the stage with the exhortation that today's writing centers must do more for their graduate students than simply include them in the undergrad peer tutoring model. Subsequently, contributors unpack the ways in which graduate-level peer tutoring exists as a fundamentally different enterprise than undergraduate peer tutoring. While the assertion of difference is not revolutionary in itself, only recently have these differences come to the surface in our conferences with some rigor. As a result, this particular volume feels very much needed *right now* owing to its sustained, intensive, research-based exploration of these themes by many of the leading thinkers in our field (Michael Pemberton, Gillespie, Steve Simpson, Michelle Cox, Joanna Wolfe, Sherry Wynn Perdue, etc.). There are still too few book-length resources specifically for graduate writing centers. Steve Simpson et al.'s *Supporting Graduate Student Writers* comes to mind, but Lawrence and Zawacki's collection focuses solely on the graduate writing center, whereas Simpson, et al. reach across the university, making these two books well-suited companions.

Lawrence and Zawacki's Introduction does the expected work of explaining how the collection comes together, presenting in plain terms a question for its audience: how is our field going to deal with the more individualized nature of graduate education, especially as it varies so widely with each institution, faculty, genre, and a

student's own language use? Providing important interpretive moments, the editors probe the relationships between the essays, which of course is valuable in a collection where there is no single authorial voice to unify the threads. The introduction teaches us how to use the book, building excitement and anticipation for what is to come without spoiling the articles. Three themed sections follow the introduction: 1) investigates assumptions and preconceived notions about graduate writing; 2) examines the unique practice and pedagogy of graduate tutoring; and 3) offers practical ideas for expanding the role of the writing center.

The editors position Part I, "Revising Our Core Assumptions," as work intended to "situate support for graduate writers within much rehearsed writing center arguments for effective pedagogies and practices for what has traditionally been undergraduate clientele" (17). Appropriately, Pemberton begins the discussion with an essay that updates the conclusions of his 1995 article, "Rethinking the WAC/Writing Center/Graduate Student Connection." Pemberton points out that graduate students are expected to write like experts in their home discipline, whereas undergraduates are not. In general, the essay sets a good foundation for the collection, helping readers to carefully consider the fundamental differences between graduate and undergraduate writing needs in the context of the writing center. Pemberton creates a sense of urgency by demonstrating that we are facing a difficult issue in supporting graduate writers, and his work is followed nicely by Sarah Summers who provides historical context for the field, preparing readers to more carefully consider the specific disciplinary support structures that follow.

While these initial essays connect to the theme of peerness through the lens of disciplinarity, the next two broaden to explore how linguistic diversity complicates our notions of expertise. Subsequently, Joan Turner discusses demand for proofreading services among multilingual graduate students in the U.K. Rather subtly, her work addresses a challenge for those designing services to meet the specific needs of grads. Namely, who negotiates the shape of those needs? The students themselves, the faculty, the administration, or the writing center? Conflicting missions here can create a tension that can quickly place the writing center in a "third space" of opposition to other voices clamoring for a service—whether that is the demand to meet the perceived need for a single linguistic standard of excellence or some other form of outsourced support. Steve Simpson in his essay shows how the history of these conversations about correctness have led many schools to combine services for L1 and L2 students in order to focus on a

shared need as opposed to points of difference. However, even as he notes his support for combined services, he also cautions us not to overlook difference but to carefully consider how the combined service model shapes the training and support structures of the writing center. Specifically, he speaks to the issue of proofreading, suggesting that this tension can be mitigated if the writing center avoids positioning itself solely around thesis and dissertation support for grads by "talk[ing] to multilingual students and advisors about the writing center being a useful resource" throughout the degree program (79). Simpson also advocates for partnerships with advising and grad faculty as a means to shift campus thinking away from the idea of the center as simply a place to outsource support. Of course, these can easily turn into difficult conversations if they become battlegrounds over who gets to determine what's best for the students.

Given that I do a lot of work with graduate tutor education and tutor graduate students as well, any book that claims graduate tutoring is different than undergraduate tutoring has to bring these specific differences to light in a practical way in order for me to feel that it is worth my investment in time and energy. I found this concern addressed in "Part II: Reshaping our Pedagogies and Practices." In particular, my interest began to peak with Michelle Cox's essay, a critical examination of assumptions about higher-order and lower-order concerns (HOCs and LOCs) that explains how word choice and other lower-order concerns in graduate writing may actually be the key to unlocking the complex understanding that produces logical organization and critical argument. Cox focuses on preparing graduate tutors to work with multilingual writers. She details an approach rooted in noticing the concepts of hypotheses and output hypotheses that emphasizes careful attention to language forms. While her focus is providing support for multilingual writers, she also realizes the applicability of this method for all graduate writers to the extent that disciplinary discourse may have some of the same characteristics of a non-native language. Cox suggests that when academic or specialized language impedes the clear flow of thoughts, tutors can use the move of 'noticing' language at the line level to help writers clarify larger ideas. This raises critical questions about the applicability of the old saw that higher order concerns must be addressed before lower order concerns. Since the article emphasizes training protocols and education for tutors, there is substantial space dedicated to the challenge of teaching tutors to work productively with line-level language.

Reading Cox's work, I was immersed in interesting new ideas with a critically engaged author directly working to figure out how

graduate tutoring is different from undergraduate tutoring. In fact, the entire pedagogy and practice section sustained this feeling, and I think the book would be a worthwhile purchase for this section alone. The highlight, for me, was Elena Kallestinova's essay, which sets a standard for research-based articles in writing center studies. At first, I thought the article was going to explain how to encourage graduate writers to pre-read, but the pre-reading here is for the tutor—as in "email us your paper ahead of time." Prereading is something many grad tutors ask for. And staunchly, we have long pushed back on this request because it seems to encourage a view of the center as a fix-it shop. In the early days of online tutoring, asynchronous models worked with this notion, and many of us found that it was very difficult to start a conversation with a grad student asynchronously or to do the kind of HOCs and LOCs work that Cox talks about with multilingual students. But Kallestinova makes a convincing case with a substantial, multi-year, mixed methods RAD study. The bulk of the essay is spent, as we would expect scientific essays to be spent, interpreting the data collected during the study, not simply theorizing a problem. This is the kind of work that writing center studies has turned toward, led by Dana Driscoll and Sherry Wynn Perdue, and Kallestinova's article here is a realization of that shift.

Spending time with this collection rewards a reader because the articles play off one another well. There are a variety of styles and approaches, but many of the ideas are thematically consistent, leading to an interplay of perspectives. For example, Patrick S. Lawrence et al. propose a new practice: expanded intake consultations for grad students. The authors explore required, extended in-take interviews as a way to set graduate student expectations and tackle the disciplinarity issue. The in-take interview is an interesting practice to consider, and it might help centers achieve more buy-in from dissertators who need a longer-term relationship with the writing center. The in-take interview also gives staff an opportunity to explain writing center pedagogy to new grad students and clear up notions of tutors as editors or writing centers as fix-it shops—assumptions that now seem more prevalent in grad students than they do with undergrads—and as a result this practice might pair quite well with Kallestinova's idea of pre-reading. Lawrence et al. work with a very limited sample—a small school with a center that emphasizes serving dissertators—but they offer an essay of ideas. They could end up being far afield or their practices could one day become commonplace; we don't know yet. In this case, the authors are still generating ideas and pushing them forward, trying to get to the point where we can study them more rigorously. In that sense, the book offers a number of

different kinds of reading experiences.

Along these lines, I also appreciated the fact that STEM writing—often a mystery to humanities-based writing center staff—takes the focus of two pieces, one by Juliann Reineke et al. and the other by Simpson. Reineke et al. look at how tutors with a humanities background can help STEM writers, harkening back to Heather Blaine Voorhies in that they are teaching tutors to analyze genre in order to raise the formal awareness of the writer and the tutor. While the authors don't detail a replicable and data-driven experiment, they do invest a lot of energy in providing a detailed outline of their methods and curriculum for preparing tutors to work. They also give many examples of what it could look like in practice. So as with Lawrence et al., we see another opportunity for more systematic study.

The collection also takes up the banner of the lonely dissertator and offers several pieces on dissertation support. Part III, "Expanding the Center," features articles that generally discuss supporting graduate theses and dissertations and creating external partnerships to help meet this challenge. Here, Laura Brady et al. share the history of their center as a model for thinking about using WAC/WID partnerships to improve support for advanced graduate writing. While their campus is a WAC campus, they detail a lengthy WID survey/outreach process that the writing center conducted with departments, faculty, and graduate students to assess and meet the need for support. The WID partnerships aim to bridge the gap between faculty and tutors, and in that area they introduce the idea of "discipline and assignment-specific tutoring tools" (DATTs). These DATTs are printed materials "collaboratively used by tutors and disciplinary faculty" in order to make it easier for writers to break down "the task and the strategies used to negotiate the actual writing of the assignment" (Dinitz and Harrington as qtd in Brady et al. 193). While the article provided a list of readings for tutors, it would have been helpful to include some examples of these DATTs as they pertain to dissertation and thesis support. Of course, the work in developing these resources relies on faculty collaboration with the writing center, but if successful, this type of partnership could provide a very tangible and powerful example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts when it comes to graduate writing support.

Other essays in Part III wrestle with the question of how to present writing to grads as a process, and not a product of their professional identity, the culmination of which is the dissertation. Marilyn Gray asks programs to consider student well-being and professional development in graduate writing assignments. She points out that

a great deal of graduate writing happens outside the structure of a class: fellowship essays, conference papers, presentations, personal statements, articles for publication and the like–all are essential writings that enhance professional identity and feed the dissertation. This seems to be a sensible and foundational way of thinking about dissertations; rather than placing them in some far-away, isolated world reserved for boot camps, Gray urges writing centers to show grads how lower-stakes writing creates identity. Elizabeth Lenaghan builds on this concept. Her article positions writing as a process of discovering one's professional identity. Lenaghan argues that framing the issue of graduate writing support in terms of retention and completion pushes our response toward a view of writing as product. Instead, Lenaghan wants to pull the writing center back to the benefits of a process-oriented approach and offers a fellows program as a model of peer engagement, promoting more mentorship among grads. Both of these articles extend Mary Jane Curry's work, "More Than Language: Graduate Student Writing as 'Disciplinary Becoming'" in *Supporting Graduate Student Writers*.

On the whole, *Re/Writing the Center* offers both clear and compelling problem definitions, a healthy amount of RAD research, and a look at some innovative approaches to existing issues of graduate writing support. This collection proceeds from the notion that graduate writing centers must start with the body of knowledge acquired from the undergraduate center and modify it, re-write it. That is one view. On the other hand, if you see graduate writing support as substantially different from undergraduate support—a claim made by many—then it might also make sense to start talking about the graduate writing support as its own separate field as opposed to an offshoot of undergraduate peer tutoring.

Of course, I understand that people respond well to the notion of "re-writing" or "re-thinking." But I come back to Pemberton, who states "the crux of the problem" for both graduate students and writing centers is that despite a clear need for grad-level writing assistance, most writing centers "are not structured or staffed in ways that will allow them to provide discipline-specific writing assistance relevant to advanced graduate students in a wide variety of professional discourse communities" (34). In a way, this is a troubling observation that couples with Pemberton's sense that "specific answers will always depend on local circumstances and contexts"; and further, that "[l]ocations, funding, institutional histories, and perceived needs vary widely and resist any one-recommendation-fits-all-answer" (36). Now, you might argue that Pemberton is only talking about centers staffed by undergraduate tutors, but I think what he

has to say applies to graduate writing centers staffed by graduate tutors as well. We have seen other researchers say as much in this very collection. Brady et al. offer a center narrative that illustrates both direct acceptance of these challenges and a way of meeting them head on. From my perspective, I have read enough recent literature to at least consider the possibility that the problem of graduate writing support not only is different from undergraduate peer tutoring, but graduate writers may also require more than just the writing center, stand alone or not. Perhaps supporting graduate writers requires other offices on the university campus working in concert with the writing center to do the job adequately. In this collection in particular, we hear Gillespie and Pemberton advocate for partnerships with others outside the writing center and across campus, just as many of the articles incorporate avenues of partnership into their own unique and original solutions for the problems of graduate writing support presented by their own institutional contexts. Placing this collection within view of other recent scholarship then, I think graduate writing support has started to cut ties with the undergraduate writing center. That gives the work a sense of urgency. We have a problem and a purpose that is all our own. If best practices in the graduate writing center are different (more diverse and more varied than our undergraduate centers) and collaboration is the way we deal with that difference, then perhaps we need to explore and study these partnerships more. This collection is certainly a first step in that direction.

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