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Writing Center Outreach: What it is and Why it Matters

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Writing Center Outreach: What it is and Why it Matters

By Christine B. Ghattas

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Writing in the Department of English
in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, Georgia

2010

College of Humanities & Social Sciences

Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, Georgia

Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

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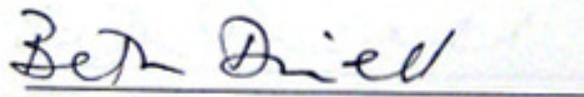
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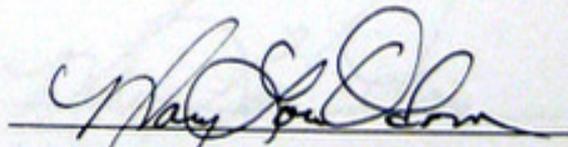
Professional Writing in the Department of English

At the May 2010 graduation.

Capstone committee:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Beth Daniell", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Beth Daniell

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mary Lou Odom", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Mary Lou Odom

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation for and admiration of my “dream team” advisory committee, Dr. Beth Daniell and Dr. Mary Lou Odom. You have challenged and cheered me throughout the process of writing this thesis, and your support and encouragement have been invaluable. I would also like to thank Rachel Greil for her guidance as she too has been there through every stage of the process to offer her support and wisdom. It has been an honor to work with all of you, and I truly cannot thank you enough.

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To the Dream Team Profs,

The Writing Center Family,

And Real Family: Thanks!

Contents

Preface.....	5
I – The Situation of Writing Centers.....	13
II – How Outreach Works.....	19
III – An Outreach Program in Action:	
Case Study of Outreach at the Kennesaw State University Writing Center.....	39
IV – Coming to Conclusions and Looking to the Future.....	53
Appendix A – Outreach Presentation Guidelines.....	56
Appendix B – Outline for Writing Center Research Workshop.....	61
Works Cited.....	64
Works Consulted.....	67
Curriculum Vitae.....	69

Preface

When I began as a student in the Master of Arts in Professional Writing (MAPW) program, I was still an undergraduate in college, a few credits shy of my Bachelor of Arts degree in English. At the time I had worked in the Kennesaw State University (KSU) Writing Center for two years, both as a writing consultant and as outreach coordinator. Even so, I did not know then that I would arrive at the destination I have, with the writing center as my central area of interest, both academically and professionally. I began my work as a student in the MAPW program in the spring of 2007, and three years and many classes later, I have completed the degree requirements, and then some. During my time as a student in the MAPW program I have taken a total of twelve classes: besides the introductory class, I completed two classes in creative writing, two in applied writing, and seven in rhetoric and composition. It has been a rewarding experience from start to finish, and through each class I have built a framework of knowledge and developed a personal philosophy of teaching writing that I have used to develop my ideas and practices in all areas of writing center practice, most notably outreach.

In the spring of 2007 I took the introductory class to the MAPW program, entitled “Issues and Research in Professional Writing.” The class was taught by Dr. Margaret Walters, who led us through the “basics” of graduate school. It was in this class that I began to build the foundation of knowledge, skills, and practice that would be crucial to my success through the rest of the program. I studied key issues, theories, and research methods specific to each field in the MAPW program – creative writing, applied writing, and rhetoric and composition – as well as those that are relevant to all three concentrations. Throughout the semester I analyzed a wide variety of readings on contemporary issues, which fed my developing interest in reading about

and reflecting on modern issues in writing center studies. I also learned about the best ways to address particular audiences, a skill that I have continued to develop and rely upon in my work studying and writing about writing center outreach. The development of these skills, in addition to learning to critique and apply research methodologies effectively in my own writing and research, has been crucial in preparing for and writing this thesis.

In addition to learning about formal research and analysis in the spring semester of 2007, I had the opportunity to practice writing my own creative works when I took “Play Writing,” taught by Dr. Aaron Levy. This was my first class in the creative writing discipline, and I found it both enjoyable and eye-opening. In this class I studied and practiced the writing of drama, including both monologues and dialogues. My major project in this class were a ten-minute play, entitled “I’m Buying a Motorcycle!” which was put into production that same semester, and a one-act play, entitled “Faceball Bat.” While my work in this class did not directly impact the particular topic I have addressed in this thesis, writing center outreach, it did help me in developing my creativity and style as a writer. No matter the genre a writer works in, it is essential to have one’s own unique style. Studying and writing creative works helped me develop mine.

The third and final class that I took during the spring semester of 2007 was “Teaching Writing in High Schools and Colleges,” taught by Dr. Mary Lou Odom. This was my first MAPW class in the field of rhetoric and composition, and it was in this class that I began to look at the teaching of writing through a more scholarly lens than I ever had before. I studied the theories and practices that have shaped writing instruction over the past thirty years. In particular, I studied student-centered instruction, as in the writing center; writing process theories; current methods of assessment in various settings including both professional and

scholastic; technologies of writing; and other advances. My major accomplishment in this class was the creation of a curricular design for a hypothetical college writing class. Because of my background and interest in writing center work, I adapted the one-on-one style of writing instruction I had learned to do when working with students in the writing center to my work in creating a framework for a writing classroom. I also presented my work to my classmates, which served as valuable practice sharing my research and ideas with a wider audience. I have continued to modify and build on that same framework in later semesters as I have taught college writing classes at KSU and as I planned for and wrote my argument for the implementation of outreach programs for writing centers.

In the fall semester of 2007 I took another class in the field of rhetoric and composition: “Evaluating Writing,” taught by Dr. Sarah Robbins. In this class I learned about modern practices for evaluating writing. I focused on several questions of interest: How do literary gatekeepers evaluate submissions for publication? How is writing evaluated in a business/workplace context? How do teachers and other stakeholders and community leaders respond to and assess student writing? How does social context shape the evaluation of writing? What are situations where evaluation of writing can be especially challenging (e.g., in cases of possible plagiarism, in writing using particular genres, in high-stakes testing of writing)? Again, my primary focus was on writing center studies, and I concentrated my efforts on studying and writing about writing evaluation in the writing center. Throughout the semester I researched, discussed, and wrote about current theories of assessment and evaluation, particularly in the context of the writing center. I also examined various “real-world” contexts where writing is assessed both formally and informally, and I explored important issues associated with evaluating writing in the writing center.

Also in the fall 2007 semester I took “Research for Writers,” taught by Dr. Jim Elledge. In this class I was allowed to decide my own topic of research, and I chose to focus on educational philosophies as they are valued and applied in writing centers. I focused on writing centers in universities, while also addressing and evaluating writing centers in other institutions such as high schools. Throughout the class I researched educational philosophies, summarizing the basic tenets of each one. The major project I created in this class was a book proposal, including one finished chapter, in which I described the application of educational philosophies in writing centers. These philosophies, and my reflections thereon, have informed my ideas about writing center outreach programs as described in this thesis. Although I do not exclusively adhere to or advocate any particular educational philosophy, either in the chapters that follow or in real life, I found the work I did in this class invaluable for my development as a student in the field of rhetoric and composition, as a teacher of writing, and as a proponent of writing center outreach.

The following semester, in the spring of 2008, I took “Understanding Writing as a Process,” another class in the field of rhetoric and composition taught by Dr. Mary Lou Odom. In this class I studied of the concept of writing as a process. I focused on the following questions of interest: What happens when we write? Can the processes by which individuals shape written texts be observed, documented, and theorized? How does social context affect writing processes? How does understanding writing as process affect the teaching of writing? I studied writing as a process and the implications for writers and teachers of writing in various creative, workplace, and instructional situations. Throughout the class I focused on understanding and teaching writing as a process in the writing center. I also continued to develop my ideas about the work we do in the writing center and about the best way to spread the word about it through outreach.

Also in the spring semester of 2008 I took “Introduction to Literacy Studies,” taught by Dr. Beth Daniell. In this class I examined various approaches for studying and shaping literacy in a range of social contexts. I learned about literacy in various workplaces and instructional settings, as well as in the literary marketplace. I also explored competing definitions of literacy and their implications for educators and professional writers. Throughout this class I learned to use research about literacy to enhance my work as a teacher of writing, both in the classroom and in the writing center. The work I did in this class was invaluable for me as a teacher of writing since it helped me look from a new angle at the theory behind the practice of what goes on during the process of teaching writing, both in the classroom and in the writing center. Through studying literacy, I came to a better understanding of and appreciation for the challenges of students whose first language is not English as they learn to speak and write in American schools. English-language literacy and is much more problematic for these students than for others, and in learning and thinking about this I have been able to improve my own teaching practices, always keeping in mind that every student is different and will therefore benefit from different approaches to the teaching of writing.

The third class I took in the spring semester of 2008 was “Careers in the Literary Arts,” taught by Dr. Ralph Wilson. A major part of my work for this class consisted of working as a consultant for the Georgia Writers Association, which Dr. Wilson manages. During the first half of the semester I studied various elements of the fields of writing and literature while practicing hands-on program management. In the process I learned about professional and organization infrastructures that support the literary arts in the United States as I continued to develop theoretical and practical knowledge concerning management. I put many of the lessons I learned

here into practice managing the KSU Writing Center's outreach program, and I have reflected on them further within this thesis.

Also in the spring of 2008 I worked as a graduate research assistant (GRA) at KSU. Throughout the semester I observed Professor Rachel Greil as she taught a freshman English composition class. This was in preparation for my work as a teaching assistant (TA) the following semester, when I would teach my own class for the first time. I studied the art and science of teaching writing, and by the end of the semester I had compiled a portfolio including a journal of daily observations of Greil's class, an annotated bibliography of works relating to modern methods of teaching writing in high schools and colleges, a formal essay on the evaluation of student writing, and a teaching philosophy essay. I also had my first experience of extended contact with students as a class, and through talking with them I learned more about students' concerns and misconceptions about the writing center, which I then began to study more closely.

I continued to look into the misconceptions people commonly hold about writing centers in the summer of 2008, when I participated as a fellow in the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project (KMWP), sponsored by the National Writing Project (NWP). The KMWP is a community of educators who collaboratively work and study together to improve as teachers of writing. In this program I worked alongside educators working with various grade levels (k-16), from various counties within Georgia, teaching in various subject areas. As I studied effective teaching strategies in the KMWP, I also conducted informal research into educators' beliefs about and impressions of writing centers. I kept what I learned from these discussions in mind as I went forward working with the outreach program for the KSU Writing Center and later as I conducted formal research for and wrote my argument for writing center outreach.

The following semester, in fall of 2008, I took “Teaching Writing to Speakers of Other Languages,” taught by Dr. David Johnson. In this class I studied the theories and practices in the teaching of writing to students whose first language is not English. In this class I expanded on the knowledge I had begun to formulate the previous spring in Dr. Daniell’s literacy class. In “Teaching Writing to Speakers of Other Languages” I studied the second language acquisition of writing skills and composition techniques and principles for non-native-English-speakers in various writing situations, particularly when working with students in the writing center. In addition to this coursework I discussed writing center theory and practice with Dr. Johnson and my fellow classmates, several of whom taught English at high schools in the metro Atlanta area. Through these discussions I continued to develop my ideas about writing center outreach.

That same semester, I worked with Dr. Mary Lou Odom on a directed study entitled “Writing Center Theory and Practice.” Dr. Odom and I designed the coursework to evaluate common strategies used in writing centers as strategies composition teachers can carry into their classrooms. A major difference between tutoring in the writing center and teaching in the classroom is that the one-on-one attention a tutor is able to give is often impossible to provide in a class of twenty-five or more students. Throughout the semester I studied and evaluated the practical usefulness of writing center strategies in working with students on a one-to-many ratio in a classroom setting versus working with students on a one-to-one ratio in the writing center. I evaluated the usefulness of strategies employed by writing center tutors when they are used in the classroom. Throughout the semester I further developed my knowledge of and ideas about best practices for working in all capacities within the writing center, paying particular attention to outreach.

It was also in the fall of 2008 that I taught a writing class for the first time. While by this point I had several years of experience teaching writing as a writing consultant in the KSU Writing Center, this was my first experience applying all that I had learned to teaching writing in a classroom setting. I was and am still glad that I had accumulated so much experience learning about the theories behind the teaching of writing, as they proved invaluable that semester, and in every semester since, in my work teaching writing to college students. I also used the knowledge and skills I acquired in developing my ideas about writing center theory and practice, the most notable of which within the context of this thesis is writing center outreach.

I

The Situation of Writing Centers

Writing centers, as those deeply familiar with them know, can be a wonderful resource on any campus fortunate enough to have one. A writing center is a place where students of all ages, levels, and disciplines can come for help with any type of writing and during any stage of the writing process. Yet not everyone understands the work that goes on there. And it is not only students who misunderstand the writing center; even faculty are often mistaken in what they think the writing center is all about. As Stephen M. North notes in his landmark essay, “The Idea of a Writing Center,” “misunderstanding is something one expects – and almost gets used to – in the writing center business” (63). Thankfully the general perception of the writing center has improved since North wrote those words in 1984, and this shift in perception is largely the result of writing centers addressing misperceptions head-on. One way – and, I will argue, the most effective way – of correcting misperceptions of writing centers is the enactment of an outreach program.

Despite writing centers’ origins as learning resources oriented toward remediation for underprepared students, modern writing centers’ work includes services ranging from helping students prepare conference papers to teaching research methods to working with faculty preparing essays for publication. They certainly are not dungeons where instructors supply “first-aid to the grammatically halt and lame,” although some students and faculty still have this view (Carino 20). Unfortunately, the writing center was once almost universally regarded by those unfamiliar with it as a place for struggling writers to go for remediation and help with surface-level errors. Happily, this is less the case now, and more and more people are coming to

recognize and appreciate all that the writing center has to offer. As Ray Wallace observes, the writing center today is less frequently seen as a “lab” than in the past; fewer faculty and students today see the writing center as a place where students go or are sent for product-focused remediation to make their papers “good” (as opposed to “bad,” as it might be assumed they are in the first place) (qtd. in Carino 10). This change in perception is largely the result of writing centers working to address and refute misconceptions of themselves.

Since the mid-1980s, writing centers across the country have been overhauling their reputations. Increased visibility on many campuses, an ever-expanding body of scholarship on writing center theory and practice, and a rise in the number of writing center administrators trained in disciplines such as composition and rhetoric and writing center studies has provided the writing center field a more professional and cohesive foundation from which to view and advocate for itself. Thus, writing centers can, with increasing success, promote themselves as places of process-based, rather than product-based instruction. Indeed, writing center pedagogy and methods *do* align nicely with those valued by proponents of the process movement in writing instruction (Hobson 166). Process-oriented teachers place emphasis on allowing students more choice in their writing, helping them discover and communicate through their own authentic voices, and encouraging them to grow and learn through the “messy, organic, recursive” practice of writing (Tobin 4). As Clark notes, the effect of the process movement on the discipline of rhetoric and composition has been to transform the way writing is taught, so that attention is focused more on students themselves than on the writing they generate (7). In many ways, this – the focus on students themselves and on their progression as developing writers – exemplifies the purpose of a writing center.

The Case for Outreach

Of course, to say to students and faculty not familiar with the discipline of composition and rhetoric, and that writing centers “operate using a process-based philosophy of teaching writing” is to say very little. In order to make our purpose as clear as possible, we need to go a step further by explaining what we mean by “process-based instruction,” and we also need to detail the ways it applies to the work of the writing center. We need to make it clear that consultants in writing centers strive to help students learn and improve so that it is not only the piece of writing in front of them that is made better, but every piece of writing they produce thereafter. As North phrases it, “in a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction” (69). Yet, even North acknowledges that the fact that writing centers focus on the process rather than the product of writing has been stated and repeated, written and re-written so often that we need now to go further in our efforts at describing the way the writing center operates.

An outreach program helps a writing center take these steps by making direct contact with students and faculty. Through an outreach program, a writing center can establish and manage relations between the writing center and the university community as a whole. This is of immense importance since a writing center’s reputation, effectiveness, and continued existence are dependent upon the support of the university it serves. To many faculty, the writing center is just another place on campus; they may have heard of the writing center and may even have a basic idea of its purpose, but faculty may think of it as separate from their own departments – that is if they think of it at all. Often the writing center is housed in the English department,

leading to the general perception that it is a part of the English department alone and that it is not to be used by, or may not be useful to, students in other classes. The purpose of an outreach program is to lay a foundation for students and professors alike to join with the writing center in order to develop students' writing skills so that students will be fully-prepared to thrive in a university setting.

Although the fact that the work of writing centers is student-focused is not always understood or appreciated by faculty (let alone students), the student- and professor-centered goals of an outreach program naturally correlate with the writing center's perception of and vision for itself. An outreach program connects the writing center with both faculty and staff across campus by informing them about the writing center and letting them know what the role of the writing center is and the ways it can help them, faculty and students alike. Writing Centers have become expert at stating and explaining their mission, but lack of awareness, either in the form of students and faculty misconceptions or, worse, total obliviousness to the very existence of the writing center, remains a stumbling block to wider understanding on the part of the university community.

To answer North's call for going further than simply proclaiming our mission, writing centers must make conscious, consistent efforts to show faculty and students what goes on in writing centers and the ways writing centers benefit the university community. It is showing, not telling, that earns the regard and cooperation of students and faculty, and this is the idea behind a writing center outreach program. Writing centers need to make contact with students and faculty across the university and let them know who we are and what we can do; we need to reach out to the academic community and go a step further than writing centers have done in the past by making presentations, offering workshops, and providing and emphasizing real results in ways

that will capture attention and earn respect. Efforts like these and others present the practices and mission of the center to its stakeholders and intended audience.

An outreach program allows the writing center to have a voice and to speak directly to students and faculty. Just as they have since writing centers' first appearance in American schools, questions remain about the work of the writing center, and an outreach program provides an efficient and effective way of addressing these questions. While it may be disheartening to those who work in the writing center that many students and faculty do not know how valuable a resource the writing center is, there is reason to be optimistic. With proper use of resources – most notably the people who work in the writing center – almost any writing center can design and implement an effective outreach program that will help the writing center build solid working relationships with students and faculty, as well as grow and reach its full potential.

An outreach program, effectively implemented and maintained, is an enormous asset to a writing center in that it helps establish the writing center as the on-campus hub of writing activity and instruction. The writing center can be identified as the place where students at every level of instruction and with writing in all subjects will feel comfortable and happy to come for guidance. It can also be the place where teachers from every discipline come to discuss openly students' development as writers. Although these are bold goals, they are achievable. I posit that the ultimate goal of outreach programs is to elevate writing centers' status on campus, making them the clear centers for literacy and writing at the institutions they serve.

As time goes by, the writing center must continue to develop itself and its reputation; we must strive to increasingly be known as – and appreciated for being – not a fix-it shop for students' papers, but a place of learning where students get help with their writing at all stages

and at the same time develop as writers themselves. Too often, the writing center is like a buried jewel on a university campus, hidden away in some obscure wing (or worse, in a basement) where writing consultants dutifully work with the relatively few students who by fortune or design find their way through its door. Outreach programs are essential to the success of writing centers because they can improve writing centers' reputation and awareness, thus leading to improved vitality and an expanded mission for the writing center. In this thesis, I will discuss the reasons why outreach works, incorporating examples from outreach programs at various writing centers. Several university writing centers already have outreach programs in place, and although the overall themes are similar, there are interesting differences and similarities between the ways different writing centers structure and manage their outreach programs. Still, outreach programs will have more similarities than differences across the board. Throughout this thesis I will explore some programs that are currently in place to discuss and compare their approaches to writing center outreach. I will then describe the outreach program for the Writing Center at Kennesaw State University in order to give an idea of what an evolving outreach program is like in practice.

II

How Outreach Works

Historically, writing centers have shared some commonalities. Initially, writing center practice was inspired by the laboratory method of classroom instruction, which is based on assisting students with the writing process through one-on-one interactions with the instructor. Early writing center practice also took inspiration from the collaborative work between students in peer groups (Carino 12). This goal of providing help in a collaborative setting to help students improve as writers is still at the heart of the writing center. Yet the ways writing centers approach and accomplish this goal – the theory behind the practice – remain mysterious to many who have never worked closely with or in a writing center. Even for those who have, writing center theory is disjointed because, as Hobson has noted, there is not a single, uniform set of tenets adhered to from one writing center to another (166). An outreach program provides each writing center the opportunity not only to describe the principles that underlie its unique practice, but to present a clear explanation of both to students and faculty. This is important since many students and faculty are unaware of or misinformed about the work that goes on in writing centers.

The benefits of outreach to each writing center may be different depending on the setup of its program, which will in turn be different depending on the specific university community it serves. The mission of a writing center – to work with and help as many faculty members and students as possible across campus – is advanced by an outreach program that allows the writing center to make contact with the very people it strives to serve. Just as different writing centers operate within different contexts, they will need different kinds of outreach programs. There is

no single set of guidelines to follow; each writing center should design its outreach program to meet its unique needs and objectives. The guidelines and practices that work perfectly well for one writing center may not work at all for another. Indeed, writing center administrators and tutors who attempt to design an outreach program by doggedly adhering to a strict set of guidelines likely will soon find themselves struggling with a program that does not “fit.”

Designing a successful outreach program, rather, needs to entail careful attention to the context of one’s own writing center, mission, and institution. Even though outreach programs will vary based on institutional needs, their purpose is the same: the goal of an outreach program is to bring student and faculty awareness to the writing center so the writing center can meet its goal of working with students to make them better writers.

Program Offerings

Classroom Presentations

Writing center outreach takes place all over campus, in classrooms as well as in the writing center itself. Perhaps the most important and effective part of outreach is the classroom visit: writing center representatives visit classes and give brief presentations that inform students about benefits of writing center visits as well as, when called for, demonstrations of what goes on during help sessions and mini-lessons on various aspects of writing

Classroom presentations are a simple and effective part of writing center outreach offered by many writing centers with outreach programs in place. The writing center at the University of Michigan-Flint, the Wright Writing Center, is an example of one writing center that provides classroom visits as a part of their outreach program. The Wright Writing Center invites faculty to schedule five- to ten-minute presentations from writing center representatives. Such

introductory presentations are a common and efficient part of writing center outreach programs since they require little time (typically, less than twenty minutes) and are simple to complete. Ave Maria University offers “Classroom visits, or ‘10 Minute Writing Sprees,’” during which writing center representatives speak with classes in order to familiarize students with the writing center (“For Faculty”). Such classroom visits are a standard offering of writing center outreach programs, and for good reason: they reach large numbers of students in a short period of time.

Students who have used the writing center know that the assistants who work there, whom students often perceive as less intimidating than their professors, are helpful and friendly rather than contrary or intimidating (Harris 140). Yet students who are not familiar with the writing center often assume is that it is filled with grumpy grammarians who wield red pens and look forward to crushing students’ spirits as they mark up their papers. These students may need to see proof of this before they are convinced, and classroom visits are an excellent way for a writing center to provide this truth. In the case of students’ perceptions of the writing center, familiarity breeds comfort. Through outreach the writing center can impart a sense of familiarity with students even before they walk through the door. This serves not only to help students who would have visited the writing center anyway, albeit timidly; in addition, students whose anxiety might have kept them from utilizing the writing center will be more inclined to come and take advantage of the services offered there.

By making a good impression during classroom presentations, writing center representatives working in an outreach program often reduce the anxiety students feel about their college experiences with writing. Students’ apprehension is a serious concern for writing centers because, as Harris notes, students frequently enter writing centers nervously, apprehensive because they do not know what to expect, and these students often feel totally different after

working with writing assistants in the writing center (141). By reaching out and taking the initiative to make contact, we can begin to build a bond that will ease students' anxiety while it invites them to take advantage of all that the writing center has to offer. The same ill feelings that lead many people, including professional adults, to view writing instructors warily, are shared by many students when they picture the assistants who work in the writing center before they have experience to disprove that notion. A principal goal of outreach that classroom presentations fulfill is to ensure that students form a good first impression of the writing center and the people who work there.

The idea that the writing center is a place for underprepared writers is perhaps the most commonly-held misconception among students who are not familiar with the writing center. While it is the purpose of the writing center to help students improve their writing skills and abilities, it is not consistent with writing center pedagogy to— or to endeavor to— merely point out and correct their mistakes for them (Carino 17). The writing center is not a place of remediation; it is a place of assistance, and *all* writers benefit from the type of feedback consultants in the writing center provide. An outreach program is an effective way to make students and faculty aware of this.

Through an outreach program the writing center can address and engage students directly, dispelling the notion that the people who work in the writing center are judgmental and intimidating. This misconception, together with an accompanying fear of being judged, is a chief reason why many students avoid the writing center, especially since many of them have experienced and been failed by writing instructors in the past; the misconception that they will experience more of the same if ever they visit the writing center is a major deterrent (Bruffee 207). Fortunately, this is one of the easiest misconceptions for an outreach program to dispel

because an outreach program sets the record straight: during classroom presentations, writing center representatives explain to students that rather than merely correct students' errors, writing assistants point them out, explain them, and help students learn to avoid them in the future, thereby helping the students themselves develop as writers and, in the long term, helping them learn to be independent within the university community and beyond. Having had this explained to them, students benefit from the awareness that rather than chastise or reprimand students for their mistakes, writing assistants help students and serve as mentors. The idea that the writing center is a place for struggling, unprepared students is a particularly important misconception to dispel because it is an idea that intimidates students, many of whom have had bad experiences with intimidating English teachers and red pens, into staying away from the writing center and missing out on the help available there.

A step beyond the supposition that the writing center is a place of scornful correction is the mistaken belief held by many students that the writing center is a place that they can come to have their writing proofread, edited, or otherwise "fixed" by the assistants who work here. Many students and faculty who are unfamiliar with the writing center believe that it is in essence an *copyediting* center, and as Harris notes, this is one of the most common misconceptions held by people who are unfamiliar with the writing center (141). Every semester students saunter into the writing center, plunk papers down on the table, and ask if it can be ready – meaning, copyedited – in an hour, because the essay is due the same day. Had that student known ahead of time that the writing center is not in the business of editing students' papers for them, this dilemma, which almost invariably leads to the student being left with little choice but to hand in a sub-par paper that neither represents the student's best efforts nor highest abilities, would never have been encountered at all.

Though they may not know it if the writing center itself does develop a voice to tell them, students stand to gain quite a lot from working with assistants in the writing center. It is a unique setting within the university. Students who work with writing assistants benefit both from increased knowledge and a greater understanding about themselves as well as their writing in a way that is simply not possible in other institutionalized settings (Harris 139). An outreach program ensures that students are familiarized with exactly what the writing center is in a way that is clear and welcoming.

Mini-Lessons

Mini-lessons are another viable possibility that can provide an opportunity for writing centers to reach out. A mini-lesson is “a brief explanation of something that may be helpful to students,” and many educators, including the likes of Lucy Calkins to Nancie Atwell, use them to successfully teach various lessons and concepts (Weaver 150). It seems only natural for a writing center outreach program to include mini-lessons as part of its services, and writing center representatives, who understand the teaching of writing from both study and experience, are well-suited to this form of instruction.

At the professor’s request, made through communication with the outreach coordinator, writing center representatives provide mini-lessons on aspects of the writing process such as punctuation, citations, or other common concerns of students and professors. When giving mini-lessons, in addition to explaining the concept or skill in question, writing center representatives provide practical tips that students can use as they write. Because mini-lessons are brief and tailored to a specific class, students benefit greatly from them. Additionally, as an added bonus to the writing center, writing center representatives also benefit. Writing center representatives

who present mini-lessons to students gain increased confidence in themselves as developing experts in the field of writing instruction. As James Jesson of the Writing Center at the University of Texas at Austin notes, outreach presents an especially useful opportunity for undergraduate writing consultants, who probably do not have much experience preparing materials for and speaking in front of large groups. Writing consultants who participate in an outreach program gain confidence in themselves in a way that they might not otherwise; through the public speaking experience they will develop confidence in themselves in their ability to interact with faculty, students, and large groups in general (“Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project”).

Mini-lessons given by writing center representatives, who are much more like students’ peers than their professors are, serve as an example of the kind of peer-to-peer instruction that goes on in the writing center. The peer-given instruction provided by writing center representatives giving mini-lessons in outreach presentations serves as an effective illustrative example of the kind of help that is available in the writing center, which is different from what students are used to experiencing in the classroom. As Erika Lindemann has noted, regular individual attention and a direct focus on writing as a mode of learning are vital in students’ development as writers (255). The peer tutoring done by writing assistants harnesses addresses these needs and takes advantage of “the powerful educative force of peer influence that... still largely is... ignored and hence wasted by traditional forms of education” (Bruffee 207).

Tours of the Writing Center

Although class visits may be the most effective form of writing center outreach, on-site writing center presentations are also important: in this outreach, students and professors are

invited to tour the writing center as well as take part in informative presentations. A writing center tour is just that: a guided tour given by a writing center representative. Professors may prefer to bring students to the writing center so that they can see and experience the writing center firsthand. In order to accommodate this, an outreach program includes the option for in-house presentations. The chief advantage of in-house writing center outreach presentations over classroom presentations is that by visiting the writing center, students and professors become personally familiar with the location of the writing center and the work that goes on there.

The added familiarity provided by students' experience of actually visiting and exploring the writing center is unmatched by classroom presentations. Similarly, a writing center open house encourages visitors to get to know the writing center and the people who work there in a low-key, relaxed atmosphere. For a writing center tour, professors bring their students to the writing center on the appointed day, and a writing center representative leads them through the writing center, pointing out and explaining the various parts of the writing center and the resources available there. The writing center representative goes over the usual information included in classroom presentations, most particularly the benefits of the writing center, as well as basic instructions about how to make an appointment for a writing center session, how to sign into the writing center, and what different areas of the writing center are used for. During tours, writing center representatives may also model a help session or show a video of a session. The tour concludes with a question-and-answer session allowing students (and the professor, if need be) time to ask questions about the writing center.

Online Presence

In addition to classroom visits and tours of the writing center, a writing center outreach program can benefit from establishing an online presence. By setting up a webpage, the writing center increases its visibility and makes itself easily accessible to everyone within the institution it serves. The Wright Writing Center at the University of Michigan-Flint is a good example of a writing center with a prominent online presence. The Wright Writing Center has its own webpage, which is easily accessible from the university's main site, where the center points out important information about its services, including a list of answers to frequently asked questions (such as "Who is the Writing Center for?" and "What services does the Writing Center provide?") and an online virtual tour that introduces students and faculty to the types of assistance and other resources available there ("Student Information and FAQs"). Other writing centers such as the Indiana State University Writing Center and the Undergraduate Writing Center at the University of Texas also include answers to frequently asked questions on their web pages ("Student FAQs"; "FAQs, Hours, & Policies"). The Ave Maria University Writing Center in Ave Maria, Florida, has a thriving outreach program. Director Ellen Fangman has posted the services the center offers for both students and faculty on their webpage. The site also includes tutorial guidelines and a list of frequently asked questions that describe what students should expect and ways they should prepare before visiting the writing center ("AMU Writing Center – Tutorial Guidelines"; "AMU Writing Center FAQ's").

By establishing an online presence, a writing center is able easily and efficiently to address the misconceptions that faculty and students often hold about the writing center. For example, just as some students assume that the writing center is intended for those who are underprepared, many assume that only freshmen use the writing center. Therefore

upperclassmen, who often consider themselves experienced writers, may jump to the conclusion that they have no reason to use the writing center. The hesitancy of upperclassmen to seek help in the writing center often stems from their belief that admitting need would be the equivalent of saying that they are not skilled in their chosen discipline.

On the one hand, it is true that there is a long-held custom of taking a sympathetic and helpful approach to working with ill-prepared and inexperienced students still stands as a part of writing center practice (Carino 16). However, the writing center helps many students who are well-prepared and very experienced. One way of getting this message across to faculty and students is to post statistics of students helped on the writing center's webpage. While it may be that many of the students who use the writing center are indeed relatively inexperienced (i.e. freshmen), faculty and especially students will feel reassured seeing the exact numbers of students of each year, freshman through senior and beyond, who use the writing center.

Students and faculty may also believe that the writing center is only for use by English majors, or that only students in writing classes can or should use the writing center. They may worry that if the papers they need help with are for a non-English or non-literature class, history or science for example, assistants in the writing center will not be able to work with them. An outreach program reassures students that the writing center is used by all students at the university, no matter what their major is or what class their writing assignments are for, and give examples to that effect. As Andy Bouelle of the Writing Center at the University of Nevada-Reno [UNR] reports, students visit the writing center for help with writing that is not only for classes other than English and composition classes, but for resumes and other professional writing as well. Bouelle reports that:

... in an average year, our Writing Center tutors between 5,000 and 6,000 students, from about 300 different classes, representing every major on campus.

About 46 percent of the students who utilize the UNR Writing Center are there for first-year composition courses, and about 12 percent are graduate students, with the remaining clients coming from a variety of 200-, 300-, and 400-level courses.

Through outreach, and specifically on its webpage, a writing center can turn the misconception that its services are useful to English majors only to its advantage by addressing the issue head on and inviting students from all disciplines to take advantage of the help available there.

Although students may not realize it, everyone including college freshmen, upperclassmen, graduate students, and even professionals can and do benefit from having an experienced writing assistant go over their work with them. A writing center with a webpage as a part of its outreach program should use its webpage clarifies this for faculty and students alike.

Outreach to Faculty

Like students, faculty often have misconceptions about what the writing center is and how it helps their students. As North points out, it is a frustrating truth that many professionals, even in the field of rhetoric and composition, do not know or understand what goes on in the writing center (63). Many faculty hold the same or similar misconceptions about the writing center as students hold: that the writing center is a place for less skilled or underprepared writers; that it is a place where papers are copyedited; and that the writing center is useful only for English majors or for those in writing classes. An effective outreach program addresses these false impressions and helps faculty, like their students, recognize its many benefits for them.

Though most faculty have at least heard of the writing center and are aware of its existence, faculty do not always know what we do in the writing center, in which case they certainly do not know the valuable role we can play in helping them educate their students. The problem of faculty not recognizing the writing center as an important resource leads to another difficulty: faculty who do not know the writing center's value are unlikely to tell their students about the writing center. As a result students may work through several semesters, or even their entire college careers, without ever learning about the writing center. It is sometimes surprising, and frequently disheartening, to talk with students who are well into their time as upperclassmen or even graduate students who do not know about the writing center. Rodis argues that it is the writing center's own responsibility to make its purpose and ways of operating clear to students and faculty (177). Indeed, if the writing center is to continue to develop itself as a valued resource then it is up to us to reach out.

Furthermore – and frustratingly enough – even though faculty in English departments are more likely than faculty in other departments to know about the writing center, they are still not always aware of what writing center work entails, and they may even view the writing center with apprehension – or worse, distrust because they misunderstand the work that goes on there. An outreach program helps these faculty members understand the writing center's mission, how the writing center can benefit their students, and how the writing center can help them be more effective teachers. This is an excellent first step to building solid relationships between the writing center and faculty across campus.

Outreach is as much about addressing faculty as it is about drawing in students. Robert W. Barnett, co-director of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) committee and director of the writing center at the University of Michigan-Flint, notes that paying particular attention to

addressing faculty has paid off for their outreach program. He comments that “faculty outreach has been important to our writing center, contributing to a rapid, short-term increase in student visits” (199). He goes on to note that “clearly defining the writing center vis-à-vis the academy is dependent on our commitment to work closely with colleagues across the disciplines.” An outreach program is an ideal way for writing centers to build lasting relationships with faculty across campus. By connecting to faculty through an outreach program, the writing center goes beyond merely familiarizing them with the writing center; outreach enables the writing center to form bonds based on understanding and trust, and in turn faculty will willingly and enthusiastically send students to the writing center for help.

The writing center at the University of Wyoming has taken faculty outreach one step further by implementing an outreach program that not only addresses faculty across campus effectively; it engages them in the work that goes on in the writing center. Not only do faculty schedule writing center representatives to speak with their classes, but they also work directly with writing consultants to design and deliver specialized outreach presentations to their students. The administrators in the University of Wyoming writing center carefully developed their policy of working with faculty in this way to keep them “centrally involved” at all stages. Not only has this contributed to a solid outreach program for the writing center; writing consultants have also “been able to both assist faculty with the design of their writing assignments and advise students on producing more satisfactory writing” (LeBlanc and Nelson 6). Such collaboration is significant in the development of a writing center. If writing centers’ goal is to help as many students as possible through individualized instruction, then it makes sense to strive to approach faculty with a similar idea of one-on-one collaboration.

Often faculty do not have the resources and lack ample time to work on teaching students writing skills in class. Further, faculty rarely have the time to work with students one-on-one in order to help them with their writing. This is one reason faculty will be especially glad to learn about the writing center; they will benefit from an outreach program that invites them to interact with the writing center as they help their students succeed.

Writing consultants can better serve students if they are familiar with exactly what the students are learning, and faculty will be more inclined to recommend the writing center to their students if they are sure that the writing consultants who work there are on the same page, so to speak, as they are. The Ave Maria University Writing Center, for example, offers faculty a series on a particular rhetoric-reader that is used by many faculty at the school (“The Writing Center”). Although this is not currently a common offering of writing centers, it is a practical idea that can be emulated by other writing centers can implement. Through an outreach program, the writing center can learn about a particular textbook or set of textbooks that are used by multiple faculty members in their classes. Writing consultants can then familiarize themselves with a commonly-used classroom text (or several), as a result of which they will be better-prepared to help the students in classes where those texts are used.

Another faculty-oriented feature of the Ave Maria University writing center’s outreach program is an instructional presentation on the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS). They offer this in addition to other presentations put together in collaboration with the university library (“The Writing Center”). This is another useful idea that may be implemented by other writing centers. The primary resources necessary for such an endeavor are writing consultants who are familiar with CMS (or MLA, APA, etc.), time, and a location for the presentation to take place. The first and second of these, a knowledgeable writing consultant and the time for an instructional

presentation, should be fairly easy to find (or develop, in the case of the citation style expertise) for most writing centers. The third, a location, may be tricky, particularly in smaller writing centers where physical space is limited; however, this problem can be solved or even reframed into an opportunity if we look beyond the walls of the writing center. Possibilities for locations include unused classrooms in buildings devoted to courses where specific styles are used. For example, instructional presentations on APA style would be held in the science building, while presentations on AP would be in the communications building, and so forth.

The Marian E. Wright Writing Center at the University of Michigan-Flint includes a page on its website entitled “Faculty Outreach,” on which they invite faculty to send to the writing center a copy of the faculty member’s writing assignment and, if possible, an example of a paper that fulfills the assignment in order that the consultants in the writing center will know what to expect when working with students. The Wright Writing Center has also posted a list of goals, the first of which is to “Assist all students in advancing their writing abilities and critical thinking skills in relation to their university education and in preparation for their respective careers” (“Writing Center Goals”). In order to achieve this goal among others, they have set up a comprehensive outreach program that is designed with specific attention to making contact with faculty.

In addition, the Wright Writing Center offers its help in designing writing assignments to faculty: “We will help you spot potential problems that students face as they complete the assignment.” This is a big step in the right direction – the Wright Writing Center is going beyond the traditional outreach objective of making contact with faculty; they are striving to establish mutually-beneficial working relationships with faculty as well. Not only does this help faculty teach more effectively; it also boosts writing consultants’ confidence and credibility.

Personnel/Staffing

While keeping in mind the critical role that context plays in an outreach program, it is useful to understand some common structural elements of such an endeavor. First when considering beginning a new outreach program, the individuals in charge of the planning should look on the project as a whole new initiative that is separate from, though closely intertwined with, other aspects of writing center operation. An outreach program requires specific resources to be managed in particular ways in order to run smoothly. The most precious of the resources necessary for an outreach program is the people who will carry out outreach duties to ensure that the program runs smoothly and efficiently. As Louise Wetherbee Phelps points out in her essay, “Mobilizing Human Resources to (Re)Form a Writing Program,” the most difficult part of initiating any new writing program initiative lies in finding and training the right people to do the work (80). This is as true with a writing center outreach program as it is with any other initiative. In part because funding is difficult to come by and in part because the people who work in the writing center are the ones with the best understanding of and appreciation for what goes on there, the best people to work in and manage an outreach program are likely to be the ones who already work in the writing center.

The main positions to be filled in an outreach program are outreach coordinator, whose principal role is to manage the outreach program, and writing center representatives, who make presentations to groups and get the word out about the writing center across campus. Writing center directors may choose to coordinate outreach themselves, eliminating the need for a separate outreach coordinator, or they may select someone else to fulfill that particular role. Should the writing center director elect to assign the responsibility of coordinating outreach to

someone else, the director still should be sure to maintain clear, open communication with the staff member in charge of managing outreach. The writing center director is, after all, still in charge of managing the writing center as a whole, and therefore the outreach coordinator should report directly to the writing center director.

An effective outreach coordinator is essential to the effective implementation and management of an outreach program. The outreach coordinator manages electronic communications with faculty, schedules outreach presentations, and confirms these appointments with faculty. Then the outreach coordinator ensures that these appointments are filled by writing center representatives. Often the outreach coordinator herself makes outreach presentations, particularly when they are scheduled on odd days, such as on Saturdays, or times, such as early in the morning or late in the evening, when no other writing center staff members are available. The outreach coordinator's responsibilities include making contact and maintaining communication with professors; scheduling outreach appointments and maintaining the outreach schedule; training and maintaining open communication with writing center representatives.

As professors request appointments for classroom presentations, mini-lessons, and tours or workshops, the outreach coordinator schedules appointments and responds to professors in order to confirm that their requests have been acknowledged and fulfilled. Many professors may request specific dates and times for outreach visits, while others may simply respond by saying that they would like to make appointments for writing center representatives to speak with their classes sometime during the semester. The outreach coordinator's goal is to fulfill specific requests, on a first-come, first-serve basis, as often as possible. When it is impossible to do so, whether because of scheduling conflicts or any other reason, the outreach coordinator should

schedule a tentative appointment for a different day instead, and then contact the professor to make sure that the different date will work the class in question.

The outreach coordinator is responsible for maintaining the outreach schedule and making sure that all appointments are fulfilled by writing center representatives. This is crucial because it is very important for writing center representatives to consistently meet with classes as schedules; not doing so is bad for the reputation of the writing center. After scheduling outreach presentations for classes, the outreach coordinator sends writing center representatives to make the presentations. The most efficient way for the outreach coordinator to ensure that all presentations are made as schedules is to check the writing center schedule in advance to see who is working when outreach appointments are scheduled. The outreach coordinator should then contact writing center representatives who are working during those times in order to ensure that they are able and willing to make the presentation at the scheduled time.

The outreach coordinator is also responsible for training writing center representatives to make effective presentations. Together with the writing center director, the outreach coordinator acts as an advisor to writing center representatives. As an advisor, the outreach coordinator is responsible for communicating with them openly, interpersonally and systematically, in order to build and maintain solid working relationships with them, and to impart necessary information as the outreach program continues (Vowell and Farren 58). Student writing assistants, the best candidates for writing center representatives who will conduct outreach visits, may at first be shy or uncertain about making outreach presentations. It is the responsibility of the outreach coordinator to explain to them the nature of writing center outreach. Acting as advisor to writing center representatives, the outreach coordinator should outline the reasons outreach is important, what outreach presentations involve, and how to give effective presentations. When they

understand the importance of the job they have been selected to do, writing center representatives are much more enthusiastic about fulfilling their duties thoroughly and well.

Writing center representatives are the staff members who make direct contact with faculty and students. These representatives will most likely include some or all of the consultants who work in the writing center, and they will be responsible for making classroom presentations and managing or helping manage workshops in the writing center. As the outreach program grows and evolves, they may also be given other responsibilities, such as helping design pamphlets and flyers, or meeting with faculty to discuss various aspects of writing center practice.

Writing center representatives are crucial to an outreach program. After all, they are the ones who actually make outreach presentations. Writing center representatives act as the face of the writing center in the sense that it is through observing and interacting with them that many students and professors form their first impression of the writing center and of the people who work there. The chief responsibility of writing center representatives is giving effective outreach presentations. Writing center representatives fulfill this responsibility by making classroom visits and by giving tours of the writing center. They must be prepared and confident in speaking to classes and presenting the personable, professional, and welcoming face of the writing center.

Writing center representatives should be chosen from among the student writing assistants who work in the writing center. Because student writing assistants tend to be closer in age to the students in classes to whom outreach presentations are made, they are able to relate to the students in a way that older staff working in the writing center would most likely not be able to. In order for outreach to be effective, students should be able to relate easily with writing center representatives, who should strive to be personable and to build rapport with students.

Because of the commonalities many student writing assistants share with the students they speak to during outreach, including that writing assistants are often undergraduate or graduate students themselves and are therefore close in age and life stage with students, they are the best-suited to be writing center representatives in an outreach program.

III

An Outreach Program in Action:

Case Study of Outreach at the Kennesaw State University Writing Center

History of the Writing Center at Kennesaw State University

The Kennesaw State University (KSU) Writing Center was founded in 1984 by a group of English professors trained in literature (Odom and Greil 5). At that time it was known as a writing *lab*, rather than a writing *center*, and the writing consultants who worked there saw as few as 115 students annually. Now an established part of campus resources, the KSU Writing Center helps hundreds of students every semester. In fall of 2009 alone we helped 608 students and fulfilled 1151 appointments. The Writing Center offers one-on-one tutoring, writing workshops, computer lab services, testing space, and research materials. In order to make students and faculty aware of these services, the Writing Center has developed a successful outreach program that has increased student use every year since its inception.

The Outreach Program at the KSU Writing Center

Although no formal outreach program was established at the KSU Writing Center until 2006, for many years Dr. Bob Barrier, the longtime Writing Center Director, strived to promote the KSU Writing Center within the university community. Because of his responsibilities directing the writing center and teaching for the English department, Barrier had neither the time nor the energy to expand outreach efforts; writing center outreach was secondary to other, more pressing concerns. Nevertheless, knowing the importance of making contact with as many

students and faculty across the university as possible, Barrier volunteered to speak at assemblies and gatherings of students, particularly freshmen. In addition, he sent out a campus-wide email at the beginning of each semester in order to invite students and faculty to take advantage of the Writing Center.

The KSU Writing Center's outreach efforts did not evolve significantly for many years. Then in 2004, Dr. Mary Lou Odom was hired as a professor of English and assistant director of the writing center. Soon she was working with Barrier to promote the KSU Writing Center; however, neither Barrier nor Odom could devote the necessary time to outreach efforts, and in 2006 Odom decided to develop an organized outreach program. She drew up a list of objectives, created a rough outline for an outreach program, and selected an outreach coordinator. Odom's main objective was to advance awareness about writing center services across campus, and she believed that an outreach program would be an effective way to improve the writing center's reputation.

The first step towards the establishment of the KSU Writing Center Outreach Program was to design a program that would fulfill the main goal of the program: to improve awareness of the writing center among students and faculty. Many members of the KSU community did not understand the mission of the Writing Center, and therefore Odom worked to design and implement a program that would reach as many students and faculty as possible across the KSU community. A successful outreach program would create positive impressions and explain the nature of the work that goes on in the Writing Center while clearing common misconceptions, thus furthering and expanding the mission of the Writing Center.

Odom knew that increased use would require additional funding for the Writing Center. In connection with the new outreach program, she requested and received this much-needed

funding, which was generated by adding a \$20 fee to tuition for students enrolled in English 1101, the first of two required freshman composition courses at KSU. The Writing Center received the funds generated by this increase in exchange for sending representatives to make outreach presentations to all English 1101 classes. In this way the Writing Center received much-needed funding and expanded the new outreach program, increasing the Writing Center's contact with more students and faculty than ever before.

Administration

The Outreach Coordinator

Although she had a plan for starting an outreach program, Odom did not have time to devote to managing the new program herself. Therefore, she created the position of outreach coordinator. Then as now, the outreach coordinator's job is to maintain contact between the Writing Center and KSU faculty, with particular emphasis on professors teaching English 1101.

The first outreach coordinator for the KSU Writing Center was Krista Talley, a writing consultant and graduate student in KSU's Master of Arts in Professional Writing (MAPW) program. Because the outreach program was new, and because Talley felt personally responsible for the success of the program (a commonality among each of the following outreach coordinators), Talley herself conducted the majority of outreach presentations during her time as coordinator. She created an "outreach script," a list of bullet-point notes detailing important facts about the Center, and carried a copy with her to every outreach presentation to ensure that she covered all of the necessary points. For the relatively few presentations that she herself could not attend, Talley enlisted the help of other writing consultants. Before sending these

consultants to speak in front of classes, Talley explained the nature of outreach and gave them a copy of her script to follow.

Following Talley as outreach coordinator was Danielle Flynn, an experienced undergraduate writing consultant who worked closely with Talley during Talley's term. The transition from Talley to Flynn was a smooth one, and under Flynn's leadership, responsibilities increased as a result of higher demand for outreach presentations. Just as Talley had done, Flynn made many outreach presentations herself and enlisted the help of fellow writing consultants for the others. Flynn held the position of outreach coordinator until she graduated in December 2006.

In Spring 2007, Leah Hale, an undergraduate writing consultant, took on the role of coordinating outreach. Because of the efforts of Talley and Flynn as outreach coordinators, in addition to the dedication of many writing consultants who represented the KSU Writing Center in outreach presentations in classes across campus, the Writing Center was receiving more requests than ever for outreach presentations, in addition to the required presentations arranged for English 1101 classes. Hale was a very efficient worker, and in order to streamline the program and make presentations more comfortable for writing consultants, she modified the script that Talley had created to develop a more detailed guideline for outreach presentations. (See Appendix A for outreach presentation guidelines). The Writing Center still uses these guidelines today.

By the Fall 2007, the outreach program had expanded even more, and professors across campus requested presentations for their classes. Because of this increase, Hale needed help coordinating the outreach program. Dr. Odom asked me (the writer of this thesis) to help, so Hale and I co-coordinated outreach: Hale managed the outreach for classes in the English

department, and I managed outreach for classes in other departments. This division of labor worked, and we collaborated effectively throughout Fall 2007.

In Spring 2008, Hale graduated from KSU and resigned as outreach co-coordinator, and I have been the outreach coordinator ever since. In my time as outreach coordinator, I have learned many details about the way students and faculty view the writing center. I have found that outreach is extremely effective for making contact with the campus community, as well as laying the groundwork for lasting bonds between the writing center and students and faculty. With the exception of the Fall 2007 semester, when Leah Hale and I collaborated to manage the program, the KSU Writing Center outreach program has always been managed by a single person in the position of outreach coordinator, who is in charge of responding to faculty's requests for outreach presentations.

Traditionally in the KSU Writing Center's outreach program, the outreach coordinator herself has made many of these presentations. However, when this is not possible or expedient, the outreach coordinator sends writing consultants to make presentations. Because the Writing Center received funding directly from the \$20 increase in students' fees attached to English 1101 courses, it has always been a priority to ensure that consultants make presentations in every English 1101 class. (This is no mean feat since there are so many sections of English 1101 courses. For example, in the Fall 2009 semester alone KSU offered 102 English 1101 courses, and writing center representatives visited every one of them.)

Scheduling appointments for outreach presentations is an ongoing duty for the outreach coordinator, as professors do not always respond promptly to the mass email sent out at the beginning of the semester. Additionally, professors may have questions or concerns about outreach throughout the school year. The outreach coordinator must therefore check the writing

center's email inbox regularly in order to ensure that professors who contact the writing center regarding outreach are answered promptly and courteously.

Throughout the years that the KSU Writing Center has had an outreach program in place, Odom has acted as advisor to each of the outreach coordinators, maintaining effective communication and focusing on the overarching goals the outreach program is meant to accomplish, as well as the methods that have been settled on as the means to achieve those goals. Odom follows the approach outlined by Vowell and Farren in "Expectations and Training of Faculty Advisors": In training and advising each outreach coordinator, she addresses specific needs and supplies necessary skills while remaining available as needed to offer guidance and support (63). As advisor to the outreach coordinator, Odom maintains certain standards of collaboration and communication; she is always aware of the latest information about and any changes in university or department policies and procedures, and she shares relevant information with those working on outreach, as advised by Vowell and Farren (58). Also, as an advisor, Odom ensures that the outreach coordinator and writing center representatives are effectively meeting the goals of the outreach program. She works to ensure the accountability of the program.

Writing Center Representatives

In addition to student writing assistants being well-suited for building relations with students, their participation in outreach is practical. Because they are already working and being paid during times outreach presentations are scheduled, no extra expense is incurred by sending them to classes. The aim is to schedule and give as many outreach presentations as possible

early in the semester, when writing center traffic is slower than in the middle and end of the semester.

Outreach Presentations

Classroom Presentations

Most of the time, faculty who contact the KSU Writing Center with requests for outreach presentations have in mind the shorter, informative presentations that the center has offered since the beginning of the program. These presentations take place in classrooms, and the general procedure is simple: once the outreach coordinator has scheduled and confirmed the outreach presentation, a writing center representative volunteers or is selected to make the presentation, and on the appointed day he or she goes to the class to speak with the professor and students as a group.

Classroom outreach presentations are generally between ten and thirty minutes in length, depending upon whether the professor requests only a brief presentation or a more detailed one addressing specific concerns. The number of questions students or professors have for the writing center representative may also affect the length of the presentation. In basic outreach presentations, consultants start with the bare fundamentals – the location of the KSU Writing Center, hours of operation, how to make an appointment – and then address the really important points: who we are and what we do. This is, after all, the whole point of an outreach program. One of the best ways to explain the writing center to students is to address common misconceptions directly and then refute each one. The biggest misconceptions are that we offer a service that helps only “bad writers” (while addressing this misconception assistants often take the opportunity to point out that there really is no such a thing as a bad writer); that we offer

copyediting services; that the people who work in the Writing Center are scary or judgmental of students' mistakes; and that we help only students with assignments for English or literature classes.

Students tend to respond favorably to writing center representatives during outreach presentations. For many students, this outreach presentation is the first time they hear of the KSU Writing Center; knowing this, writing consultants take advantage of the opportunity to make a positive first impression. By using friendliness and a bit of humor, the writing center representative makes a connection with the students while presenting a distinctly friendly, *human* face that they can then associate with the Writing Center.

In outreach presentations to English 1101 classes, writing center representatives complete basic outreach presentations up by showing a video of a model writing center help session. In 2006, as a result of a Gear-Up grant awarded to Carol Harrell, English education professor at KSU, the Writing Center was allotted funding for the creation of five videos depicting writing center sessions. Two former writing assistants scripted five realistic scenes from the KSU Writing Center. These scenes show a writing assistant introducing a student to the writing center (Video One), helping a student with the planning stage of writing (Video Two), working with a student on an existing draft (Video Three), helping a student learn to edit and proofread his own work (Video Four), and working with a student to create positive reinforcement and understanding of the writing process (Video Five). The writing center staff cleared a room in the center and filmed these scenes using writing consultants from the center as actors. These videos were then posted online, where they are still available for use ("Marietta Gear Up Home").

In outreach presentations to English 1101 classes, writing center representatives show Video Three – a depiction of a session with a student who comes to the writing center for help

with a draft already marked with his instructor's comments and suggestions ("Marietta Gear Up Home"). The writing assistant works with the student, who does not know how to interpret and implement the instructor's comments, and together they discuss ways to improve the essay. The writing assistant leads the student without making any judgments about the essay.

Recently the KSU Writing Center has expanded its outreach program to include more than basic classroom presentations. The Writing Center now offers more in-depth outreach presentations in classes, during which writing assistants provide lessons on various facets of writing and workshops designed to help students from various disciplines who might have been hesitant to come to the writing center for individual help but who are interested in learning more about a particular aspect of writing.

Longer classroom presentations are more easily shaped and melded to fit specific classes than brief presentations. Longer presentations may last anywhere from twenty to forty minutes, depending upon the nature of the class and whether the professor has special requests. In longer classroom presentations, much of the content is the same as in brief presentations: the writing center representative provides information about what the writing center is and what writing assistants do and addresses and clears up common misconceptions about the writing center. The main difference between brief classroom presentations and longer ones is that in the longer presentations, writing center representatives model a writing center session for the class and may also give short lessons on specific aspects of writing at the professor's request.

One of the most recent additions to the KSU Writing Center's outreach program is the mini-lesson. For mini-lessons, a writing consultant visits a classroom and leads a short lesson on one aspect of the writing process. Typically, faculty request lessons on "general writing concerns" as defined by the professor and on documentation styles (MLA, APA, and Chicago).

If the outreach program continues to grow and develop, the KSU Writing Center will soon offer mini-lessons as a standard part of our outreach program.

Although onsite writing center tours and workshops may not be immediately associated with the outreach program, the KSU Writing Center considers them another way to reach new students since they are designed to bring in students from across campus, provide help to more students than assistants could have reached otherwise, and improve the reputation of the Writing Center as a valuable resource on campus. The KSU Writing Center now holds workshops focusing on research, documentation, and top ten errors. After planning the content for the workshops, writing assistants make flyers, post them around campus, and contact faculty with information about the workshops to pass on to their students. For example, the objective for the recent research workshop was to provide clear, practical information about why research is necessary, how to incorporate research into writing, and how to avoid plagiarism when incorporating research into writing. (See Appendix B for the workshop outline.) The workshops have become a successful aspect of the writing center outreach; the participants claim to have benefitted, and many of them have become regulars in the KSU Writing Center. In the future the KSU Writing Center will offer an expanded number of workshops about different aspects of the writing process.

Off-Site Tutoring Sessions

In 2006 the KSU Writing Center offered off-site tutoring as a part of outreach efforts. The idea was a good one: if some students were reluctant to come to the Writing Center, the center would go to them. Once a week writing center assistants set up a satellite writing center in student housing complete with signs advertising that they were available to help any student

who had questions or concerns about his writing. Although the idea was a good one, for whatever reason – lack of prior advertising probably being a chief one – the initiative was not extremely successful. In the two semesters the KSU Writing Center offered off-site tutoring – for a total of seventy-two hours of available dorm tutoring time – only two students came for help. Clearly this was not an effective method of outreach, at least at the time, and the KSU Writing Center stopped offering in-dorm writing assistance after two semesters.

In 2009, at the suggestion of one writing consultant, a resident assistant in the university dorms, the KSU Writing Center went directly to student housing as a part of outreach efforts again. Four writing consultants held an information session in the dorm where he works, followed by tutoring sessions. The resident assistant arranged to have food and drinks delivered, and while the students were eating, the writing consultants gave a basic outreach presentation, Later they helped students individually with writing assignments. This was a very successful venture: The assistants not only presented the KSU Writing Center in a favorable light to the students who attended the session, but they also offered real help to the students at the same time. Some of the students who made first contact with the Writing Center in the dorms now frequent the Writing Center. Because the first dorm information and tutoring session was so successful, the Center plans to make dorm outreaches a part of each semester's outreach program.

Statistics

In the 2009-2010 academic year alone, representatives of the KSU Writing Center gave 296 outreach presentations, including both basic classroom presentations and mini-lessons. Of these, 224 were during the fall semester of 2009, and the remaining 72 were during spring of

2010. The drop in number, while significant, is not troublesome; since Writing Centers often experience lower numbers in the spring, it is not surprising that this affects outreach as well. Nevertheless, by maintaining outreach efforts year-round, the outreach coordinator ensures that as many professors and students as possible get to learn about and experience the writing center and all it has to offer.

Of the 224 outreach presentations representatives of the KSU Writing Center made to classes in fall of 2009, 193 (86.2%) were made in English classes, and 31 (13.8%) were made in classes in other departments. In spring of 2010, 48 (66.7%) of outreach presentations were made in English classes while 24 (33.3%) were made in classes in other departments. For the 2009-2010 academic year as a whole, the vast majority of classroom outreach presentations – 141 (79.3%) – were made in English classes.

While the KSU Writing Center outreach program has been successful, the Center has more work to do in order to reach out to the entire university community. Only 26 (20.7%) of the outreach presentations conducted in classrooms in academic year 2009-2010 have been in classes outside the English department. The writing center is currently working on ways to make a larger impact on faculty outside the English department. In addition to sending out emails at the beginning of each semester, the writing center is planning to create flyers to post in academic buildings around campus, as well as in faculty mailboxes. In addition we will contact Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) fellows through email. Our goal is to increase non-English department outreach visits to 30% for the 2010-2011 academic year.

The KSU Writing Center has had an outreach program in place for five years, and every year the program experiences improvements. As a direct result of the outreach program's success, the writing center is making contact with students and faculty across campus. The

outreach program has helped improve general awareness of the KSU Writing Center, and it has improved the general perception as well. Now more than ever the KSU Writing Center is regarded as a place for real writing assistance; while writing consultants still occasionally encounter students who wonders why consultants will not proofread their essays, the assistants have been thrilled to note that many more students come to the writing center asking for “help” than “copyediting.”

General Notes on Outreach at the KSU Writing Center

Outreach takes place throughout the school year. Just as no two semesters in the writing center are ever exactly the same, neither are any two semesters of outreach. However, there are trends of activity are similar in the writing center from semester to semester, and writing center outreach reflects this as well. At different points in the semester, the emphasis tends to be different.

Before the semester begins, the outreach coordinator sends a campus-wide email to professors, inviting them to participate in the writing center’s outreach program by visiting the center during an open house or by signing up for classroom visits or writing center tours with their students. Because many professors are keen to let their students know about the writing center as early as possible, before the first writing assignments are due, classroom visits and writing center tours will likely be concentrated towards the beginning of each semester during weeks two through four. Those who manage and work in the outreach program should therefore be prepared to make many outreach presentations at the beginning of the semester.

In the middle of the semester, during weeks five through eleven, outreach efforts continue but with fewer presentations. Although there are fewer requests for classroom visits in

these weeks, the outreach coordinator works with the director to organize mini-lessons and short workshops. At the end of the semester, during weeks twelve through sixteen, outreach efforts focus on workshops, but the outreach coordinator continues to check the writing center's email account to maintain open communication with professors and to address any concerns or late requests for outreach.

IV

Coming to Conclusions and Looking to the Future

Clearly writing centers benefit from outreach programs that help spread the word about the valuable work that goes on there, and there are many possibilities for writing center outreach. Once a writing center has effectively implemented an outreach program that is effective in furthering the writing center's mission, the writing center director and outreach coordinator may decide to maintain it as it is. They may decide to sustain it at a steady state indefinitely, or they may choose to build on the outreach program. In many, if not most, cases, those who manage an outreach program will eventually find it necessary to expand on it. When this happens, there is a variety of ways they can do that, such as extending outreach to high schools or the community at large, and using the outreach program to merge to writing center with on-campus educational initiatives. In particular, I advocate the expansion of outreach to link the writing center with the rest of campus by linking it up with other, campus-wide, initiatives.

The most obvious initiative with which to merge the writing center through outreach is Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). Because the central goal of the writing center is to help students grow and develop as writers and WAC encourages the incorporation of writing in all classes across the disciplines, the goals of a writing center outreach program can easily be tailored or amended to address the same concerns. At the same time as the writing center helps faculty and students by addressing WAC goals through outreach, it stands to improve its own standing and reputation within the institution it serves. As Mark L. Waldo argues, an institution where WAC is supported must also support its writing center whole-heartedly. He recommends "a home for WAC on middle ground, between the open space of dialogue and the cloister of

English department control. This home needs a physical location that is well known to faculty and students, and that is situated in some central, easily accessible part of campus” (20). The writing center is an ideal home in which a WAC program might reside, and an outreach program can be modified and expanded to make this happen.

As Erika Lindemann points out in *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, the academic world is comprised of various communities of people whose different experiences and understandings are diverse and dependent upon their unique beliefs and assumptions, which are shaped by the fields in which they work and study. Further, “these assumptions are lived in language,” and therefore many teachers strive to help students develop and succeed as writers “by broadening their understanding of how these academic discourse communities function. Writing-across-the-curriculum programs attempt to give students such an understanding” by assigning “a high priority to context” (Lindemann 14). Through outreach, the writing center can further WAC initiatives by acknowledging and helping students understand and navigate the various contexts in which they write.

By communicating with faculty ahead of time, the outreach coordinator can determine what a teacher of a class outside the English department requires for writing assignments. Writing center representatives can then tailor their presentations to address specific concerns of a specific discipline of the class. For example, when giving a mini-lesson as part of a presentation for a science class, a writing center representative would discuss aspects of writing that pertain specifically to scientific writing, as well as APA style of structuring a paper and referencing sources.

Another way an outreach program can merge with and even improve a WAC program is by developing mini-lessons and workshops that are designed to help students writing for specific

disciplines. Many students have only limited experience with significant academic writing. Yet the way students learn to write is by practicing writing (Lindemann 256). Periodic workshops where students in various departments, for example science and history, can go for guided practice and instruction in writing would be extremely beneficial extension of writing center outreach. As Lindemann points out, “guidance in the writing process and discussion of the students’ own work should be the central means of writing instruction. Students should... [receive] frequent, prompt, individualized attention from the teacher” (256). Yet in classes where subjects other than writing itself are the focus, such instruction is often impossible. The writing center can improve this situation by expanding its outreach program to reach such students both through classroom presentations and mini-lessons, as well as in writing workshops where students in these classes are offered personalized writing instruction.

David R. Russell points out in his essay on the origins of WAC in American educational philosophy that “it is not surprising that all but a handful of the many cross-curricular efforts to improve student writing launched over the last hundred years merely asked general faculty members to correct students’ mechanical and grammatical errors or, more commonly, to refer ‘deficient’ students to a ‘remedial’ program run by composition instructors” (6). This is connected with the common misconception that the writing center is a place where teachers, especially those not in the English department, send students for remedial help. Unfortunately it is often the case that teachers in departments other than English may not ever have been trained to teach writing, despite being compelled to give writing assignments to their students (Lindemann 255). By working with such teachers through an outreach program, a writing center can make connections across the institution it serves while helping students and faculty.

Appendix A

Outreach Presentation Guidelines

1 - Introduction

Ideas and strategies for first conferences.

Preface

These materials address the sometimes difficult first moments of a conference: acquainting the student with the tutor *and* the tutoring process, discussing the assignment and the student's concerns, and setting realistic goals for the session.

As you go through the materials in this section, consider strategies for putting both student and tutor at ease, and try to envision how tutors can lay the groundwork at the very beginning of a session for a productive discussion of writing.

Follow-up Activities and Questions

1. Why might students be apprehensive about working with a writing tutor?
2. Develop a "script" for introductions. How will you greet students? What kinds of questions will you initially ask about the student? The assignment? The student's writing? (The script need not be long—approximately one page is fine.)

2 - Planning/Drafting

Exploring ways to work with a student with a new paper.

Preface

Students come to the Writing Center with papers at a variety of stages in development. This module explores the possibilities of working with a student who has just begun work on a paper; the student has an assignment, some thoughts, but little else.

Consider how, through techniques such as questioning and listening, tutors can help students articulate ideas and consider appropriate directions for a first draft.

Follow-up Activities and Questions

1. What techniques do you use to begin drafting your own papers?
2. Look at a paper assignment you haven't seen before (see accompanying samples*, if needed) and answer the following questions: What do you know about the topic? What about this topic might interest you? What is the purpose for writing this paper? Who is the intended audience and what do they know/need to know? How is this like writing you've done before? What structure is most appropriate? What sorts of prewriting techniques will be most useful for this kind of assignment?

3 - Revising

Working with a student on an existing draft.

Preface

This module depicts the most common activity in a session: working with a student on an existing draft. While the way these sessions proceed depends on many factors, including the writer and the writing, there are some key principles to making the session successful for all concerned.

Consider how tutors can insure that writers maintain responsibility for their own work while simultaneously guiding students through the revision process.

Follow-up Activities and Questions

1. Why is it so important for the writer to maintain control of his or her own paper?

2. Make a thorough list of all the concerns a writer (like yourself) might have about a piece of writing? Now rank those concerns in the order you would address them during a tutoring session.

4 - Editing and Proofreading

Working with students to edit and proofread for themselves.

Preface

While the primary focus of a tutorial session should never be *only* editing or proofreading, many students will seek—and benefit from—this kind of help. Ultimately, most sessions will involve some attention to sentence-level concerns.

Consider how tutors can not only assist students in identifying and correcting errors on their current draft but can also teach them strategies for avoiding errors in future work.

Follow-up Activities and Questions

1. Look at a piece of your own writing. Read it through silently to check for sentence-level errors. Now read the same piece of writing aloud. Finally, read each sentence in your paper individually—starting with the final sentence and working backwards. How did these strategies affect your assessment of your writing? Why might these techniques allow you to catch errors differently than if you proofread silently?
2. Carefully examine your word usage throughout the paper. Highlight any words or phrases that you use frequently. Do you overuse certain words or phrases (for example, “there are,” “this/that,” forms of “to be”)? How might you revise your word choice to make your writing more effective?
3. What strategies might tutors use to guide students in understanding how to find their own sentence-level errors?

5 - Wrap Up

Creating positive reinforcement and understanding of the writing process.

Preface

The ending of a tutorial session can be just as important as the beginning. Students who leave a session with a sense of positive reinforcement and a better understanding of their own writing processes are not only more likely to write better papers but to return to the Writing Center for help in the future.

Consider how tutors can end sessions by reinforcing the work done in the session and by building students' confidence in their own abilities.

Follow-up Activities and Questions

1. Look back at the examination of your own writing and writing process that you have conducted throughout these five modules. Make a list of the major issues in your writing that you feel you do well. Make a list of those components that you often find need work. How would this sort of exercise benefit students?

2. Just as you did in the first module, develop a possible "script" for how you might conclude a session. What kinds of questions might you ask of the writer? How might you close on a positive note?

Appendix B

Outline for Writing Center Research Workshop

1. Introductions
 - a. Have each person state discipline for which they are currently writing a research paper. You might want to ask what style format they are to use.
 - b. Ask if anyone has been to the Writing Center before.
 - c. Mention that this workshop will be aimed at all research papers but that for specific one-on-one help on an individual paper, we hope they'll come work with us individually.

2. Talk about "Why do we do research?"
 - a. To help us find answers to questions.
 - b. To enter into a conversation on a particular topic.
 - c. To support our point of view or argument.
 - d. NOT so we can "report" on what we found.

3. Transition into "How do you incorporate research into your own writing?"
 - a. Make sure your own ideas always remain the most important part of the paper.
 - b. *DO* something with all the research in your paper. Don't just repeat/report the research you found.

- c. Use the MEAL Plan for each paragraph or section of research:
 - i. **MAIN IDEA:** State (usually in a topic sentence) what argument you *and* the research are making.
 - ii. **EVIDENCE:** This is your research. Research is evidence for *your* argument/the paper's thesis. You can include this through summary, paraphrase, or quotation (or some combination of the three).
 - iii. **ANALYSIS:** After you include a piece of research, you *must* analyze it. This can mean interpreting the research, asking questions of it, agreeing or disagreeing with it (& explaining why, etc).
 - iv. **LINK:** As you near the end of your paragraph or section, you need to take a sentence or more to link the discussion back to your **MAIN IDEA** and/or overall thesis. You can't assume that your readers will make this connection. You need to spell it out for them.

4. Structures such as the MEAL Plan help writers to incorporate research into their papers effectively. Now, it's time to review how to present that research so that we aren't accidentally plagiarizing.
 - a. Explain difference between summary, paraphrase, and quoting.
 - b. Explain when you use one versus the other, and particularly emphasize how quoting should be done very selectively and infrequently. Talk about those circumstances where quoting is appropriate.

5. Show them the original [Gardner] passage and the examples. Discuss.

6. Show them the original [Lester] passage. Give them 5 or so minutes to write their own paraphrase. Have volunteers read their paraphrases and discuss. Then show the model “good” ones, and discuss.

7. Q & A

8. Give out WC fliers; encourage them to come, talk about what we can do, etc.
Demonstrate on the computer how to make an appointment online.

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Presentations

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