

REARTICULATING THE ROLE OF PEER TUTORS
AS CHANGE AGENTS IN U.S. AND EUROPEAN
WRITING CENTERS

by

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This research is dedicated to my mother,
who gave me life and taught me the wisdom to live it well.

I love you, Mom.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine the professional role of peer tutors in writing centers in Europe and the U.S., highlighting transferable skillsets learned outside of tutoring. After exploring the work of European and U.S. scholars such as Girgensohn, Trimbur, Bräuer, and Pemberton, I explain how peer tutors' professional skills manifest in organizing, presenting, and attending events for peer tutors. I then present Tennessee Tutor Collaboration Day and European Peer Tutor Day as current models of peer-to-peer (P2P) collaboration and explore the benefits and barriers of each. After proposing three transnational models for improving P2P collaboration across borders, I offer practical suggestions for how they can be implemented. I conclude by discussing further implications of P2P collaboration between U.S. and European writing centers that will potentially catalyze new approaches to research and cultivate richer scholarship for the international writing center community.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASN	Academisch Schrijfcentrum Nijmegen
CCCC	Conference on College Composition and Communication
CMS	Content Management System
EATAW	European Association for Teachers of Academic Writing
ERIC	English wRiting Improvement Center
EUV	European University Viadrina
EWCA	European Writing Centers Association
HoA	Google Hangouts on Air
IWCA	International Writing Centers Association
JoSch	Journal der Schreibberatung
LNAP	Long Night Against Procrastination
MAWCA	Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
MTSU	Middle Tennessee State University
NPTC	National Peer Tutor Conference (Germany)
P2P	Peer-to-Peer
SWCA	Southeastern Writing Centers Association
TuColla	Tutor Collaboration Day
WLN	Writing Lab Newsletter
WRAB	Writing Research Across Borders

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

“A person often meets his destiny on the road he took to avoid it.”
— Jean de la Fontaine

I became a writing tutor by accident. When I was an undergraduate at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) in 2011 studying for my B.A. in literary studies in the English department, my advisor Dr. Ron Kates told me I could satisfy one of my minor requirements with a course entitled “Introduction to Peer Tutoring in Writing.” I had no idea what the course entailed, but it sounded like something that would be a fun departure from my other English courses. Little did I know, the course was a tutor training practicum that prepared students for working in the writing center. I had heard of the writing center on campus, but I was not familiar with its purpose or how it operated. My assumption was that the writing center was for “bad writers,” which did not interest me at the time, but those assumptions were soon shattered. During the Spring 2011 course taught by Dr. Wes Houp, I was introduced to the writing center community and explored the methods and practices of tutoring and how they have changed over the years. One of the first articles my classmates and I read was Kenneth Bruffee’s “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind,’” in which he illuminates the process by which ideas are exchanged organically and that a tutoring session is, in its purest distillation, a conversation (642). I went immediately to the writing center to see these conversations in action. When I first stepped into the writing center space, the exchange of knowledge hung in the air like a mist; it was overwhelming. I then realized the writing center is a place for learning, and I wanted in.

As part of my coursework in the tutor training class, I was asked to visit the writing center once a week and keep an observation/reflection journal. I wrote the following entry after my first visit to the writing center:

I have no idea what to expect. My instructor has told me to come into the writing center without letting the staff know why I'm here. I'm undercover, scoping out the scene and picking up the vibes. There are a few sessions going on, each pair of tutor and tutee sit beside each other, not across from each other. This seems to break down a barrier of perceived authority, the idea that 'I'm over here and you're over there.' It is interesting because the tutor is by definition a peer and not one to be recognized as a figure of academic authority. (Hardy)

The idea of working with students as a peer resonated with me for the duration of my tutor education, and I dedicated much of my time learning about two essential aspects of peer tutoring that would become the focus of my tutoring philosophy and pedagogy: communication and collaboration.

As I became acclimated to writing center culture, I learned that, going into a session, tutors should be focused on the fact that they are engaging in conversation with another human being. This conversation requires questions that inform tutors of students' assignments, students' specific needs, and how much of the assignment has been completed. During this brief but intense assessment, the tutor has a better idea of how to proceed with the session; however, the tutor's goals might be different from that of the student writer. For this reason, strong communication skills are crucial in order to establish a common ground for an effective session to take place.

In addition to strong communication skills, an effective tutor must also exercise competent collaboration skills. My tutoring philosophy has evolved during my time in the writing center (2011-present), but I maintain that the tutor/student writer relationship is a bit like collaborative archaeology. Both parties actively engage in uncovering the finer details of a written work, a process not unlike digging a fossil out of the ground¹. The piece of writing is a fossil that needs to be extracted carefully, using shovels for discovery, brushes for clarity, and more delicate tools for cleaning and refining the artifact for presentation. This collaborative act encourages the tutor and the student writer to approach a written work playfully, getting their hands dirty, as it were, while still unearthing the full potential of a writer's work as delicately and as painlessly as possible. The tutor/tutor relationship can be approached in a similar manner, which is what I am examining in this thesis.

Effective communication and collaboration is important for helping students improve their writing, but tutors should also be concerned with the ways in which they communicate and collaborate with other tutors, particularly those in other centers. When I participated in Tutor Collaboration Day (TuColla)² in 2012, I met tutors and administrators from other centers in Tennessee. Not only did I learn new tutoring strategies at TuColla, but I also gained new insights into how our centers operate differently. Throughout this collaborative experience, I also learned that a writing center serves as its own resource for tutors and administrators, but both groups will benefit more from communicating with those in other centers and by sharing resources. Without

¹ I came upon this metaphor while reading Stephen King's *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, a work that informs my own approach to the writing process as well as my tutoring philosophy.

² TuColla is a peer-organized and peer-led mini-conference for writing center tutors in Tennessee.

constant revision of a center's day-to-day operations, administrators risk their center becoming stagnant and jaded, and even writing center tutors are not exempt from such danger. Tutors, as well as administrators, expand their resources by establishing closer relationships with centers in their region and across the globe. These relationships prosper with the grassroots efforts of peer tutors in the form of peer-to-peer (P2P) collaboration that starts in their own writing centers and expands to those in other states and outside the country. Once I completed the tutor training practicum and learned of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), the way these P2P relationships work interested me enough to research their connections.

When I first began working in the MTSU Writing Center as an undergraduate tutor in 2012, some of my colleagues and I presented on a panel at the IWCA conference in San Diego³. I was intrigued by the idea of meeting other writing center professionals from all over the world at an international conference. But the presentations, vendors, food, and San Diego sun grabbed hold of me, and my interest in international writing centers was pushed aside for the moment. In 2014, I found the conference program while moving into a new house, and my curiosity returned. At the end of the program, the presenters are listed along with their institutional contact information, and I decided to look for those presenters who had come from outside the U.S. What I found still surprises me.

In an attempt to include the growing number of writing centers outside the U.S., the National Writing Centers Association became the *International* Writing Centers Association in 2000, but unfortunately few international representatives have attended

³ October 25-27, 2015.

IWCA conferences in recent years⁴. For example, only seven presented at the 2012 conference (out of 862), and in 2010, four presenters from outside the U.S. attended (out of 708 total attendees). Most telling, in 2008, eight representatives from outside the U.S. presented and, with the exception of one, took part in a roundtable discussion of “world writing centers.” These figures show that *less than 1%* of presenters at IWCA conferences have represented non-U.S. writing centers. Further, the IWCA conference has only been held in the U.S., which has made access difficult for international representatives who travel longer distances and at greater costs. Writing centers outside the U.S. have been marginalized by an incomplete move from a national writing center association to an international one.

I still wanted to know what is happening in those *other* writing centers. While attempting to answer this question, I discovered the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA), an affiliate of IWCA. I had been working in the field as a student for a few years, and I had never heard of EWCA. The association was accepting proposals for their upcoming conference in Germany⁵, and I immediately submitted one and was subsequently accepted to present a poster on connecting writing centers across borders, which was the theme of the 2014 conference. With my poster (see Appendix A), I proposed a virtual peer tutor conference (discussed further in Chapter 4), and because of the subject matter, I was invited by conference organizers to present my ideas at Peer Tutor Day⁶, an international event that precedes the biannual EWCA conference. Similar in design to TuColla’s organizers, Peer Tutor Day’s organizers invites tutors from all

⁴ For more information, please see: <http://writingcenters.org/events-2/past-conferences/>. Participation numbers are only available from 2007 – present.

⁵ July 19-22, 2014.

⁶ July 18-19, 2014.

over the world to take part in P2P collaboration for two days, discussing problems their centers share and working together to solve them. I was touched by the passion and enthusiasm tutors exhibited at this event, and my understanding of various social, cultural, and institutional contexts deepened because I was “othered.” I was forced to interrogate my own idea of a writing center’s goals and where I stood in achieving them. After returning to the U.S., I thought a great deal about events like TuColla and Peer Tutor Day, wondering how their approaches to P2P collaboration might inspire new avenues for international exchange and lasting relationships between writing centers, especially now that the role of the peer tutor is beginning to change.

Participating in Peer Tutor Day and the EWCA conference challenged my perceptions of writing centers in the U.S. and abroad. The writing center model is one of the great U.S. exports in higher education; it can be found on nearly every continent. Centers are quickly proliferating across the globe, and most of those outside the U.S. need help ensuring their sustainability and development. Adapting the U.S. writing center model for other cultural and institutional contexts is no easy task, but some centers in various parts of the world are doing extraordinary things that tutors and administrators in the U.S. would do well to investigate.

The peer tutor’s role is evolving, increasingly becoming a professional role in the writing center community, one that is shifting from an emphasis on tutor identity to a professional identity. The skills tutors learn and tasks they execute qualify as valuable workplace experience, and tutors benefit from having a community of their own to develop those skills before reaching the job market.

In the last few years, on both sides of the Atlantic, peer tutors have been included on the boards of international and regional writing center associations (e.g. EWCA, SWCA, IWCA, MAWCA⁷), which makes evident a shift towards the tutor as a professional role; however, no *formal* peer tutor community exists. As board members, peer tutors are given more recognition in the field, and this recognition could help them to create a community of their own. With a professional affiliation, tutors can voice their concerns to a larger audience, but a formally recognized tutor community would serve to better amplify and fortify a tutor's identity as an emerging professional.

Tutors who take ownership of this role enhance the writing centers in which they work by communicating with tutors in other centers. By tutors improving themselves and connecting with other tutors, the writing centers in which they work are improved and better connected by proxy. Certainly by attending conferences, peer tutors bring back knowledge to improve their centers in various ways, but tutors are not as connected to each other as they could be.

In this thesis, I show that peer tutors in the U.S. and Europe are taking on additional responsibilities in the writing center unrelated to tutoring, helping them to create a professional identity, develop transferable skills for other workplace environments, and initiate new forms of P2P collaboration to improve international writing center work. In Chapter 2, I present a literature review that explains the history and evolution of the peer tutor's role in centers on both sides of the Atlantic. I provide an ethnographic description (a qualitative means of gathering evidence using interviews and

⁷ European Writing Centers Association, Southeastern Writing Centers Association, International Writing Centers Association, and Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association.

introspection) in Chapter 3 of current models of P2P tutor collaboration, focusing on TuColla and Peer Tutor Day, along with barriers that inhibit these models. In Chapter 4, I propose three transnational P2P models for tutors to improve interaction with each other on a global scale and explain the benefits and challenges of each. I explore the further implications of P2P collaboration for tutors, students, administrators, and the writing center field in Chapter 5 and offer suggestions for further research that involves collaboration across different writing center cultures.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

“Even with a critical mass, a group has no power, no clout without an organ to communicate its platform and mission.”
— Michael Pemberton

Professionals in the writing center field who come from institutions in both Europe and the U.S. express varying perspectives of peer tutors in their scholarship. Geographically and conceptually, their scholarship occupies two separate hemispheres. Both hemispheres are hitting similar strides, apparent in the research presented here, but an interesting trend in E.U. scholarship has surfaced, with the (professional) peer tutor at its center. In Europe, writing centers are a relatively new idea; the first one did not open until 1993 after Andrea Frank brought the U.S. writing center model to her home institution at Bielefeld University (Bräuer, “Freiburg Model”). In the U.S., however, writing centers have had nearly forty years to situate themselves in response to changes in higher education. European centers face the same struggles, as their own system of higher education shifts towards degree programs and curricula comparable to those in U.S. institutions.

The writing center field is starting to join together in the same way as the field of composition. In 1966, cross-cultural communication between the U.S. and Great Britain resulted in a dramatic change in the teaching of writing. Scholars and educators from the U.S. and Great Britain gathered at Dartmouth College to participate in the Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English (Harris). This meeting helped shift writing instruction away from the tradition of “formal teaching of grammar and usage” towards

engaging students “directly in the writing process in a non-prescriptive atmosphere” (Hairston 81). The Dartmouth seminar helped define and unify the field of composition in a global context, and cross-cultural communication among peer tutors (as well as administrators) can potentially result in a similar impact on the writing center field.

Current writing center scholarship reflects a struggle for credibility, a situation in which peer tutors are now finding themselves, especially as writing center studies continues to gain traction in the greater academic community. The history of the peer tutor in both U.S. and European contexts communicates the tutor’s various roles in furthering writing center research, contributing to the sustainability of the center, and encouraging the cross-pollination of and implementation of ideas in new and interesting ways with and without administrative support. The peer tutor is an emerging professional who acquires and utilizes transferable skillsets in a professional atmosphere, and tutors in both U.S. and European writing centers are now acting as change agents in the field by building their own professional network across national, institutional, and cultural borders.

Contextualizing the Struggles of the Peer Tutor in U.S. Writing Centers

Although the history of the writing center can be traced back to early strides in composition over 130 years ago, the modern writing center did not begin to take shape until the Open Admissions era of the early 1970s (Gillespie and Lerner 142, 145). In Elizabeth Boquet’s article “‘Our Little Secret’: A History of Writing Centers Pre- to Post-Open Admission,” she states that the writing center was originally “conceived of not as a place at all but rather as a method of instruction” (466). The goal of writing center work

shifted from remediating unprepared writers to supplementing writing instruction outside the classroom (Gillespie and Lerner 145). From the turbulent writing center times in the 1970s to the present, proponents of the writing center, including peer tutors, have had to adapt in order to survive. Resistance from faculty, the institution, and the greater academic community has been an issue with which writing center personnel continue to grapple, but having a forum for discussing this and other matters helped build a support system for the profession, which began with the *Writing Lab Newsletter (WLN)* in 1977.

WLN is arguably the single most important publication in the history of writing center scholarship, largely because its own development mirrors that of the field: foundations (volumes from the late 1970s), the struggle for legitimization (volumes from the 1980s and 1990s), and looking forward (current volumes), which are further discussed in “Our Documented Growth as a Field and Community: An Analysis of the Writing Lab Newsletter” (Phelan and Weber). *WLN* marks significant shifts in writing center scholarship from discussions about what it means to be a “writing center professional” to building a theoretical foundation for practice and research. When Muriel Harris started *WLN*, writing centers were still on the periphery of academia, struggling for visibility and to justify their own existence. In “The Writing Lab Newsletter as History: Tracing the Growth of a Scholarly Community,” Michael Pemberton states in 2003, “[n]ot only must writing center professionals make efforts to protect themselves institutionally, but they also must promote a student-centered, collaborative, process-oriented environment in the center itself, driving their own pedagogies rather than being driven by those which might be more administratively convenient” (29). The freedom to implement their own pedagogical ideals, however, took a great deal of compromise and

patience. As writing centers gained credibility in the institution, a professional community began to emerge, and *WLN* was its primary forum for intellectual exchange. *WLN* provided a space for discussion that did not exist at that time in journals like *College Composition and Communication (CCC)* and *College English* (Pemberton 28). Until 1980, when the *Writing Center Journal (WCJ)* was first published, *WLN* was the only portal through which one had access to information about job openings, calls for proposals, and conferences related to the field (30). As a rich resource for writing center administrators, *WLN* thrived despite the odds and was instrumental in building a professional network that helped construct an identity for a relatively unknown specialization.

Constructing a professional identity in a marginalized field requires constant negotiation of institutional constraints. In Judith Fishman's article "The Writing Center – What is its Center?" she reflects on the necessary credibility writing center professionals must earn within their respective institutions and within the greater academic community. She addresses this importance of survival and how to effectively manage feelings of vulnerability and instability while existing in this liminal space (1-4). In order to combat these insecurities in the early 1980s, professionals needed to ground their work in the theoretical underpinnings of composition studies. In Stephen North's "Us n' Howie: The Shape of Our Ignorance" he argues that writing center professionals should learn more about the work of composition theorists in order to "identify with and for our writers, the composition process they use now" (5). A number of concerns began appearing more frequently, taking the form of calls to action about gaining credibility within the institution, advocating for professional status, and the need for a theoretical framework.

These problems can only be resolved if people working in writing centers “are well-read, well-trained, and willing to wage war on the battleground of theory for the pedagogies they believe are the most effective” (Pemberton 30). Peer tutors, I argue, are waging their own war on a very different (battle)field: *their own*. They are fighting to change how they are perceived in the roles made available to them in writing center studies. As the peer tutor metamorphoses into a paraprofessional role, these developmental changes must be met with the same accommodations as writing center professionals during their own struggle for credibility. In other words, peer tutors deserve both a forum for sharing ideas and professional status as well as a theoretical framework. Although writing center publications and organizations have recently begun to address these changes, peer tutors are largely enacting change for themselves.

What was first designed as a means of administrative communication became a forum for peer tutors in 1984 when *WLN* began welcoming the contributions of peer tutors with a dedicated Tutor’s Corner (now Tutor’s Column). *WLN* is now in the process of rebranding as *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, a peer-reviewed journal that will allow both professional scholars and peer tutors to gain substantially more viable credibility. *WLN*’s website also hosts a blog called “Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders” (CWCAB)¹, which extends conversations about writing centers and writing programs outside the U.S., and their current editors solicit more contributions with a stronger emphasis on non-U.S. writing centers. Other online writing center publications also welcome the scholarly work of peer tutors, both online and in print, such as *Praxis*, *PeerCentered*, and IWCA’s official journal *The Peer Review*, which is scheduled to

¹ <http://www.wlnjournal.org/blog/>

release its first issue in the fall of 2015. But peer tutors' contributions to the field are not limited to writing center journals alone. They can communicate their research and knowledge through interdisciplinary publications and those with emphases on linguistics, composition, and pedagogy. Clearly the opportunities for peer tutors to have their voices heard in a scholarly forum are increasing exponentially as their paraprofessional role as junior scholars extends further from the traditional role of being "only a tutor."

Tutoring is not only the primary service of the center, but it is also the center's defining and most widely understood characteristic, and this is a concern in writing center studies in the 2010s. Jackie Grutsch McKinney states in her book *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers* that "the idea that writing centers are places for one-to-one tutoring seems so commonsensical that it is implicit if not explicit in nearly every writing center publication" (58-59). As Grutsch McKinney argues, however, tutoring students is not all a writing center does. Such tasks might include conducting workshops, writing client report forms, maintaining the center's social media outlets, creating and revising resources for students, and hosting writing groups. These tasks are often excluded from conversations about what a writing center does because "non-tutoring work does not fit into the writing center grand narrative" (76). Peer tutors must wear a number of hats and perform various roles external to their default role as tutors, and in the process, learn and utilize skillsets beyond tutoring. These administrative tasks "are seldom theorized as something potentially pedagogically important on their own" (76); however, their importance is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Contextualizing the Struggles of the Peer Tutor in European Writing Centers

Since the first European writing center appeared in 1993, the evolution of the role of the peer tutor in a European context has not been so different from that of its U.S. counterpart. Many of the same resources for tutor training are used, and their place in the writing center's administrative hierarchy is relatively the same; however, many writing centers in Europe lack the financial and institutional support afforded to those in the U.S., which require peer tutors to assist their administrators more intensely in communicating the center's agenda to stakeholders and by executing tasks beyond tutoring. These tutors in European centers also grapple with applying writing center scholarship written for practice in U.S. centers, and often challenges emerge for tutors while in training. In Tracy Santa's 2002 article, "Writing Center Orthodoxies as Damocles' Sword: An International Perspective," she suggests that concrete directives from tutor training manuals encourage resistance to theory and practice that do not easily import into her center's context at the American University in Bulgaria. Drawing off the work of Peter Vandenberg, she posits that engaging her staff in conversations about the professional discourse of writing centers forces them to locate "vestiges of their own experience and culture" within a rigid framework dictated by American writing center theory *for* American education systems (30). Instead of adopting prescriptive rules, tutors in international writing centers should explore models that allow more flexibility in practice, Santa argues. Her tutors "exhibit a *need* to improvise which is at the heart of all effective writing center practice," and improvisation should be encouraged when prescriptive practices fail "to accommodate competing education principles and goals in a multinational environment" (36). Tutors in these multinational contexts "play off, against, and with the theoretical and experiential

knowledge [they] accrue, the confusion they confront, and the fresh, lucid insight they offer as writing center practice becomes a global phenomenon” (37), and administrators must invite their tutors to take part in an ongoing professional dialogue about their work and authorize their voices in a global context.

The ethos of particular writing centers in Europe demonstrates the peer tutor has helped construct identity for their centers in various ways. Katrin Girgensohn, Academic Director of the *Schriebzentrum* (“Writing Center”) at the European University Viadrina (EUV) in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany, addresses this issue in “Writing Center Leadership: An Empirical Study,” as well as in frequent blog posts made while a visiting professor in 2012 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Girgensohn focuses on how writing center directors can ensure the success of their centers, identifying these central ideas:

- collaborative learning
- peer tutor education
- finding and keeping excellent staff
- working with faculty
- funding
- visibility
- positioning the writing center as an academic unit
- writing center research
- professional networks. (“Results of a Research Expedition”)

Girgensohn’s ideas intersect and inform each other, but innovative writing center research, she suggests, occurs “often with the support of peer tutors, sometimes with additional funding and always in a collaborative way” (par. 15). Although much of a

center's success depends on the director's ability to manage and coordinate day-to-day operations, experimentation with and implementation of new ideas happens when peer tutors lead the charge, which informs the center's positioning within the institutional structure and therefore increases the likelihood of long-term sustainability. Girgensohn also speaks of the flexibility and adaptability of the writing center as necessary traits (par. 18), but the "success of all those strategies, actions and interactions is strongly dependent on the writing center director's stance of collaborative learning. The more he or she is willing to share authority and responsibility and to appreciate others as experts, the more sustainable this work will be" (par. 19). These creative, collaborative practices coming out of Germany promise to reshape and redefine the writing center community and, as a result, continue the rearticulation of peer tutors' roles globally.

Tutors' experiences in the center not only help construct their professional identity, but they also inform the growth of the center itself. Girgensohn's article, "Mutual Growing: How Student Experience can Shape Writing Centers," shows how ideas of autonomy and collaboration, for both writing support and writing center leadership, led to the writing center's growth at EUV. Financial and staffing challenges continue to put strains on day-to-day operations and create doubts about long-term sustainability, largely because writing centers in Europe are "too dependent on the different contexts they serve to allow for universally valid advice that could guide writing center leaders" (127). Girgensohn's center opened in 2007 and has since served as a model for developing writing centers across Germany and greater Europe. She argues that "the center's success and expansion depended primarily on the efforts of student tutors" and that "their active involvement and participation led to the growth of the

writing center” (127-8), which she credits to their ability to work both autonomously and collaboratively. Her own approach to leadership was “strongly influenced by the pedagogical ethos that the center tries to espouse: to respect the autonomy of each writer while working collaboratively on the writer’s writing process” (128). Working with students and within the writing center team must happen synergistically to generate a “mutual growing process,” a symbiotic relationship that contributes to the overall success of the center. Tutors’ experience extends “far beyond training of writing skills,” Girgensohn claims, and it acts to help them “develop critical thinking skills” and become “a part of an academic community” in a professional way (130). Administrators must support their team of tutors with the development of these skills in mind because tutors are on the frontlines; they are the ones who are entrenched in the writing center’s pedagogy and who “co-construct the knowledge the writing center needs” (134). Peer tutors act as a membrane through which this knowledge passes, acquiring it autonomously and synthesizing it collaboratively amongst themselves, and administrators at EUV recognize this process as part of a greater team effort towards the continuing growth of their center.

Another European writing center that developed in conjunction with efforts from its peer tutors is the English wRiting Improvement Center (ERIC) at the University of Łódź in Łódź, Poland. Wishing to start a writing center at a Polish university, Professor Łukasz Salski took advice he received in 2008 from Ann Mott, director of the writing center at the American University of Paris and then chair of the European Writing Centers Association, and with “a table and two chairs,” he accomplished his mission (Reichelt et al.). In fall 2011, using his experience in teaching English as a Foreign

Language (EFL), Salski and his tutors began operating their center with limited resources and minimal training materials. These tutors presently receive no monetary compensation for their work; they are tutors by choice. Since the students they serve are mostly Polish speakers exclusively studying English, tutors must, like in many European centers, work competently in both languages. Despite their challenges, peer tutors working at ERIC have helped establish long-term sustainability for their center through their continuing service, and ERIC, like the writing center at EUV, serves as a model center for other Polish institutions to emulate.

Another European writing center that has been successfully established with the help of peer tutors can be found in the Netherlands. Founded in early 2004, the *Academisch Schrifcentrum Nijmegen* (ASN), or Academic Writing Centre, at Radboud University in Nijmegen was the first writing center established there. In response to more writing intensive courses and the resulting increase in writing assistance needed, Ingrid Stassen and Carel Jansen approached Radboud with plans for a writing center based on the success of one at Stellenbosch University in South Africa and with inspiration from Purdue University in the U.S. After multiple positive evaluations every two years since 2004, the University continued to renew its funding of ASN until 2013, after which time alternative funding resources would have to be sought out (Stassen and Jansen 300). Most of the tutors at ASN are graduate students who were trained in giving development-directed feedback, conducting student and faculty workshops, and learning to work with students studying in both Dutch and English. Tutors support the goals of ASN by finding new ways to connect with and learn from tutors in other centers, especially by volunteering to host an event called Peer Tutor Day in 2015, which I further discuss in

Chapter 3. Efforts of ASN's administrators and peer tutors received positive reactions from faculty and, as of 2011, had inspired the development of four more writing centers at Dutch universities based on ASN as a model (Stassen and Jansen 299-300).

The success of these writing centers in Germany, Poland, and the Netherlands exemplify how integral peer tutors are to the development and growth of their respective centers, which further demonstrates how these centers inspire the proliferation of others. Peer tutors may render services to students, but they are also proponents of innovation in writing centers' professional and academic discourse communities on both sides of the Atlantic.

Cross-Connections: Problems in Both U.S. and European Writing Centers

Many writing centers continue to struggle with justifying their own existence and communicating their viability, and this is true not only in the U.S. but abroad as well. In Europe, there are so few writing centers in comparison to the number in the U.S., and, as Girgensohn explains, they are often “institutionally invisible” (“Mutual Growing” 127). In other words, these centers often fly under the radar of their respective institutions. As of 2012, Germany had about 13 documented writing centers (“Exciting Things” par. 2); now, the number is closer to 50. Even though fewer writing centers exist in Germany than in the U.S., German centers have experienced the same developmental progress but on a compacted timeline. Girgensohn claims that comparing the writing centers of both countries is “like comparing the achievements of a small child with those of an experienced, grown-up person” (“Exciting Things” par. 1). Certainly writing centers in the U.S. have had more time and opportunities to establish a sturdy field within

academia, and most universities have some writing center model in place; however, smaller centers in the U.S. still encounter conflict with the higher institutional echelon. Centers not yet firmly rooted in the institutional structure may be seen as expendable, regardless of where in the world the center is located. In other words, U.S. and European writing centers share common concerns about their stability within their respective institutions, which makes it more imperative for these writing center cultures to better converge and help each other; peer tutors can help make this happen.

U.S. Perspectives on the (Professional) Role of the Peer Tutor

Since the inception of writing center practice and theory, scholarship in the field has focused primarily on the work done with the student writer, or tutee, rather than peer tutors themselves: conducting the session, working with ESL students, tutoring strategically, and other related topics. Aside from peer tutors working with student writers, the role of peer tutor as a career-building role has been largely overlooked. In “What They Take with Them: Findings from the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project,” Brad Hughes, Paula Gillespie, and Harvey Kail make a second claim for peer tutoring: working as a peer tutor is a legitimate professional, personal, and academic development opportunity in which one develops and utilizes a variety of skillsets that transfers to his or her career post-university. After surveying former peer tutors from three U.S. universities in 2010, the authors present findings that demonstrate tutors developed:

- a new relationship with writing,
- analytical power,

- a listening presence,
- skills, values, and abilities vital in their professions,
- skills, values and abilities vital in family and in relationships,
- earned confidence in themselves,
- and a deeper understanding of and commitment to collaborative learning.

(14)

Empirical evidence collected during these surveys suggest participants' writing had, because of their experience as peer tutors, become more precise, more organized, and more argumentative (24), and they developed an ability to solve problems creatively through "active listening" (28). The most important finding, however, is the extent to which tutoring experience informed the pedagogy of those who became teachers. From the writing center, these former tutors brought to their teaching a "particular approach to teaching and learning: a deep respect for students and a collaborative ethic as well as a commitment to student-centered instruction" (31). Reflecting on their experience, some participants in the study even credit the writing center for inspiring them to pursue teaching as a career, using phrases that demonstrate metacognition, such as "made it possible for me to recognize myself as a teacher" and "made me conscious of my skills as a teacher" (32). Their roles as peer tutors helped them to connect with their professional roles as teachers by transforming their tutor identity into a teacher identity, one that demonstrates "a newly developing sense of self, a self with confidence" (39). Not all tutors become teachers, but the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project makes evident the skills and values tutors take with them beyond their time in the writing center.

As evident in the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project, attitudes towards the professional role of peer tutors have changed significantly over the years. In John Trimbur's 1987 article "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms," he describes tutors wrestling with a "conflict of loyalties" and navigating competing identifications and responsibilities in which their student peers and the academic institution are concerned. Professionalizing tutors, in Trimbur's opinion, takes them out of the "social medium of co-learning" and gives them expertise on writing instruction reserved for academic professionals and their culture, which should be instead rendered within the context of students' culture (27). Trimbur argues that "we need to resist the temptation to professionalize peer tutors by treating them as apprentices and by designing training courses as introductions to the field of teaching writing. We need to treat peer tutors as students, not as paraprofessionals or preprofessionals, and to recognize that their community is not necessarily our own" (27). The peer tutor's role today, however, can and must be considered professional in some respects. Whether tutors are undergraduates who simply like to talk about writing or graduate students with research interests in composition, their role is constructed in a professional space. Treating tutors as merely students contradicts what writing center professionals have fought to uphold. The field cannot recruit younger supporters and inspire future writing scholars without having tutors engage with the field's professional community and its scholarship. The ways in which tutors are trained help prepare them to negotiate this and other workplace situations such as the classroom; this makes fulfilling the role of peer tutor a stepping stone for their future careers, necessitating that they practice metacognitive awareness of the transfer of skills taking place.

Metacognition and transfer are current topics of interest in composition studies², and they have pedagogical implications for writing centers as well. By directors addressing the needs of students and by encouraging tutors to develop professionally, tutors have potential to transfer skills and knowledge from their tutor role (Driscoll and Harcourt 2). Tutor training practicums facilitate this learning in a way that promotes transfer of knowledge and skills that are not only applicable to tutoring (near transfer), but also in connection to their career goals (far transfer). Far transfer is useful in constructing a generic professional identity, an armature on which the tutoring role is worn like a costume or uniform, a badge of a tutor's indoctrination into an academic enterprise. Echoing the findings of the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project, this generic professional identity serves to act in similar ways outside writing center work. Tutors can abstract universal skills and apply them to other workplace situations, but only if their training allows for them to reflect on the construction of their identities.

Discussions about transfer are important to the construction of peer tutor identity, but tutor training must also address the instructive role tutors assume in the center. Alison Bright argues in favor of tutor education programs that focus on the development of teacher identity, which better prepares tutors to “assume the professional identity of a writing tutor [...] beyond the constraints of the tutorial” (22). Connecting teacher identity to the construction of a “relevant tutor identity,” she identifies four behavioral characteristics of a strong teacher identity that include flexibility, community membership, regular engagement with reflective practices, and pedagogical and content

² For more information on transfer as it applies to composition, see Elizabeth Wardle's article “Understanding ‘Transfer’ from FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study” in *Writing Program Administration* 31.1-2 (Fall/Winter 2007).

knowledge of a discipline (23). Tutors benefit from refining these characteristics of their identities in the writing center space, and the center they serve also stands to benefit: “If tutors are given opportunities to foster these characteristics as key aspects of their tutor identities, they may be more effective in their tutoring practices and better able to reflect the best practices of the writing center discourse community” (23).

European Perspectives on the (Professional) Role of the Peer Tutor

Writing center scholarship in Europe attempts to redefine the role of peer tutor in such a way that includes the tutor’s professional skills beyond tutoring. In “Literacy Development Projects Initiating Institutional Change,” Gerd Bräuer explains his concept of Literacy Management (LM). Literacy managers “initiate and facilitate substantial change not only in the daily practice of writers and readers but in the literacy culture of entire institutions” (Bräuer and Girgensohn 225), and peer tutors, in the writing center, act as literacy managers. Expanding on the definition, Bräuer adds that LM is an “emerging professional field at the intersection of literacy research, pedagogy of reading and writing, institutional design, and institutional development” (227). Like Bräuer, Katrin Girgensohn is also a pioneer of LM, and her model of autonomous academic writing groups in German higher education has helped to redefine the roles of faculty and writing center staff in facilitating such groups (225). Writing coaches and tutors act as literacy managers, agents of change “in shaping local cultures of readers and writers who interact with global practices” (228). Literacy managers must be given specialized training that emphasizes patience, persistence, and a willingness to work within institutional constraints (228), and they must be encouraged to engage in reflective

practices that help to deconstruct and retool approaches to traditional models of peer tutoring. Reflective practice also helps tutors develop their professional identity, and in a European context, this identity is further shaped by the richness and complexity of a tutor's regional identity.

Regional identity is obscured by the constant negotiation of the various cultural and institutional contexts from which the student population is comprised. Anssi Paasi of the University of Finland, in a 2003 article entitled "Region and Place: Regional Identity in Question," defines regional identity as "an interpretation of the process through which a region becomes institutionalized, a process consisting of the production of territorial boundaries, symbolism, and institutions" (478). Throughout this process of interpretation, peer tutors' identities are configured by the demands of the institution and by the various cultural contexts they encounter, and most writing centers must respond to the writing needs of international students adjusting to foreign cultural and institutional contexts as noted by Bräuer:

At some point, American tutors may wonder how English as a foreign language (EFL) students are accustomed to working with writing center tutors in their home countries and whether writing instruction abroad is the same as it is in the United States. These questions are important to answer because tutors may gain a greater understanding of the ways that EFL students' writing experiences in their home countries affect their tutoring sessions in American writing centers. ("Role of Writing in Higher Education" 186)

Tutors in the U.S. often do not possess the same cultural sensitivity as their European counterparts in writing center sessions largely because they are not trained to develop it

as part of their tutoring identity. If writing center administrators trained tutors about intercultural communication skills or required engagement with foreign centers, tutors in the U.S. would be better prepared to understand the expectations of the international students they serve. Their professional identities would also be a product of this intercultural engagement, which would help them in a globalized economy, and it would aid in their understanding of their own regional identity because “[i]t is increasingly becoming the case that the production and reproduction of these [identities] does not take place in people’s native localities and regions but in other regions, in other national contexts” (Paasi 481). European tutors, however, engage in this process almost on a daily basis.

Learning to communicate across cultural boundaries is a necessary skill for tutors in European centers. Hurn and Tomalin define cross-cultural communication as “the way people from different cultures communicate when they deal with each other at a distance or face to face” (2). Tutors act as cultural informants in a writing center session, demonstrating their native cultural and linguistic habits for ESL students (Powers), but tutors also serve as cultural informants for each other by challenging ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and existing perceptions of the other (Hurn and Tomalin 12-18). The field of cross-cultural communication rests at the intersection of semiotics, anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and psychology (18), which provides a unique assortment of lenses through which tutors encounter students and other tutors. When peer tutors from international centers engage with one another, they learn how to build and sustain a relationship by creating a “climate of trust” and developing “cultural synergy” (158). Since peer tutors, regardless of their nationality, share a common role in their respective

centers, they stand to benefit from creating multi-cultural interaction as part of their developing professional identity. Hurn and Tomalin identify numerous advantages of establishing multi-cultural groups:

- a greater spread of values and ideas and the potential for increased activity and innovation;
- more alternative points of view, new ways of looking at old problems;
- teaches patience, cultural sensitivity, humour and listening skills;
- provides excellent training in the need for clear verbal and non-verbal communication;
- reduces the likelihood of ‘group think’ because of cultural diversity and minimizes the risk of pressure for conformity;
- ‘virtual’ meetings offer the advantage of being more cost-effective if the circumstances are conducive to do so. (159)

Writing centers are sites of innovation, and when peer tutors connect and collaborate with each other, this innovation is multiplied and accelerated. Through sharing alternative points of view, tutors learn cultural sensitivity and empathy, which provides beneficial training for developing better communication skills for working with students.

Furthermore, listening skills improve from working as part of a multi-cultural team because cultural systems are being negotiated constantly within the working environment. Each member of the team wants to clearly understand and be understood by the other. Meetings in virtual spaces allow members to connect across great distances, but there are technological barriers to overcome, which I explain in Chapter 4. Despite the

challenges, the dynamics of cross-cultural communication prepare tutors for encountering foreign tutors and international students with a better informed cultural awareness.

Much like writing centers in the U.S., European centers serve a heavily diverse student population. For example, at the European University Viadrina (EUV) in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany, over 7,000 students from 90 different countries make up their student population (“European University”). The university also sits on the open border of Germany and Poland, which further complicates the isolation of a single regional identity. The tutors at EUV major mostly in Intercultural Communication, a program that mandates a semester studying abroad. Student mobility is increasingly becoming a factor with which European tutors must negotiate. In 2010, more than 4.1 million students were enrolled outside their country of citizenship, and 2.3 million students mobilized internationally within the framework of the Erasmus exchange program between 1987 and 2011 (Van Mol 1), which is the most common means of exchange. With a diverse student population, tutors at EUV must serve students in different languages since EUV has curricula taught in German, English, and Polish. The student population and faculty (including writing center staff) wrestle with these cultural, linguistic, and institutional identities more intimately than those operating within U.S. institutions.

Peer Tutors Taking Ownership of their (Professional) Role

Recently, efforts have been made by peer tutors on both sides of the Atlantic to better connect with each other. Digital technologies have allowed social, cultural, and institutional knowledge of peer tutors to converge and permit the cross-pollination of ideas related to writing center work. Cross-pollination is successful when the received

model is appropriated for use in another context, and the Long Night Against Procrastination (LNAP) is perhaps the most significant result of effective cross-pollination between centers and their tutors.

LNAP is a free, all-night event that usually takes place in the writing center space during extended hours, where students come to work on neglected writing projects. Writing center staff typically provide food and/or drinks and host a number of mini-events during LNAP, such as desk yoga and other exercises to invigorate the minds and bodies of student writers and keep them motivated. Across the globe, this event is often conducted by many centers synchronously by keeping channels of communication open between centers using Skype. LNAP is chronicled on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media using the hashtag #lnap, and the results of the yearly event are archived online³.

The event was conceived by a peer tutor at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany, and it was first implemented there in 2010. A number of German institutions adopted the event and sought to conduct their own version of LNAP in conjunction with others in Germany and abroad, extending as far away as Abu Dhabi (Dreyfurst; Datig and Herkner). As of 2013, more than 30 universities and writing centers worldwide have held this event in some form (Datig and Herkner 129). Writing centers in Canada also participate in LNAP, such as those at Ryerson University⁴, Brandon University⁵, and the University of Manitoba⁶. Many university libraries in the U.S. also host their own version of LNAP, and this event has been adopted by various writing

³ For more information, please see: <https://schreibnacht.wordpress.com/>

⁴ Ryerson University (<https://passport.ryerson.ca/organization/studentlearningsupport/calendar/details/24775>)

⁵ Brandon University (<https://www.brandonu.ca/long-night/>)

⁶ University of Manitoba (<http://umanitoba.ca/longnight/>)

centers in the U.S., such as the University of Wisconsin Madison, University of Puget Sound, and Waldorf College (Kiscaden and Nash 9). Each of these centers has had to alter the original model (from EUV) for implementation in their own national and institutional contexts and with their unique student populations in mind.

Many benefits come from hosting LNAP. The intrigue of an international event turns the library (or writing center) into a more inviting and exciting space while promoting writing center services at the same time. As a result of Datig and Herkner's efforts in Abu Dhabi, their center has also gained more support from their university, especially after significant media coverage both nationally and internationally.

Collaboration between departments and communication across the institution are essential to their success (130). University libraries and writing centers not only benefit from exposure to students, but they also stand to benefit from deeper interaction and collaboration with university faculty across disciplines, which helps to demystify the purpose and services of the center. LNAP benefits tutors professionally by placing them in a position to coordinate these efforts and, therefore, allowing them to gain experience working with those outside the writing center field. Tutors also have access to other tutors coordinating and conducting the event in other countries, which builds interpersonal and intercultural communication skills that further shape their professional (tutor) identity.

LNAP is only one recent example of peer tutor initiatives that have gained traction in the international writing center community, and more of these can be seen in Chapter 3. Often these initiatives develop outside of the institutional structure and with fellow peer tutors acting as a support system. Never before have peer tutors led the

charge for such a dramatic shift towards internationalizing the efforts of the writing center, and now this is occurring in a more professional context, leaving the role of being “merely a tutor” far behind.

CHAPTER III

Current Peer-to-Peer Collaboration Across Borders

“Tutors are vital to the future of our work and are absolutely necessary for our conversations to continue.”

— Brian Fallon

Peer tutoring is a central topic of discussion at writing center conferences, whether it is addressed explicitly or implicitly. Both administrators and peer tutors attend and present at international, national, and regional conferences, but the experience at larger conferences is intense and often overwhelming for peer tutors new to the field. Often for this group, the quantity of sessions compromises the quality of the takeaways, which is why smaller conferences facilitate richer, more manageable insights for peer tutors. In Tennessee, efforts have focused on connecting peer tutors on a regional level. Tutor Collaboration Day (or TuColla) has been instrumental in bringing together not only peer tutors but also writing center administrators. At Tucolla attendees engage in peer-facilitated discussions, presentations, and workshops, and all are encouraged to continue their discussions about writing center work after the event has concluded via a dedicated blog¹. Events with similar goals have begun to appear in Europe, such as the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) Peer Tutor Day, which is held as a precursor to their bi-annual conference. Both TuColla and Peer Tutor Day are coordinated *by* peer tutors *for* peer tutors, and they are substantial professional development opportunities that expose writing center tutors to different social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Although these P2P events are similar in design, TuColla represents building community

¹ For more information, please see: <https://tucolla.wordpress.com/>.

among tutors in the state of Tennessee, and Peer Tutor Day represents the same goal across international boundaries.

The unique cultural and institutional contexts of TuColla and Peer Tutor Day are integral to their design. For my ethnographic investigation of both, I chose to draw on my own introspection as a “participant observer” to demonstrate my own access to their communities, and collect a “multiplicity of observations” from tutors as autonomous coordinators and also administrators as overseers (Lauer and Asher 39, 40). These interviews reveal the social constructions that shaped the events’ current design and present patterns for interpretation. As a composition scholar and an ethnographer, qualitative research methods yield me the best approach for studying and exploring a group’s culture to make the “strange familiar” (Kirsch and Sullivan 155). The purpose of this study is to clearly render perspectives from both U.S. and European writing center cultures in such a way that demonstrates a common goal: connecting and professionalizing tutors through peer-to-peer (P2P) collaboration. These collaborative P2P efforts could provide a gateway for peer tutors to create their own professional network or other models on a global scale, which could potentially improve the ways writing centers operate within their own discourse community. Using qualitative research in the form of interviews, introspection, and ethnography, I examine both events and explain their function in professionalizing the role of peer tutors². Based on my qualitative research, I propose a new, transnational model designed for peer tutors to dissolve barriers between these two writing center cultures, especially with regard to communication and community building, which I explain further in Chapter 4.

² This research is covered under IRB protocol #15-310 (see Appendix D).

Tennessee Tutor Collaboration Day (TuColla)

Effective collaboration is crucial to the development of successful writing center events for peer tutors. After the Southeastern Writing Centers Association (SWCA) created State Representative³ positions in 2010, Stacia Watkins, Director of the Writer's Studio at Lipscomb University, became the representative of Tennessee and began brainstorming simple, community-building events; TuColla was the result. She and Caty Chapman, Assistant Director of the Margaret H. Ordoubadian University Writing Center at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), discussed hosting the event at MTSU in the spring of 2012, and then the event was handed over to the MTSU peer tutors to oversee. Watkins and Chapman developed TuColla as an event that recruits members for SWCA, enriches the writing center community within the state, builds collaborative opportunities for peer tutors, and gives tutors and directors a chance to meet each other. TuColla allows writing centers greater access to other resources and is, according to Watkins, "an excellent tutor training opportunity for smaller centers that can't afford to travel to conferences."

For one Saturday each April, about 40-50 tutors and administrators attend TuColla, and most are representatives from writing centers in Middle Tennessee, such as Lipscomb University, Volunteer State Community College, and Vanderbilt University. The event is designed as a mini-conference with a formal call for proposals and

³ The job description for State Representatives can be found at: <http://www.iwca-swca.org/About-Us.html>.

scheduled concurrent breakout sessions. Tutors present on panels, conduct workshops, and lead discussions on various topics, such as:

- Breaking Down the High School Writing Center
- Bringing Magic to the Writing Center
- Building Physical and Digital Writing Center Communities

Many of these topics highlight what tutors find worthy of discussion, and not all of them are specifically related to their roles as tutors (see Appendix B).

Tutors representing their writing centers demonstrate their roles as advocates or ambassadors, which begins the construction of their professional identity. In 2014, for example, Carmen Watts from Hendersonville High School led a session in which she discussed how the High School Writing Lab prepares its tutors for the job market by giving them workplace skills and building their resumes. Communicating professional experience to potential employers, even while still in high school, is a valuable skill that gives tutors an edge when looking for a job in their chosen careers. Watts also invited discussions about creating awareness about the writing center's services, a topic that was echoed in another presentation led by Morgan Hanson and Erica Anderson from MTSU. Hanson and Anderson gave practical advice for bringing more enthusiasm and "magic" to the writing center that would invite more students into the space. Effectively communicating the mission of the writing center to students and faculty is challenging, and Hanson and Anderson emphasized that tutors should be cognizant of how their attitudes affect students' perception of the writing center.

Discussions about communication are prevalent in TuColla's programming, but community building also has a strong presence: using physical and digital spaces to

connect and communicate, for instance. With T. Mark Bentley and Tom Cruz, I communicated how MTSU uses technology to build community as part of a creative writing group in the writing center. Tutors at our session discussed how they build community through writing center events, and they offered some suggestions for events we could investigate at MTSU. By examining the conversations that took place at TuColla 2013, I determine that peer tutors are clearly interested in communication and community building as part of their role in their writing center, but these are not necessarily aspects of their tutoring identity; rather, they function as components of tutors' professional identity.

Tutors exhibit the professional aspects of their role at TuColla, which serves to prepare them for more substantial professional development opportunities at larger conferences, such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Administrators are welcome to attend TuColla, but tutors are the ones organizing it, and both tutors and administrators function as peers within the same learning environment during the day. Tutors lend their unique perspectives on topics pertinent to the writing center field, insight from which both their peers and administrators can benefit. Those tutors who coordinate, present, and attend the event also gain additional experience.

Benefits of Coordinating

Organizing TuColla provides peer tutors with opportunities to develop themselves professionally. In preparation for TuColla 2014, MTSU peer tutors Khristeena Lute and Morgan Hanson coordinated with administrators and peer tutors from other centers in the

area, created a program, ordered food for attendees, and reviewed and scheduled session proposals. These tutors exercised a number of professional skills before, during, and after the event. Reflecting on her experience, Hanson feels as though she gained significant knowledge about conference planning: “I believe I have a better idea now of how conferences are run, and I think I could do a bigger one after working on TuColla.” Making sure 50 people have nametags, a folder with program information, and food for lunch is no easy task, even if the event is on a small scale; peer tutors experience firsthand what goes into conference planning.

Teamwork and constant communication between centers are also vitally important in the successful execution of TuColla. “Communication was a challenge,” Lute states, “and I found myself putting out ‘little fires’ here and there. Even during the event, lunch arrived two hours late, so I was always checking to make sure food would be there for everyone.” Putting out little fires, as Lute puts it, requires a great deal of awareness, multitasking, and on-the-spot decision making, forcing organizers to react appropriately within a professional context. The greatest benefit of TuColla, however, is learning what it is like in other centers, appreciating our own writing center contexts, and understanding what we do and how we do it. Regardless of whether or not an attendee has research interests in writing centers, the TuColla experience provides peer tutors with many opportunities to professionalize, and the skills and knowledge acquired by coordinating the event are transferable beyond writing center work, which Driscoll and Harcourt find important to a tutor’s development.

Benefits of Presenting and Attending

Peer tutors who organize the event may also present or lead a large group discussion. Lute presented at the opening and closing of the event, which helped acclimate her to addressing a larger crowd: “That experience prepared me for speaking at bigger conferences. Along with the administrative experience, it was a stepping-stone for moving up in the writing center ranks. From becoming a Peer Mentor last year and now being a Program Assistant, organizing and presenting at TuColla helped me do that.” Even though presenting has benefits, attending TuColla on its own can be an exceptional learning experience, especially for newer peer tutors; it acclimates them to the conference format while introducing them to topics of interest in the field. TuColla 2012 was the first writing center mini-conference I ever attended. As an undergraduate, I had just completed an internship in the writing center at MTSU, and I had not yet begun working as a peer tutor, but the TuColla experience propelled me into discussions that expanded my understanding of writing center work outside of MTSU. Since then, I have helped organize the event and have presented many times as well; fulfilling these various roles prepared me for engaging with the greater writing center community on a global scale.

Peer Tutor Day

Peer Tutor Day is a newer and little known writing center event. This two-day event first took place in 2014 before the EWCA conference in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany. Katrin Girgensohn and Franziska Liebetanz, Directors of the Writing Center at EUV, wanted to host an event where Łukasz Salski and his tutors from the English wRiting Improvement Center (ERIC) in Poland could come to Frankfurt (Oder).

Liebetanz shared that the EWCA conference took almost two years to prepare, and trying to manage two events at once would have been difficult. They investigated the interest among their peer tutors at EUV, and Anja Poloubotko, who had just finished her master's thesis at EUV on the crucial role of the peer tutor in writing centers' sustainability, volunteered. She was the leading coordinator of Peer Tutor Day, tasked with completing financial paperwork for the institution and organizing presentations, workshops, and social events. Poloubotko was allowed to work on the event autonomously, only checking with administrators when she had questions or ideas. She saw her role in "creating an environment where peer writing tutors could exchange their experiences in writing center work" (Poloubotko). This "educational event" allowed tutors to discuss their own writing center experience the day before the EWCA conference and established a comfortable space where peer tutors from all over the world can be "among themselves" (Poloubotko).

The first Peer Tutor Day in 2014 was truly an international event that invited a presence beyond European boundaries. About 40 peer tutors from the U.S., Germany, Iceland, Abu Dhabi, Ireland, Austria, the Netherlands, Oman, and Poland participated in the event and took part in presentations, interactive workshops, and community-building exercises within the writing center space at EUV (see Appendix C). The event has no breakout sessions or concurrent panels like TuColla; all attendees remain together for the duration. Liebetanz fondly recalls her impressions from that first Peer Tutor Day:

When I came into the room, I was feeling this vibrant internationality, and I was imagining how many things [peer tutors] have in common and I imagined how many differences [they] will also find. I was feeling so happy to see all these

young people [...] being in one room, talking, changing their ideas and knowledge. I was feeling that [the tutors were] so interested in each other as human beings.

Peer Tutor Day is significant in that it builds close relationships between tutors before the EWCA conference begins. Liebetanz, discussing the greater benefit of Peer Tutor Day, states, “it is good for the world to communicate, to work together, to respect each other and to build bridges, and I often think peer tutors (as I see my peer tutors) are able to do it and they are doing it. And at the same time, they are really good and often outstanding in their profession.” Within the context of Peer Tutor Day, tutors build many bridges during their time together. When I attended the event, we discussed our own peer tutoring

identities, conducted mock sessions, and participated in a thought provoking World Café⁴, which I had never encountered before. A

World Café is designed as a conversational process that

takes place at several tables

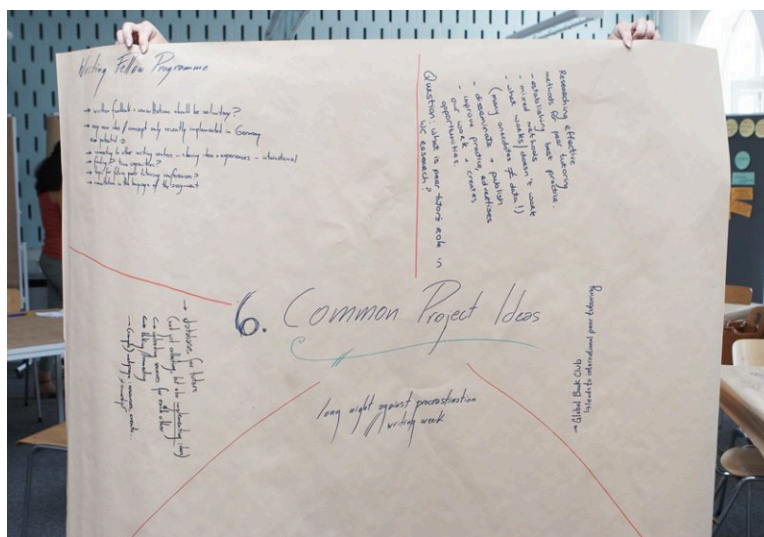


Fig. 1 Collaborative Notes from World Café

covered with a large sheet of paper. Tutors rotate in groups from one table to another, discussing a particular topic: tutor networking, for example. Participants are encouraged to write notes or sketch during the conversation, which lasts about twenty minutes. After time is up, tutor groups move on to another table. A facilitator remains at each table to

⁴ For more information, please see: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/method.html>

help continue the last conversation. After the World Café session is over, the notes are compiled and reviewed as a large group. Activities like the World Café create concrete takeaways that can be used as platforms for future initiatives (see Fig. 1).

Relationships between peer tutors are further deepened by Peer Tutor Day's social aspects. At the conclusion, for example, organizers arranged a group dinner in Słubice, Poland, which is located just across the Oder River on the German-Polish border (a short walk from the EUV campus). Opportunities for tutors to socialize gives them a chance to contextualize their writing center work in other ways. P2P interaction outside of their tutoring roles helps them to learn more about each other on a deeper level, developing relationships that oscillate between personal and professional (Girgensohn). Making friends from various parts of the world while in a foreign country is a special moment all its own, but the brevity and intensity of Peer Tutor Day makes these peer-to-peer (P2P) encounters even more special. Conversations begun during the event have more inertia after its conclusion because of the community building that takes place, which is what makes Peer Tutor Day a viable model for writing centers to consider participating in.

Benefits of Coordinating

Coordinating Peer Tutor Day allows for the acquisition of administrative skills that are valuable while on the job market. For example, Poloubotko and two other peer tutors, formerly of EUV, recently opened a new writing center in a German university⁵. They were selected because of their familiarity with writing center work and because the people “who hired them saw that they could lead an institution even more than somebody

⁵ Leibniz University Hannover.

who is older and maybe more experienced and more familiar with universities” (Liebetanz). This familiarity with the institutional structure comes from working closely with administrators and coordinating the event within university guidelines. Leadership skills are also clearly demonstrated by orchestrating an international event across various borders and by supervising a team working towards a common goal. These are all marketable skills that gave Poloubotko and her colleagues a strong advantage over candidates with less substantial writing center experience. Reflecting on the benefits of organizing Peer Tutor Day, Poloubotko states that: “I learned a lot of organizational skills which help me in my current profession – building up a multilingual writing center.” In addition, she was exposed to different perspectives and gained insight from tutors’ various backgrounds in writing centers. For her, Peer Tutor Day “was the start of a very significant networking experience” and that “lots of interesting projects are to come.” (Poloubotko). As a professional/educational event, Peer Tutor Day is special because at the EWCA conference that follows, tutors are often “lost among hundreds of participants/‘professionals’” (Poloubotko), and by making tutors more visible to each other, they are more likely to be recognized by other writing center professionals at the EWCA conference.

In July 2015, the Academic Writing Centre (ASN) at Radboud University in the Netherlands will host the second Peer Tutor Day during an off-year for the EWCA conference. ASN tutors who were in Germany for the last Peer Tutor Day valued this experience so much that they decided to organize it themselves since most of their staff will be leaving before the next EWCA conference takes place. Among these tutors is Ellen Nieboer, who is organizing the event this year. Aside from some help with

institutional formalities from the ASN coordinators, Joy de Jong and Inge Eijkhout, Ellen is leading the charge for this tutor-led and -facilitated event; however, she has support from other peer tutors in her center. Nieboer is supervising two teams of tutors who assist her with developing workshop materials and travel planning for attendees. In addition to these tasks, she is responsible for distributing information about the event through social media in both English and Dutch. Organizing an event like this is challenging for her, but Nieboer is determined to further develop her leadership skills in preparation for the event, something she does not learn in her academic studies (Nieboer).

Benefits of Presenting and Attending

Presenting at Peer Tutor Day 2014 gave me the opportunity to share my research interests with an international audience. Since I was presenting on connecting international peer tutors in digital spaces⁶, I had the best possible audience for my presentation. This was also the first time for me in a foreign country, a situation that forced me to consider the cultural and linguistic implications of my work, but everyone was very supportive and willing to listen. Afterward, I was able to gauge interest in the topic and obtain feedback more easily than at a larger conference, perhaps because of the intimate setting of the writing center and the relatively small group of people in attendance. As an attendee during others' presentations and workshops, I was able to contribute my own cultural knowledge and writing center experience. Whether a tutor attends or presents at Peer Tutor Day, the tutor has access to a rich, international

⁶ Presentation title: "Crossing Borders in Digital Spaces: An International Peer Tutor Collaboration Effort".

assembly of peer tutors who are enthusiastic about cultivating innovation in the writing center field.

Common Barriers for These Models

Both TuColla and Peer Tutor Day are significant events for peer tutors, but there are some barriers that organizers of future events should address to make them more effective, such as lack of funding, time, initiative, and communication. These barriers restrict access to professionalizing opportunities, and I address possible solutions in Chapter 4.

Barrier 1: Lack of Funding

In order to professionalize, a tutor must have the financial means to do so. With regard to TuColla, funding for a larger event, like a reputable conference, may take priority over a smaller, less reputable one. As of 2014, the event has only been held at Middle Tennessee State University, although other centers in Tennessee have been encouraged to serve as hosts. TuColla 2015, which was to be hosted elsewhere for the first time, was canceled after few expressed interest in attending or presenting. Why the lack of interest? One reason is that the SWCA conference was held in Tennessee earlier the same year, and centers could not financially support tutors who wished to attend both, giving priority to a conference over a peer tutor meeting. TuColla 2015 was also to be held in the western part of the state, and most of the past attendees come from Middle Tennessee. A solution would be to brand TuColla as a “statewide conference,” and also as a forum privy to writing centers within our regional organization (SWCA), with the

intention of growing the assembly and encouraging other communities to emulate our level of engagement with one another. The benefits would possibly open up additional SWCA funding opportunities available exclusively for statewide events. These funds could be used for other interim in-person meetings to strengthen our relationship and accelerate the sharing of resources, while also coordinating outreach projects in conjunction with other writing centers. TuColla could be re-branded and marketed towards tutors in a way that highlights the event as an outlet for research, a networking opportunity, and chance to enhance their CV.

Peer Tutor Day has the advantage of being attached to an international conference (EWCA); however, the costs involved for international travel are extraordinary. Since Peer Tutor Day is a two-day event, more funding may be needed for food, transportation, and accommodations. Peer Tutor Day 2015 will be held on an off-year for the EWCA conference, and attendance may not be consistent, especially since several attendees come from the U.S. Still, this event remains inaccessible for many smaller centers with limited funding resources for professionalizing tutors. Like TuColla, re-branding the event as a conference, colloquium, expo, or similar may lend it a more reputable air in the academic community. Other options for participation exist, which I further explore in Chapter 4.

Barrier 2: Lack of Time

TuColla is held on a Saturday, leaving tutors to attend on their own time, and they must have adequate time to travel to and from the host site. International travel to Peer Tutor Day requires additional time for travel, especially if tutors have to fly and establish

themselves at or near the host site. With Peer Tutor Day as a two-day event, tutors must remain on site for an even longer period of time. Tutors must take into account obligations to their coursework and to the writing center, and determine whether or not they can accommodate such a commitment. Attending a conference of any kind is often disruptive because so many arrangements must be made in advance, and TuColla and Peer Tutor Day are no exceptions. Time for travel and participation is better justified when Peer Tutor Day is closely associated with the EWCA conference, but if Peer Tutor Day is held on its own during an off-year, the event might not be as accessible for peer tutors. Tutors could participate in these events without taking much time from their personal and professional lives, and I propose this solution in the next chapter.

Barrier 3: Lack of Initiative

Some universities do not hire composition-focused scholars to direct their writing centers, and they may not see a benefit in having their directors attend TuColla. Peer tutors are equally capable of exhibiting disinterest in participating. At MTSU, for instance, most tutors are staffed in the writing center as part of their graduate assistantship assignment, not by choice; their academic interests may not concern writing centers. If TuColla were part of a series of events or more strongly affiliated with the SWCA conference, it would possess more credibility and perhaps attract more participants. With Peer Tutor Day preceding the EWCA conference, attendance has greater value. The EWCA conference might be the main event, the primary draw, but participating in Peer Tutor Day is an additional opportunity for engaging with the international writing center community, and most attendees can “piggyback” on funding

received to visit a more substantial conference (EWCA). If these events could be incentivized in some way, more administrators and peer tutors might be more likely to consider attending or presenting.

Barrier 4: Lack of Continuing Conversations

TuColla is an intense one-day event that brings together writing center personnel from all over the state, but the conversations that take place during that time rarely continue, if at all. The official TuColla blog summarizes each presentation and workshop and the takeaways from each, but the site was intended as a space for those discussions to evolve into something concrete, something that could be implemented and tested.

Unfortunately, the site has remained dormant since the conclusion of TuColla 2014.

When asked why conversations started at TuColla do not continue, Caty Chapman responded with “isn’t that the big question? Communication between centers doesn’t happen much during the year between events. I think the main reason why this happens is that the methods of communication haven’t been established.” Chapman’s comment raises an even more important question: How do we extend the conversation about our own unique writing center practices and strategies beyond the limitations of a single meeting? One step towards answering that question is to establish a better system of communication, which is something organizers of Peer Tutor Day accomplish with great success. After Peer Tutor Day, conversations *do* continue, regionally and transnationally. Discussions do not cease largely because virtual exchange tools are used to keep them going. Although these tools are a more effective means of communication, Tutors in the U.S. must have access to the same communicative tools, which is problematic. If a

common platform existed, these conversations could be continued in a public forum in which all peer tutors could participate and contribute.

How Can These Best Practices Be Implemented in a New and Different Way

Both TuColla and Peer Tutor Day create exposure to issues in the field that challenge existing perspectives on writing center work, making tutors better at working with students and more engaged with the professional discourse community. Combining best practices from TuColla and Peer Tutor Day will allow for improved collaboration among writing centers and hopefully establish an event that is autonomous from institutions and independent of organizational endorsement. Another best practice peer tutors should consider for themselves is establishing their own professional network. By hybridizing physical and digital spaces, tutors can accomplish this task, and I suggest how in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

Transnational Models for Furthering Peer-to-Peer Collaboration

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”
—Helen Keller

As globalization increases, writing center administrators need to provide an environment in which tutors seek out new ways of engaging with other tutors working in the field. Opportunities exist on an international scale for learning about tutoring strategies, various writing center spaces, the student populations they serve, and the ways other tutors negotiate the liminal space between their roles as students and as peer authorities on writing. Connecting with tutors in countries outside the U.S. introduces new approaches to writing center research, lays the groundwork for innovative scholarship, and promotes a deeper understanding of the cultural and institutional contexts within which tutors operate. Within the past year, I have helped initiate a variety of transnational peer-to-peer (P2P) collaboration projects in response to barriers discussed in Chapter 3. Some of these initiatives are already in the early stages of development.

Initiative 1: Build a Professional Community/Network of Peer Tutors

When writing centers became more prominent in higher education in the 1980s, writing center professionals developed their own community to strengthen their place in academia (Phelan and Weber), and since peer tutors are finding themselves in a similar situation, they could benefit from building their own professional community. While attending the EWCA conference in 2014, I met numerous German peer tutors who were

interested in shaping this community on an international scale. Birte Stark (Hamburg University), Dennis Fassing (Goethe University), Sascha Dieter (Goethe University), and I discussed possible approaches for accomplishing this task and agreed upon using online tools to create a peer tutor community. We had to create a neutral, centralized meeting place (albeit a virtual one) to have conversations about peer tutoring more easily. My German colleagues and I established “International Peer Tutoring¹,” a Google+ Community designed to bring together peer tutors from all over the world to engage in ongoing conversations about what we do in the field. We set out to discuss peer tutoring strategies, the structure of our various writing centers, and the institutional contexts we come from in order to broaden our understanding of how writing centers in other countries handle some of the same issues. To date, 63 representatives from writing centers in the U.S., Germany, Oman, Ireland, Poland, Colombia, and the Netherlands make up this Community (see Fig. 2).

Stark, Fassing, Dieter, and I developed another component of our Community as an online reading group

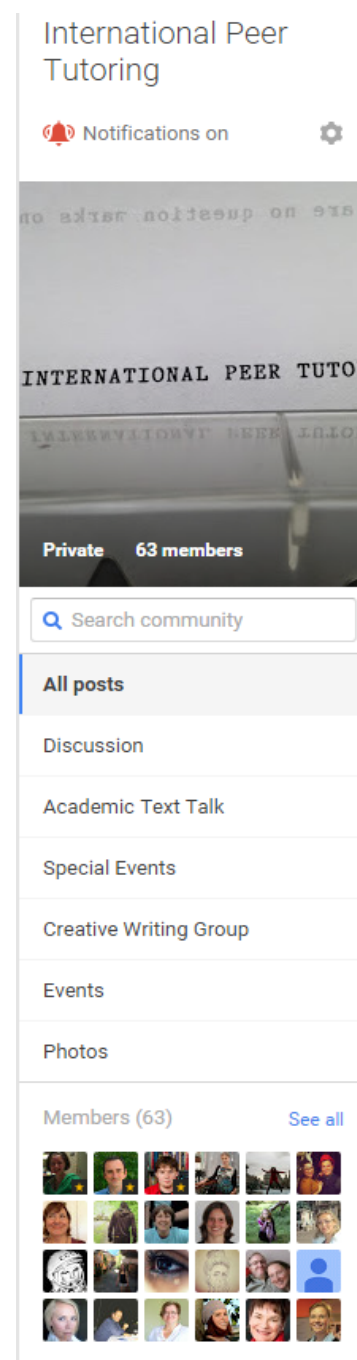


Fig. 2 - Google+ Community Dashboard

¹ For more information, please see:
<https://plus.google.com/u/0/communities/101524268544278291462>

called the Academic Text Talk², which is a monthly, moderated discussion about an article or book chapter related to writing center work (see Fig. 3). We held the first one in January 2015 with great success. Over the course of a weekend, peer tutors discussed Nancy Annett’s article “Collaboration and the Peer Tutor: Characteristics, Constraints, and Ethical Considerations in the Writing Center” with each other online. Most of our conversation ended up



Fig. 3 - Academic Text Talk Logo

being more about peer tutor identity (how we define our role as writing tutors negotiating that liminal space between being students and authorities on writing) and also about our tutoring philosophies. The number of participants continues to increase each month, and each participant contributes new insights from their own cultural and writing center backgrounds to a global, ongoing discussion. As this Google+ Community continues to grow, a distinct international peer tutor network takes shape, one that has the potential to reap benefits for writing centers everywhere.

Cross-cultural writing center partnerships can result from tutor relationships that originate from the “International Peer Tutoring” Community. As peer tutors become better connected to each other, their writing centers, by proxy, have greater access to shared resources. This access provides an environment and data ripe for new empirical studies that reach beyond national borders, which could yield writing center scholarship never before imagined. Further, tutors collaboratively write scholarship within the online

² For more information, please see:
<https://plus.google.com/u/0/communities/101524268544278291462/stream/d66a7beb-274d-4ee5-b519-02e7615b6677>

Community. Stark, Fassing, Dieter, and I teamed up with Anja Poloubotko and Leonardo Dalessandro (Goethe University) to write an article³ for *Journal der Schreibberatung* (JoSch), a multilingual peer tutor journal. We used Google Docs, an integrated word processor in which multiple writers can work synchronously on the same document. Early in the process, we decided to work *dialogically*, collaborating on all aspects of the project, rather than *hierarchically*, delegating individual tasks, because a dialogical approach provides more opportunities for learning (Lunsford and Ede 40). This approach maximized our interaction and allowed for us to produce a document with more coherence than one written in parts or sections by different writers. Using these tools, tutors can collaboratively compose documents other than journal articles, such as conference proposals, blog entries, and resources for students, and tutors may communicate with their collaborators while they work.

The “International Peer Tutoring” Community allows for tutors to also meet with each other via Google Hangouts, a built-in video conferencing tool. By connecting through Google Hangouts, tutors can practice “active listening” by communicating across different cultural systems (Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail). This means of exchange enhances their professional identity and their capacity to develop transferable skills (Driscoll and Harcourt). Since the Google+ Community is a component of other online tools, writing centers and their tutors have incorporated these tools for use in the center as well. For example, managing appointments and conducting online consultations can take place within the Google ecosystem⁴. With integrated collaborative writing tools and a

³ “The Story of (International) Collaboration Among Peer Tutors.”

⁴ The writing center at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and the Writing Studio at Lipscomb University are two examples of centers that use the Google ecosystem.

social media platform, Google products support the “sociality of writing, which writing centers aim for” and help to “build and sustain affiliative relationships around writing” (Godbee par. 4).

The Community also serves as a rich resource for tutor training; its forums can be used to bring tutors from different centers into the same space for group discussions, acting as a site of collaborative learning that encourages cultural synergy (Hurn and Tomalin). When writing center administrators use the Community for this purpose, their tutors will learn new tutoring strategies, test them in a session, and share their experiences with other tutors around the world. Troubleshooting these strategies and alternative methods of instruction helps to shape and refine tutor identity, which informs the identity of a writing center (Bright). Additionally, when administrators encourage their tutors to coordinate synchronous training activities with tutors in other centers, they will connect and explore differences not only in their own centers but also the ways in which they operate within their respective educational systems (Santa).

The Google+ Community “International Peer Tutoring” affords peer tutors greater visibility in the international community and within the institution because of its inherent accessibility. As a result, the pedagogical importance of P2P collaborations becomes part of the “writing center grand narrative” and opens up new possibilities through collaborative, cross-cultural exchange (Grutsch McKinney).

Initiative 2: Allow for Remote Participation at Existing Conferences

Attending and presenting at conferences is now possible by hybridizing physical and digital spaces, a method of participation that has recently attracted attention in the writing center community. For example, during the last week of September 2014, I was



Fig. 4 - NPTC Workshop Screenshot A

invited to participate in a discussion at the (German) National Peer Tutor Conference (NPTC) in Frankfurt/Main, Germany. This session on building a platform for international peer tutor collaboration was led by Stark, Fassing, and Dieter. Several

attendees were present in a classroom, seated around a laptop (see Fig. 4); I was visible on the computer screen, coming at them live via a Google Hangout (see Fig. 5). From my virtual attendance in a physical space, I was able to participate in the discussion and contribute closing remarks to the session⁵. Together, my German colleagues and I were able to demonstrate how a virtual presence can be a formative substitute for physically occupying the conference space.

My remote participation at NPTC in 2014 was an experiment; it had never before occurred at that conference. For NPTC 2015, conference organizers included remote participation as an option on their call for papers⁶. Our experiment showed that the conference experience can be successfully augmented with a digital space, which creates

⁵ The session is archived on video here: <https://youtu.be/Ginl6DoAgAA>

⁶ For more information, please see:

<https://www.universitaetskoleg.uni-hamburg.de/veranstaltungen/ptk15.html>

new possibilities for engaging with the global writing center community without leaving home. This hybrid model serves to function well for regional writing center conferences.

For SWCA 2015, plans were made to introduce the keynote speaker via Google Hangouts on Air (HoA), which allows video

conferences to be streamed live to a

YouTube Channel for select audiences to

watch. After the video conference ends, the

video is archived on YouTube for later

viewing. The purpose of using this method

is to extend the keynote address to those

who could not attend the SWCA conference and, in the process, promote the

organization. Due to inclement weather, the afternoon sessions were canceled, and the

HoA was removed from the program. In a recent conversation with IWCA President,

Kevin Dvorak, he expressed interest in testing this model at the IWCA conference in

2015. After Stark, Fassing, Dieter, and I demonstrated the effectiveness of virtual

participation as a component of a traditional physical conference, a completely online

peer tutor conference becomes possible, one that builds on the development of a peer

tutor community.

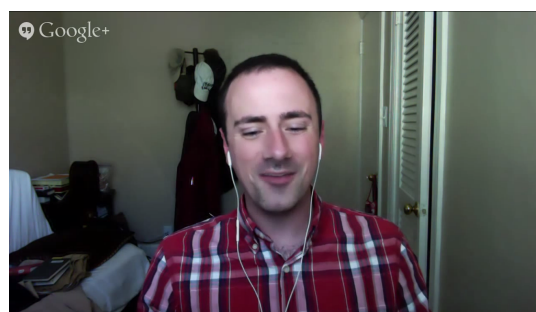


Fig. 5 - NPTC Workshop Screenshot B

Initiative 3: Launch a Virtual (International) Peer Tutor Conference

Writing center tutors and administrators constantly strive to reinvent the ways in which we work with students. We also try to observe what other writing centers are doing to engage with students and model our own writing center practices through listservs,

conferences, and other avenues. However, we are often forced to confront issues of money, time, and space. Tutors and administrators may wish to attend conferences, but they are unable to do so because of limited funding or prior obligations as stated in the previous chapter. For these reasons, many voices go unheard. IWCA connects writing centers from across the globe and attempts to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers, but time, space, and financial limitations inhibit writing centers from communicating and collaborating effectively. Initiating a free, online peer tutor conference lifts these restrictions.

The Virtual Peer Tutor Conference idea, on which I presented at Peer Tutor Day 2014 in Germany (see Appendix A), is designed in response to a lack of professional development opportunities in the writing center field. Connecting writing center professionals has been possible with listservs and other text-based communication, but our field benefits when we adopt the use of visual media and newer, more effective methods of communication and collaboration (Hurn and Tomalin). This conference will be free and open to all peer tutors and writing center professionals. Using Google HoA will eliminate the need for a physical space to attend, which means no venue to host, no hospitality costs, and no registration fees. Presenters and attendees will engage with each other in a digital space with no travel involved, saving additional time and further financial resources and, as a result, minimize disruptions to work and personal

obligations. The virtual conference will be organized by a committee of five peer tutors in the following roles:

- Two Pre-conference Coordinators: responsible for creating a call for papers, marketing, collecting submissions, and ensuring each presenter has access to the conference.
- Two Technical Directors: responsible for inviting presenters into the HoA and moderating two virtual panels each over a two-day period.
- One Post-Conference Technician: responsible for archiving and organizing recorded presentations in a dedicated YouTube channel after the event has concluded.

After the first conference ends, the committee will seek out new members to form the next conference committee and provide their replacements with a document detailing the challenges they encountered and advice for performing their roles effectively. Like peer tutors who coordinate TuColla and Peer Tutor Day, peer tutors who autonomously coordinate the virtual conference will develop similar organizational skills that have the potential to transfer to other workplace environments outside of the writing center. Further, this experience trains tutors to coordinate an international event, preparing them to negotiate various cultural contexts, and the results of their efforts will be available online for future employers to evaluate.

The concept of a virtual writing center conference is ambitious but promises a great reward: tutors and administrators from around the world can share ideas and collaborate freely in order to foster more effective writing center practices and community engagement. This innovative professional development opportunity provides

tutors with substantial benefits by promoting cultural awareness and enabling faster and more efficiently collaboration among peer tutors. However, challenges must be overcome in order to ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Possible Challenges to Initiatives 1, 2, and 3

Many professional opportunities become possible when temporal, spatial, and financial barriers are of no concern, but some remaining challenges concerning access must still be overcome. Virtual meetings are convenient and exciting for tutors, but steps to ensure their effectiveness can be taken (Hurn and Tomalin 157, 158). Asynchronous interaction in the Community forums, for example, is not affected by users lacking a strong, sustained internet connection. Synchronous video conferencing, however, suffers when users' connections are weak. Losing connectivity during a presentation or a live discussion could disrupt an otherwise effective exchange. The quality of communication is only as strong as the internet connection that supports it.

In the hybrid physical/digital conference model tested at NPTC, I noticed some challenges in communication because of the newness of the experience. Some of the attendees in the physical space seemed a bit wary at first, their eyes darting to me, a little square on a computer screen, then back to the leaders of the discussion. They waved at me, laughed at my jokes, and listened attentively, but there was some obvious difficulty in accepting me as a participant in the physical space. At one point, a presenter motioned towards my disembodied head on the laptop and said, "That's Brandon. He lives in the internet." He was joking, of course, but the combined physical and digital participation seemed to reinforce my "otherness," at least for those people I had not met in person. As

this model becomes more accepted and more common, the strangeness of interaction will likely disappear.

Time is less of a barrier in a non-physical space, but for the conference models discussed in this chapter, additional concerns must be addressed. Coordinating across time zones is the most significant issue with which to contend. Google Hangouts scheduled in one time zone are automatically adjusted for participants' local time, which makes the math simpler, but other issues must be remedied. For example, if I present on a virtual panel with someone from Germany, both of us must be able to present across a seven-hour time difference; an 8:00 AM presentation for me becomes a 3:00 PM presentation for the German panelist. These virtual panels must be scheduled with these time differences in mind.

Challenges concerning access⁷, ownership, and language must be addressed as well. Google is the preferred tool for most millennial peer tutors, but some European institutions frown upon using Google because of privacy issues, so this presents additional problems for some participants. Otherwise, technological restrictions are few, as the HoA tool is web-based and requires no software download. One must have administrative permission to install a plugin when using HoA for the first time; therefore, using a university-owned computer may require IT support beforehand. In addition to these challenges, since presentations for the virtual conference are archived online and freely available in a public space, organizers need permission from all presenters beforehand. Presenters acknowledge a legal consent form upon accepting an invitation to

⁷ Accessibility includes other challenges for those with physical disabilities who might have difficulty attending a conference event in person.

present, and this information is collected by the Pre-Conference Coordinator. Since the presentations can be subtitled in various languages on YouTube (if the presenter wishes), language becomes less of an issue after the conference has concluded; however, English is the lingua franca of the conference models discussed here, and presenters should be made aware that English may be a second language for some attendants/participants (Hurn and Tomalin). Despite these challenges, coordinating such an event is possible since the Long Night Against Procrastination (LNAP) has been conducted in this manner for years with great success (Datig and Herkner), with additional steps taken to ensure that all participants have equal access before the conference begins.

Tutors can contribute to the sustainability of their own community by taking part in these initiatives, but they require administrative support to ensure an optimal learning experience and the development of transferable skills. Writing center administrators who encourage tutors to develop professionally also help them to hone cross-cultural communication skills, which are necessary for working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, from varying institutional contexts, and with different academic expectations (Bräuer). Tutors who have autonomy to explore the possible outcomes of collaborative exchange will bring better practices back to the writing center (Girgensohn). The knowledge peer tutors learn across borders will deepen empathy with the students they serve (Hurn and Tomalin), inform the operations of the centers they work in (Girgensohn), and generate new topics in writing center scholarship (Santa), which will help to strengthen international ties in the greater writing center community.

CHAPTER V

Further Implications of Peer-to-Peer Collaboration

“There is nothing like a dream to create the future.”
—Victor Hugo

As peer tutors increasingly become change agents in the writing center field and the greater academic community, their roles as emerging professionals become clear. Like the early writing center professionals marginalized by the academic community (Boquet; Gillespie and Lerner), peer tutors are starting to interrogate their roles as subordinate workers. As evident in Tutor Collaboration Day (TuColla) and Peer Tutor Day, tutors are gaining access to different professional development opportunities that validate them in the professional world. The three initiatives I discussed in Chapter 4 provide newer opportunities for tutors to professionalize, learn more about their field, and enact positive changes in the development of their centers. But these initiatives also have the potential to impact students, tutors, writing center administrators, writing centers, and the greater writing center field in a variety of positive ways¹.

Further Implications for Students and Tutors

Imagine students walking into a technologically-informed writing center space with a few tutors actively engaged in communication via electronic means. While the students wait for their sessions to begin, they hear continuing dialogues about writing and about the writing center, see real people on computer screens, and witness non-traditional

¹ I organized this chapter to show how the initiatives discussed in Chapter 4 directly and indirectly affect different people involved in writing centers, beginning with students since they are at the “center” of writing center studies.

means of collaboration in action. In a way, tutors model good communication and writing practices for students by simply demonstrating those practices in the writing center space. If these kinds of interactions take place in view of students coming into the writing center, they may be intrigued enough to ask what is going on. Alternatively, tutors working with students might initiate a conversation about collaboration or the writing process by either relating personal peer-to-peer (P2P) experience or by simply gesturing to other tutors who are engaging in P2P collaboration with other tutors. If a student is working on a group project, his or her tutor might share insights into using collaborative writing technology like Google Docs or Google Hangouts. While students are in the writing center, the tutor might also show the student how to use that technology, and the student leaves with new tools for writing with others. Another resource students might find useful is the variety of Google+ Communities dedicated to writing. “Writing Resources” and “The Writer’s Community”² are forums for writers to discuss various aspects of the writing process, and within those digital spaces, students meet other writers, “hang out” with them, and participate in live group conversations about particular topics in writing. Tutors can direct students to these resources, instruct them on using these tools effectively, and encourage them to take part in P2P collaboration. Students will encounter discussions about writing outside of their academic studies and in an informal social situation, but they will also gain a broader perspective of collaboration and learn new writing techniques through contact with other writers from various cultural contexts.

² For more information, see “Writing Resources” (<https://plus.google.com/communities/116514944403874825632>) or “The Writer’s Community” (<https://plus.google.com/communities/117308378473812380442>).

Examining practices in centers in other contexts can drastically change the way tutors work with students. Using technology to communicate across various borders (social, cultural, national, and institutional), tutors acquire skill sets that inform the quality of their instruction and the improvement of students' writing:

- tutors have greater empathy for students in the writing center session
- tutors are more culturally informed about students' expectations
- tutors have access to a larger arsenal of tutoring strategies, which increases number of available tools to improve quality of instruction

Empathy for students improves the way tutors guide them towards becoming better writers, which is the primary goal of a writing center (Bruffee). Tutors working in monolingual centers in the U.S. benefit from being othered, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The experience of being othered occurs in both physical and digital environments. I was othered by being a foreigner at the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) conference in Germany, as well as by my virtual presence at the German National Peer Tutor Conference (NPTC). These experiences deepened my own empathy for not only students from international contexts, but also for students who are alienated by their perceived ineptitude in a writing center session.

Empathy also comes from cultural information acquired during encounters with other tutors from different cultural and language backgrounds. Monolingual tutors in the U.S. particularly benefit from learning about other institutional and cultural contexts that students bring to the writing center. If tutors acquire a deeper understanding of multilingual contexts, they are more likely to empathize with the challenges students face when the native language is not their primary language (Bräuer).

Tutors might also learn new editing and proofreading skills from working with other tutors in other centers. For instance, during Peer Tutor Day 2014, I talked at length with a Dutch tutor named Wout Waanders from the Academic Writing Centre (ASN) about working on the organization of a student's paper. He recommended pulling up the student's paper in Microsoft Word or similar word processor and putting each sentence of a paragraph on one line. In this way, problems with the organization and coherence becomes clearer, such as the mindful use of appropriate transitional phrases used to connect sentences. This is a strategy I brought back to my writing center at MTSU, and I still use it today even when revising my own writing.

Learning empathy, cultural/linguistic awareness, and alternative tutoring strategies could be added as component of a tutor's initial and continuing training. Tutor training practicums would better prepare students for one-to-one and group collaborations if empathy and cultural awareness were more strongly emphasized. A tutor's initial training might incorporate some or all of these ideas in conjunction with reading foundational writing center scholarship. Although reading foundational writing center scholarship is important for a tutor's development, discussing these texts with tutors in other centers invites outside perspectives that could potentially change the way we read or understand it. Participating in the Academic Text Talk mentioned in Chapter 4 would work well as part of tutor training curricula. Tutors-in-training could take part in online discussions on a global scale about a particular article or book chapter related to writing center work. Not only would these soon-to-be tutors engage with the scholarship, but they would also gain international perspectives from their peers. An empathetic, culturally-informed tutor approaches a session with an edge, an advantage; he or she

converses more easily and with a broader perspective of the history and future goals of writing center work.

As part of a tutor's continuing training and professional development, time on the tutoring schedule could be substituted for participating in the International Peer Tutoring Google+ Community. Tutors in the center could be given a general topic, "directive tutoring" for example, and pose a question in the Discussion forum. Perhaps the tutor asks "Do you consider yourself a directive tutor? If so, why?" The tutor might initiate a conversation with some longevity. After reading responses, the tutor might be asked by the administration to reflect on what he or she has learned by recording it in a daybook. These reflections could be shared in small groups during staff meetings and then opened up for a large group discussion. Many options exist for including these engagements in initial and ongoing tutor training.

Further Implications for Writing Center Administrators

Ongoing P2P collaboration serves as a powerful generator for innovative ideas. By encouraging tutors to take part in regional, national, or transnational P2P collaborations, administrators learn about these ideas from their tutors and work towards implementing those applicable to their center in a meaningful way, but P2P collaboration might work equally as well for administrators. Not only can they adapt models discussed in Chapter 4, but they can also refine tutor training curricula, improve the policies and procedures of their center, and take advantage of new topics for written scholarship that come out of cross-cultural communication, which I discuss later in this chapter. The

WCENTER Listserv³ has been the primary means of exchange between writing center administrators since its creation in February 2000, and although it has served as a rich resource for over 15 years, a new and improved means of communication is needed. A P2P network of writing center administrators in the form of a Google+ Community like “International Peer Tutoring” would allow administrators to ask questions and receive answers in a more interactive way than a listserv. Centers operating in different time zones and with different semester periods would be better connected and more in sync if administrators used tools that facilitated more meaningful interaction. Like tutors in the Google+ Community, administrators would have greater access to other writing center professionals, new research in international writing center studies, and new resources that could be used in their centers.

As administrators become more proficient in using Google tools, they will be more inclined to experiment with the technology. For example, as part of continuing training, they might set up a “mystery hangout”⁴ with another writing center through their own P2P network. Administrators could adapt this model along with the peer tutor network initiative mentioned in Chapter 3 to begin a series of exchanges that will contextualize writing center work institutionally, culturally, and socially. Various topics could be addressed down the road, but in order for that to happen, writing center staff in

³ For more information, see: <http://lyris.ttu.edu/read/about/?forum=wcenter&sb=1>.

⁴ Mystery hangouts are Google Hangouts between two classes at different institutions but in a common subject. In Google+ Communities focused on education, for instance, teachers post invitations to connect with other teachers and their classes on a set day and time. The object of the Hangout is to create a dialogue between their students in order to guess their respective locations, but the virtual meeting can be structured with different learning outcomes in mind. For more information, see <https://plus.google.com/communities/110369120141935358658>.

one location should first get to know the other. Administrators (and tutors) might ask questions like:

- What are the typical day-to-day operations of your center?
- How long has your center been in existence?
- Where is your writing center located on campus?
- How is your writing center staffed? By whom? What are the terms of their employment?
- Do your tutors receive monetary compensation or institutional credit for their work?
- Does your institution have a tutor training practicum? How do tutors receive ongoing training?
- How does your writing center schedule and track appointments?
- What are your methods of assessment and evaluation? What do you report to your institution? To whom do you report? How often?
- What is your annual budget? How is your budget funded?
- What are some notable current/past projects in your center?
- Are there specific challenges your center is dealing with now?
- What new resources for students (and our centers) can we develop together?
- What campus/community outreach projects could we develop to raise cultural/institutional awareness in our respective centers?

Many of these questions often appear in some form on the WCENTER Listserv, but I wonder how much more effective cross-cultural P2P communication would be if these questions were answered in a better organized virtual space – especially if the space allowed for simulated face-to-face interaction. A Google+ Community would also serve as a professional directory. Members of the Community would be indexed with their photo, their name, and their institutional affiliation, much like any social media platform. The Community would serve as a resource that operates autonomously from any one writing center association. Further, members could be messaged individually, in select groups, or collectively. The WCENTER Listserv limits the ways that administrators communicate, and like peer tutors, administrators would benefit from having a standardized means of communication that reflects a shift towards current social media practices. If tutors are employing these methods of communication effectively with other tutors and the outcomes of these exchanges are beneficial for the writing center, administrators will adopt these practices and embrace the technology. If writing center administrators (and their tutors) are primed to use this technology, within a couple of years, the WCENTER Listserv may be rendered obsolete and abandoned in favor of something more interactive, such as Initiative 1 from Chapter 3.

Further Implications for Writing Centers and the Writing Center Field

In addition to tutors and administrators, the greater writing center field also benefits from P2P collaboration. Representatives of regional, national, and international writing center associations can engage with one another and help each other succeed in accomplishing common goals. For instance, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, less than 1% of

presenters at International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) conferences represent centers from outside the U.S. This number will increase as organizations share more about what they do and initiate conversations that continue in conference venues whether in-person or by technological means, as I discussed in Chapter 4. Alternative opportunities for presenting and attending these conferences allow more voices to be heard, and as a result, richer conversations will take place. More peer tutors will be able to participate because of the absence of financial, temporal, and spatial barriers. If these alternative means of participation are implemented at IWCA and other conferences, I expect within one year, the number of presenters and attendees from outside the U.S. will triple. Tutors as well as administrators will be more likely to become members of IWCA if the membership fee and conference registration fee are the only costs involved. The models I discussed in Chapter 4 make substantial growth in the writing center community not only possible but a likely development within the next few years.

Additionally, a formal peer tutor organization will likely come to fruition as the professional role of peer tutors becomes more widely recognized. Peer tutors presently serve on the boards of current writing center associations, but by having their *own* organization, tutors establish their own professional body in the academic and writing center communities. The leadership of a peer tutor organization could work together with the leadership of regional, national, and international associations to provide a support system designed specifically with the tutors' needs in mind. The Google+ Community "International Peer Tutoring" could be the platform from which this organization takes shape.

By whatever means necessary, a stronger international presence of peer tutors will initiate a sea change for the writing field and rejuvenate writing center scholars who tirelessly combat shifts in the academic climate and changes in institutional structures. Writing center work is, by definition, “work,” but that does not mean it should not be enjoyable. In Europe, the enthusiasm writing center administrators and peer tutors have is unparalleled. They speak of “power,” “energy,” “spirit”, and the “heart” of a writing center; a completely different writing center philosophy is in practice that is foreign to that in the U.S. Perhaps this is because European centers are still young in comparison, but regardless, writing center scholars in the U.S. would benefit from contact with that kind of enthusiasm. Writing center colleagues in Europe can help us find a deeper connection to our work, which will reinvigorate our own writing center culture in the U.S.

Suggestions for Further Research

Prioritizing the acquisition and practice of effective cross-cultural communication skills will open up new topics for scholarship in the field. Current writing center scholarship has not evolved much in recent years, but after only a few encounters with tutors in other centers, deficits in written and conference scholarship will be rendered more clearly. Further, existing topics will be explored in new and interesting ways, such as addressing the needs of international students, employing directive and nondirective tutoring strategies, and assessing the effectiveness of writing center services. Each writing center is unique, whether it exists in another country or within the same state, and

by encountering tutors in other centers, the pool of resources expands and the writing center community becomes stronger and more unified.

Tutors, administrators, and other writing center professionals learn what makes them different from the others, giving them a new perspective on their roles in the writing center structure. As more and more conversations continue between and among various centers, “old” topics in writing center scholarship begin to fade or take on new meaning.

Further research might include:

- working with multilingual writers
- improving the writing center space
- developing events to engage students
- examining the process by which tutors learn transfer in different contexts
- analyzing the outcomes of cross-cultural writing center partnerships
- proposing new theories of writing center collaboration in a digital age
- developing training modules, curricula, and certificate programs for tutors
- writing a meta-analysis of scholarship written collaboratively across national borders

With regard to multilingual writers, for example, various opportunities exist for studies to examine writing centers that are part of border cultures. A six-month or one-year study could be proposed to compare and contrast the ways in which tutors in Germany work with students writing in Polish and the ways in which tutors in Texas work with students writing in Spanish. Potential scholarship might include comparing tutoring strategies, examining reflective practices in documenting sessions, or evaluating

the effectiveness of new resources for centers that exist in similar geographical and/or cultural contexts.

Writing center spaces can always be improved, and we can learn much by discussing how these spaces function in relation to others in the campus community. For instance, two writing centers that occupy similar spaces (e.g. in the university library) could compare notes on how that space affects the writing center experience for both tutors and students. If these centers occupied a very different space prior, they could reflect on that transition and offer advice for other centers looking to relocate in order to become more visible in the campus community. Imagine representatives from Middle Tennessee State University, East Carolina University, and the University of Freiburg writing together on moving their centers to library spaces at their institutions. Two of the centers are located in the U.S. but in different states, and one is located in Germany. Three very different perspectives emerge from such a study. Synthesizing these experiences and projected outcomes of occupying the library space would yield scholarship relevant to other centers that are part of larger learning spaces.

Writing center workers from all over the world can continue to coordinate and develop new events to engage students and bring them into those learning spaces. Events like the Long Night Against Procrastination (LNAP) will become more commonplace, and other disciplines on campus will become more involved with (or adapt ideas from) the writing center. For example, LNAP has been adopted by university libraries independent of the writing center, and disciplines in the sciences and humanities could use the same model to help students avoid procrastination. Further, tutors and administrators from one writing center could borrow events from another. Whether the

event brings students to the center to write their own Valentine's Day card or write a poem for National Poetry Month, it creates awareness of writing center services and introduces students to the space.

Another possible area of research is analyzing the outcomes of P2P collaboration in the form of more formal writing center partnerships, and the best practices and challenges could be presented in an article for the benefit of other interested centers. New theories of writing center collaboration might emerge from P2P interaction, especially since the models proposed or discussed in Chapter 4 are mediated by technological means. For example, these theories might apply dialogical or hierarchical collaboration to those that take place online between tutors and/or administrators (Lunsford and Ede 40). Effective collaboration is necessary for working with students in the writing center, and studying how writing centers collaborate could yield new insights into the collaborative process.

New and improved training modules, curricula, and certificate programs for tutors will begin to take shape after P2P collaboration becomes more common. I envision open-source tutor training in the form of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which are free and accessible to anyone anywhere in the world. These MOOCs would be used for initial and continuing tutor training, and if the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) sponsored such modules, components of tutor training could become standardized and developed with input from international writing center professionals. A certificate would be provided to tutors or administrators after completing the modules, which serves to demonstrate their competency in various skills or their familiarity with writing center scholarship. Such a certificate program recognized by IWCA would help

enhance tutors' professional identity, especially after they leave the center to pursue a career.

All of the above potential topics for future scholarship affect peer tutors, students, administrators, individual writing centers, and the writing center field. Further, topics concerning transfer, meta-analysis, and collaboration have additional pedagogical implications for the field of composition. If tutors are guided towards reflective practices that make them cognizant of transferable skills, they are more likely to implement those practices in their sessions. For example, a tutor might invite a student to reflect on his or her identity as a writer in a freewriting session. Students come into a writing center session with a constructed author's identity that pertains to the writing they do as part of their coursework. If a tutor asks them to connect that identity to writing they do outside of academia, students will more likely transfer better writing practices to their everyday lives. Writing center sessions are process- rather than product-oriented, and tutors have the opportunity to share their own learning experiences with students through informal conversations about the writing process.

Discussing the composition process improves the written product, but the greatest benefit for students is to engage in a dialogue about writing and work collaboratively with a tutor. Kenneth Bruffee states that to "think well as individuals we must learn to think well collectively— that is, we must learn to converse well. The first steps to learning to think better, therefore, are learning to converse better and learning to establish and maintain the sorts of social context, the sorts of community life, that foster the sorts of conversation members of the community value" (640). In other words, tutors and students should learn to communicate effectively with each other during a session. In a

relatively short period of time, the student's needs must be addressed and the student should leave the writing center with some new piece of knowledge, whether a skill, resource, or tool. Accomplishing these goals requires the negotiation of a unique social context, one that belongs to students. Peer tutors occupy this social context, but they also exist within the social context of the writing center as a tutor. Tutors are peers; they are part of the student community, which is what makes the peer tutor an effective aid for a student writer. Tutors establish common ground by conversing with and relating to students on that level.

Conclusion

During my study, I learned that encouraging a cross-cultural dialogue between peer tutors promotes change and innovation for the writing center field. Working together more closely across international boundaries also better situates writing center studies within global conversations about composition. For example, discussions about transfer, collaborative pedagogy, and the value of the writing process are not limited to studies in writing centers; these topics also concern international scholars in composition studies. The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and the European Association for Teachers of Academic Writing (EATAW)⁵ conference are examples of sites where these conversations take place. Additionally, Writing Research Across Borders (WRAB)⁶ is another conference at which global writing center work could grow within the field of composition and also expand the field of writing studies.

⁵ For more information on EATAW, see: <http://www.eataw.eu/>.

⁶ For more information on WRAB, see: http://conference2014.fr/wrab_accueil_en.php.

My experience working with international writing center tutors exposed me to areas of research and introduced new areas of scholarly inquiry that have yet to be addressed. As P2P collaborations increase, these unexplored areas will yield fertile ground for new scholarship to grow and develop. Just as the clinical model for writing centers has fallen out of popular practice, the current model will soon be discarded in favor of collaborative innovation. Reform is on the horizon in writing center studies, and tutors are leading us towards it. They are the game changers, the ones who have taken ownership of their new professional role and embrace the challenges ahead.

Tutors who are enthusiastic about the work they do will transform and energize the writing center field within the next ten years. New P2P initiatives will continue to emerge, and they will create and inspire new areas of research in the writing center field as a result of their efforts. Writing center administrators should encourage and support the kinds of collaboration presented in this thesis by asking their tutors to consider the personal and professional benefits of furthering online, cross-cultural collaboration. Just as peer tutors and administrators from all over the world have supported me in advocating these kinds of relationships among writing centers, future leaders in the field will be met with the same enthusiasm from the writing center community. Together, we can enact change to ensure that writing centers remain a valuable component of higher education and continue to grow for the betterment of students we serve.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: POSTER PRESENTATION FOR EWCA 2014

Crossing Borders in Digital Spaces

A Virtual Peer Tutor Collaboration Effort

Background

Participation at the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) Conference has steadily increased since becoming an international organization in 2000; however, in 14 years, the numbers of participants from outside the United States have been few. For example:

-In 2010, FOUR professionals (out of 708) from outside the U.S. presented at the IWCA conference.

-In 2012, SEVEN professionals (out of 862) from outside the U.S. presented at the IWCA conference.

While writing centers are appearing at institutions around the world, many voices go unheard in the professional writing center community.

Regional organizations provide forums for conversations about the struggles of operating a writing center and peer tutoring, but do we truly have a broader understanding of what other centers are doing?

How can we strengthen communication between writing centers all over the world?

Problem/Question

As modern technology continues to offer us the means to communicate more effectively across borders, how can we use it to grow our field and the greater writing center community?

We rely heavily on text-based communication (email, listservs, etc.) to share ideas and collaborate, but the world is becoming increasingly visual and connecting us on more personal levels than ever before.

Now is the time to take action and begin conversations that transcend borders and bring us closer together in digital spaces.

Solution

By implementing an annual virtual peer tutor conference in which any writing center professional can attend or participate, we can dissolve three barriers that hinder professional development in the writing center field:

TIME, MONEY, and SPACE.

The conference will be conducted using Google Hangouts on Air (HoA), a free, easy to use online tool. There will be no physical space to attend, which means no venue to host, no hospitality costs such as food and drink, and no registration fees.

Presenters and attendees can be in the digital space in a matter of minutes -- no travel involved, which takes time and money.

This event will minimize disruptions to your work and life.

How Will It Be Used?

Google HoA is similar to a private Hangout, but there are a few additional features:

- The Hangout is broadcast live on the Internet, accessible to anyone
- Viewers can ask questions of presenters during the conference, which can be answered live on air

- After the broadcast has concluded, the entire presentation is archived on YouTube, which can be later used to share at staff meetings and as a lasting resource for peer tutors

The conference will consist of multiple virtual panels. Each virtual panel will be similar to a traditional conference panel, comprised of four presenters and a moderator. Each participant will present on a topic either together or separately, and then a moderator will handle questions after all presentations have finished.

Who Will Have Access?

Anyone with Internet access can virtually attend the peer tutor conference via a live streaming YouTube channel, where viewers can ask questions of presenters. Although the conference will be publicly available, writing center professionals and other academics will be invited to attend and participate, such as:

- Peer Tutors
- Writing Center Administrators
- University Professors
- Graduate Students
- Editors of Academic Journals
- Board Members of Writing Center Organizations
- Undergraduate Students from All Disciplines
- Executive Parties from Multiple Academic Institutions



Why Is This Significant?

- Writing center professionals can share ideas and collaborate faster and more efficiently than ever before by lifting temporal, spatial, and financial barriers.

- Peer Tutors will be more likely to reach out to fellow Peer Tutors they meet online and collaborate on professional documents, such as journal articles, student resources, and conference proposals.

- Our field will be culturally richer and united by our diversity. Cultural awareness makes us better, more informed tutors and more competent writing center professionals.

When Is This Happening?

Testing of this virtual conference model has already begun. A small scale, hybrid version will be piloted at the Southeastern Writing Centers Association Conference in February 2015, where the keynote speaker will be introduced to the membership in a physical space using this technology, followed by a virtual Q&A with virtual attendees.

Using feedback from the international writing center community at EWCA, the project's logistics will be refined for a tentative trial beginning autumn 2015.

Updates concerning the untitled virtual peer tutor conference will be sent out via major writing center listservs.

An invitation to the event will appear early next year, pending successful trials in the future.



Conclusion

The virtual peer tutor conference project is not designed as a replacement for the traditional conference experience. Current writing center practices depend on frequent collaboration and presentation of research, and this conference should be considered an additional professional development opportunity for anyone who wishes to participate.

While the traditional conference model and listservs are effective means of communication, we should strive to modernize and streamline our methods by embracing the technological tools available to us. I believe this is the next logical step in developing stronger bonds between our writing centers, our peer tutors, and the students we serve.

Connecting in digital spaces allows us to effortlessly cross borders whenever we like, so let us make friends and work towards building better writing centers together.

Brandon Hardy, Middle Tennessee State University
bmh2j@mtmail.mtsu.edu

APPENDIX B: TUTOR COLLABORATION DAY 2014 PROGRAM

Tutor Collaboration Day

April 12, 2014
Middle Tennessee State University

Presented By:
The Writing Center at MTSU
615-904-8237
uwcenter@mtsu.edu

Remember to visit the [TuColla](http://TuColla.blogspot.com) blog!
tucolla.wordpress.com

Special Thanks to SWCA for providing breakfast
and lunch for the day.



Presented by:

[TuColla](#) logo by T. Mark Bentley



Why Collaborate?

We all tutor in different contexts and communities that produce differing challenges and opportunities. When we collaborate we learn about other writing centers and discover new ways to approach tutoring in our own.

What is Tutor Collaboration Day?

Tutor Collaboration Day is a day of tutor-led discussion designed to facilitate creativity, communication, and collaboration between writing centers across Middle Tennessee. Tutors will share stories, compare experiences, thoughtfully explore current tutoring practices, and actively engage with one another to become better tutors. Thank you for coming, and let the collaboration begin!

Keep the Conversation Going!

Visit the TuColla blog (tucolla.wordpress.com) to continue discussion and collaboration, and help get ideas rolling for SWCA 2015!

Program Schedule

Registration/Meet and Greet (Lib 362).....10:15 - 10:45 am
 Large Introduction and Ice-Breaker (Lib 362).....10:45 am - 11:15 am
 Break-out Sessions "A"11:20 am - 12:10 pm
 Minimalist Grammar Instruction: Using Multimodality to Avoid the Proofreading Trap (LIB 362) - Moderated by Katherine Brewer and Mary Marley Latham (Middle Tennessee State University)
 Eek! Too Much Red: The Online WC Tutor is Not an Editor Either (LIB 272) - Moderated by Suzanne ~~Pryor~~, Jill ~~Chaffetz~~, Samantha Michaels, and Sheravah ~~Witcher~~ (Volunteer State Community College)
 Collaborative Exploration in Software and Applications (LIB 264A) - Moderated by Mark Priddy (Middle Tennessee State University)
 Break-out Sessions "B"12:20 pm - 1:10 pm
 Bringing Magic to the Writing Center (LIB 362) - Moderated by Erica Anderson and Morgan Hanson (Middle Tennessee State University)
 Multicultural Tutoring (LIB 272) - Moderated by Sheila Moss and Carolyn Frye (Nashville State Community College)
 Breaking Down the High School Writing Center (LIB 264A) - Moderated by Carmen Watts, Haley Carter, and Christina Cu (Hendersonville High School Writing Center)
 Lunch (Lib 362).....1:15 pm - 2:30 pm (Sponsored by SWCA)
 Break-out Sessions/Meeting for Administrators.....2:30 pm - 3:20 pm
 Building Physical and Digital Writing Center Communities (LIB 362) - Moderated by Tom Cruz, T. Mark Bentley, and Brandon Hardy (Middle Tennessee State University)
 Consulting Across Disciplines (LIB 272) - Moderated by Stephanie Higgs (Vanderbilt University)
 Praxis Makes Perfect (LIB 264A) - Moderated by Cory Hudson and Arlo Hall (Middle Tennessee State University)
 Closing Remarks/Announcements (Lib 362).....3:30 pm - 3:45 pm
 Extra! Professional Development Workshop (Lib 362)3:45 pm - 4:30 pm

APPENDIX C: PEER TUTOR DAY 2014 PROGRAM

Program - European Peer Tutor Day

Friday, 18th July (10.00 - 19.00)

Time	Program	Room
✓ from 9.15	Registration EWCA	AB 115
✓ 10.00	Welcoming Words: Franziska Liebetanz and Katrin Girsensohn	AB 111
✓ 10.15 - 10.45	Introduction	AB 111
✓ 10.45 - 11.30	Individual Peer Tutor Biography	AB 111
✓ 11.30 - 13.00	Poster Work: Writing Center	AB 111
✓ 13.00 - 14.00	Lunch Break	AB 116
✓ 14.00 - 16.00	Workshop Intercultural Peer Tutoring	AB 111
✓ 16.00 - 16.30	Coffee Break	AB 116
✓ 16.30 - 18.00	Workshop by peer tutors from Łódź: <i>It takes all sorts to make a writing center: on flexibility in (peer) tutoring</i>	AB 111
✓ 18.00 - 18.30	Conclusion	AB 111
✓ from 18.45	Shuttle to Słubice, restaurant Anka	meeting point: in front of the building August-Bebel-Str. 12
✓ from 19.00	Dinner in Słubice (Poland)	

Saturday, 19th July (10.00 - 14.00)

Time	Program	Room
✓ 9.30	Arrival	
✓ 10.00 - 10.30	Introduction and Warm Up	AB 111
✓ 10.30 - 11.30	Presentation by Brandon Hardy: <i>Crossing Borders in Digital Spaces: An International Peer Tutor Collaboration Effort</i>	AB 111
✓ 11.30 - 12.00	Snack Break	AB 116
✓ 12.00 - 13.30	World Café: <i>Future Collaborative Work and other themes</i>	AB 111
13.30 - 14.00	Conclusion	AB 111
14.00 - 17.00	Time off	
17.00	Reception EWCA Conference	GD Entrance Hall

APPENDIX D: IRB LETTER OF EXEMPTION



4/30/2015

Investigator(s): Brandon Hardy, Allison Smith
 Department: English
 Investigator(s) Email Address: bmh2j@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: Rearticulating the Role of Peer Tutors as Change Agents In American and European Writing Centers

Protocol Number: #15-310

Dear Investigator(s),

Your study has been designated to be exempt. The exemption is pursuant to 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations.

We will contact you annually on the status of your project. If it is completed, we will close it out of our system. You do not need to complete a progress report and you will not need to complete a final report. It is important to note that your study is approved for the life of the project and does not have an expiration date.

The following changes must be reported to the Office of Compliance before they are initiated:

- Adding new subject population
- Adding a new investigator
- Adding new procedures (e.g., new survey; new questions to your survey)
- A change in funding source
- Any change that makes the study no longer eligible for exemption.

The following changes do not need to be reported to the Office of Compliance:

- Editorial or administrative revisions to the consent or other study documents
- Increasing or decreasing the number of subjects from your proposed population

If you encounter any serious unanticipated problems to participants, or if you have any questions as you conduct your research, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Lauren K. Qualls, Graduate Assistant
 Office of Compliance
 615-494-8918

MTSU Compliance Office
 010A Sam Ingram Bldg.
 1301 E. Main St.
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129

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