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Building Community Within the Writing Center

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Building Community Within the Writing Center

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ABSTRACT

Since their inception, Writing Centers have had the purpose of helping students with their writing, and they have met this goal by using collaborative learning and by talking to students about their writing. While the form of the center has changed over time, its purpose has not, and to better help Writing Centers achieve their purpose, they should focus on building community both amongst their tutors and between their tutors and tutees. A greater sense of community, welcome, and harmony will make the center a better place to work for the tutors, and it will make students/clients will feel more comfortable in the center as well. Working toward this sense of community should be a priority for Writing Center directors, and by engaging in various team-building exercises early in the year, such a feeling of community is readily created. A Writing Center with a healthy sense of community benefits tutors, clients, and the college campus as a whole, as its ability to work well within begins to extend without, thus proving once more the value and overall necessity of a Writing Center, particularly for new/emerging Writing Centers.

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INTRODUCTION

When college students require writing assistance, they have many resources to turn to. One of those resources, if their college has one, is a writing center. The writing assistance students receive at a writing center comes from writing tutors, typically students who excel in both writing and teaching students about writing. These tutors use talking as their main medium of writing instruction and their effectiveness depends on the relationship/rapport they are able to develop with their client. Clients' comfort level can often make or break a tutoring session, as can the tutor's confidence in their ability to help that client. Comfort and confidence are both impacted by the feeling/atmosphere of the Writing Center itself. Therefore, writing centers and their employees should make community building between themselves and their clients a main goal of their writing center. By developing a sense of community amongst themselves before even meeting their first clients, tutors can create a pleasant work environment and can become better tutors through learning to work together and open up to each other regarding tutoring issues. This community of happy coworkers will create a welcoming, open, harmonious space for their clients, making the clients more comfortable in expressing their writing concerns and in receiving writing assistance. Since their inception, writing centers have had helping students with their writing as their main purpose, and despite the changes in the center's form and location over time, this remains the end goal of writing centers and the best way to ensure writing centers meet that goal is by facilitating community between tutors, and thus, between tutors and their clients. Building community within a

writing center should be a priority for all writing centers, particularly new/emerging

writing centers, as doing so will make tutoring more effective, which may, in turn, lead to

higher retention rates, more successful students post-graduation, and prove once more the

value of writing centers on a college campus.

CHAPTER 1: WRITING CENTER HISTORY, PURPOSE, AND GOALS

Writing centers on college campuses have been around for longer than people think, making a difference in student writing since the 1930s in the form of Writing Labs. The "Writing Labs" of the 1930s were mainly remedial fix-its shops that slowly evolved into the writing centers we know today. It was in the 1940s that writing centers began determining their purpose and identity (Carino). In the article, "The Writing Clinic and the Writing Laboratory," written in 1950 by Robert Moore, Moore states that, "writing clinics and writing laboratories are becoming increasingly popular among American universities and colleges as remedial agencies for removing students' deficiencies in composition" (qtd. in North, 436). The idea of the Writing Lab or Writing Center as a place of writing remediation remained for the next few decades, particularly during the literacy crisis and the era of open admissions (Harris). Writing centers were called on to help underprepared writers while the centers themselves struggled for respectability and recognizability as academic assistance centers that could help all writers, prepared and unprepared alike (Carino).

This desire for respect and recognition is still present in many writing centers across the U.S. today, though, according to Stephen North, writing centers made great strides toward achieving those two ideals in the 1970s. He differentiates between the "old" center and the "new" center in Writing Center history. North explains that "the 'old' center instruction tends to take place after or apart from writing, and tends to focus on the correction of textual problems" and "in the 'new' center the teaching takes place

as much as possible during writing, during the activity being learned, and tends to focus on the activity itself" (439). The "new" center "is the result of a documentable resurgence, a renaissance if you will, that began in the early 1970s," and this "new" writing center "represents the marriage of what are arguably the two most powerful contemporary perspectives on teaching writing: first, that writing is most usefully viewed as a process; and second, that writing curricula need to be student-centered" (North 438). The move from Current Traditional teaching to a focus on the writing process started in the composition classroom and then made its way to the writing center as the center gradually moved from being a fix-it shop to a place of learning and working with writers during each stage of the writing process, not just cleaning up the paper during revision. This focus on the writing process and on the writers themselves, rather than on finished products and grammar remediation, has stuck with writing centers since the "new" writing center developed in the 1970s. In other words, "this new writing center, then, defines its province not in terms of some curriculum, but in terms of the writers it serves" (North, 438). Serving writers may have been always been the purpose of Writing Labs and Writing Centers, it was but that purpose was overshadowed by the competing purposes imposed by the colleges and students they served.

The purpose of writing centers, as mentioned above, has evolved with time depending on the general needs of college students and on trends/changes in composition pedagogy. Today, few colleges would refer to their writing centers as places for remediation, though individual professors at colleges may think that way. What happens in writing centers at the most basic level is the tutoring of writing, but that means different things to different departments, particularly depending on what department is in

control or what department oversees what happens in the Writing Center. Stephen North's "The Idea of a Writing Center" examines that issue when he writes, "[n]ow who do you suppose has determined what is to happen in that center? Not the director, surely; not the staff, if there is one. The mandate is clearly from the sponsoring body, usually an English department" (North 437). So, the activities that take place in the center and that then influence how the center is perceived on campus, are in many cases out of the center's hands.

North goes on to say, "where there is or has been misplaced emphasis on so-called basics or drill, where centers have been prohibited from dealing with the writing that students do for their classes…it is because the agency that created the center in the first place, too often an English department, has made it so" (437). The blame for the concept of writing centers as "the grammar and drill center, the fix-it shop, the first aid station" goes to the English Department, according to North, as that was the department running writing centers at that time, unlike today where most writing centers are run by student success departments (437). North even goes so far to say that this influence of English Departments on the purpose of writing centers is not a phase, but a permanent situation: "these are neither the vestiges of some paradigm left behind nor pedagogical aberrations that have been overlooked in the confusion of the 'revolution' in the teaching of writing" (437). Now, it's important to point out that North was writing his critique in 1984, about 30 years ago, so his claims may be less accurate today, but they are still worth noting as part of Writing Center history and the changing/evolving focus and purpose of the writing center.

Because North's excellent essay is old and because writing centers have changed in regards to how they operate and who operates them, it is only the purpose and goals of the center as stated in North's essay that have not changed. When North wrote his essay, writing centers were run by and overseen by the college's English department, which is why North puts the brunt of how writing centers are seen by others on the English department. In 2018, many writing centers on college campuses are not run by English departments; rather, they are run by the same people who oversee the college's academic success center, career center, and/or general tutoring center. At Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky, for example, their Writing Center is located within the same space as their student success center and, in a recent job posting for their Writing Center Director, they sought someone with both knowledge of higher education theory/practices and experience working in a writing center. This position at Bellarmine University demonstrates the growing influence higher education professionals have on the daily running of Writing Centers, and it demonstrates that English departments are not the ones to blame for the ways in which college students and professors see the writing center. However, North's statement that the mandate regarding what is to happen in the center is still true as, regardless of the sponsoring body, whether the Academic Success Center or the English Department, they are still the group that decides what happens in a writing center.

Not only have writing centers changed in regards to what department runs them, they have also changed in regards to where they operate. Writing centers in 2018 often have an online component where clients can receive tutoring via an internet connection/online platform. Online Writing Labs (OWLs) are quite common and are

especially useful for non-traditional or part-time students. Obviously, North could not have predicted the rise of the internet and its impact on writing centers, but based on his essay, "The Idea of a Writing Center," he would not have found online tutoring to be an effective form of tutoring writing. North's focus on the role of talk in a writing center session makes up the majority of his argument, so unless talk is part of online tutoring (which is sometimes and sometimes isn't), North would not approve. Online tutoring has changed how some writing centers operate and has allowed schools without writing centers to hire online tutoring services, such as NetTutor, to assist their students with writing in a way that better meets the needs of students who are increasingly more strapped for time and cannot physically get to a writing center. Writing centers now also assist students with more than just standard/traditional writing assignments, oftentimes working with them on multimedia projects, public speaking, digital composition. With the switch from focusing on the product to the process in composition, writing centers have been able to assist students both during and after the actual act of drafting occurs. This has enabled tutors and writing centers to focus more on the higher-level concerns, like thesis sentences, organization, and transitions, and less on the sentence-level concerns, such as grammar, that it started off addressing in its early days.

Online tutoring is a result of the move from English department oversight to Academic Success Center oversight because now writing centers are more aware regarding who their students are and what they need. Writing center directors are now more involved in helping their colleges with issues like student retention, time to degree, and success post-graduation. They are no longer in a bubble of writing and literary studies with a focus on writing skills at the sentence-level. They are more open to

changes in student demographics, socio-economic-status, and non-English course writing requirements. This openness and understanding of the writing and academic needs of all of a college's students works toward building a sense of community in the writing center. A sense of community between tutors and between tutors and their clients better enables them to practice the talking and collaborative learning argued for by North in 1984. So, while the writing center has changed in the *way* it helps college students with their writing, its underlying purpose and goals remain the same.

With the change in departmental oversight and the growing use of online tutoring in writing centers, the Writing Center of 2018 differs somewhat from North's Writing Center of 1984, but the over-arching pedagogical goal—to help students with the process of composing—has persisted. To achieve their purpose and goals, North states that writing centers "must be accepted on their own terms, as places whose primary responsibility, whose only reason for being, is to talk to writers" (446). This purpose is sometimes overlooked by frustrated professors who send their "bad" writers to the center like a parent would send a sick child to the doctor: expecting a cure or prescription upon arrival that will make the problem go away for good. North believes that, for professors, "writers fall into three fairly distinct groups: the talented, the average, and the others; and the Writing Center's only logical raison d'etre must be to handle those others" (North 435). Such professors suffer from a misguided idea of what happens in a writing center and still believe the writing center's purpose is to help students with surface-level issues, which is different from the idea of what happens in a writing center from the perspective of those who work there.

This is proven by Malcolm Howell's survey of writing center tutors and faculty at the University of Pennsylvania which he undertook to determine their perceptions of what happens in a writing center. He found that, "[f]or faculty members the two primary criteria were grammar and punctuation. Tutors, on the other hand, ranked organization 'as by far the single most important factor for referral,' followed rather distantly by paragraphing, grammar, and style" (North 435). This can lead to frustrated tutors and students, as well as a writing center unable to really help writers with their writing in the way the "new" writing center is intended to.

Sending students to the writing center for grammar help is, in many ways, antithetical to the object or purpose of a writing center. At a writing center, "…the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction," so fixing the grammar in one text may help that one paper, but it will not help the student become a better writer, thus leading to more frustration down the road for student and professor alike (North 438). Helping writers through their writing is why the process approach works so well in writing centers for students are helped during the process where they are still open to recommendations and, sometimes, major revision. And because the focus is on the writer rather than a particular assignment, the approach tutors use to help that writer does not change from appointment to appointment. North explains this process perfectly when he writes,

> [w]e always want the writer to tell us about the rhetorical context-what the
> purpose of the writing is, who its audience is, how the writer hopes to present
> herself. We want to know about other constraints-deadlines, earlier experiences
> with the same audience or genre, research completed or not completed, and so

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on…We can question, praise, cajole, criticize, acknowledge, badger, plead-even

cry. We can read: silently, aloud, together, separately. We can play with

options…We can ask writers to compose aloud while we listen, or we can

compose aloud, and the writer can watch and listen (North 443).

The process of helping a student with his/her writing is a process that involves much

conversation, often questioning the writer's goals and methods for their assignment in

order to truly help them best convey their thoughts in an academic manner. This talk is

how the tutor not only gets to know the writer, but also his/her concerns regarding the

paper and his/her general writing weaknesses. This talk is what differentiates the "new"

writing center from the "old" and is what makes the center more than a remediation zone.

In all the talking about writing that takes place in a writing center, there is also a

bringing together of subjects and ideas, not necessarily writing related, but that are

experienced and accepted in the writing center. The writing center becomes a sort of hub

for people of various disciplines to come together and share their knowledge while

improving their writing skills. This hub is often one of the reasons why writing centers

are overseen by Academic Success departments as such departments encourage a

mingling of students majoring in all subjects to come together and interact in the same

place. Such a hub is easy to create in instances where the writing center is in the same

place as the general tutoring center/student success center, like at Bellarmine University.

All the talking that takes place, between building rapport between tutor and client and

teaching clients about writing, turns the writing center into a place where all are

welcome. In this way, one of the goals of the writing center is to make all students feel

welcome and like they can be good writers regardless of their chosen major or area of study.

The idea of the writing center as a hub for various disciplines is quite common in writing center research. In her article, "The Best of Where We're Going: The Writing Center as Metaphor of the Community of English Studies," Twila Papay states that, "all the splendid things which happen separately in the different contexts of reading and writing on a college campus merge and diverge and are comfortably brought together in the Writing Center" (11). She goes on to say that the writing center "is available to a host of "passengers" on a number of journeys to distant locations," and as such "[i]t furthers the discourse of all academic disciplines, by enabling all students to enter into the conversation to the best of their abilities" (Papay 8). On this topic, Muriel Harris writes that, "writing centers provide another, very crucial aspect of what writers need-tutorial interaction. When meeting with tutors, writers gain kinds of knowledge about their writing and about themselves that are not possible in other institutionalized settings" ("Talking in the Middle," 27). And Jan Robertson, in her article, "Who We Are and Why It Matters," explains that, "writing centers everywhere do share the commonality of a collaborative, accepting, and inclusive culture; and indeed, we must see not only the differences but also the universal humanity of all who enter our centers" (21). In these ways, learning from each other, creating a welcoming space for all writers, and by seeing students/writers as people with their individual dreams and academic journeys, writing centers meet the goal of being a hub, and also achieve their purpose of helping writers with writing for they do so in a non-judgmental, fair atmosphere, where friendly conversations teach about writing.

Writing centers are able to achieve their purposes and goals via the tutors they employ and the tutoring strategies used to help students with their writing. The sort of talking tutors take part in was mentioned previously, but now a more in-depth look at the purposes and goals of tutors in writing centers is required to really understand how the parts (the tutors) enable the mission of the whole (the center) and make the center an effective place for students to come for help with their writing. What makes the tutor's talking so effective? What do they talk about? How do tutors toe the line between teacher and friend?[1]

A writing center tutor has one main job: talk to students about their writing. They do not take the paper from the student, mark it up, and hand it back to them in silence. It is a very interactive process and the conversation that takes place between tutor and client is what makes the session either a success or a failure. There is a lot of pressure on tutors to make sure the students get the help they need by the end of the session. Harris explains that a tutor's role entails many tasks: "offering reader response, leading the student toward finding her own answers, suggesting strategies to try, diagnosing possible underlying problems, listening while the student articulates her message, and offering needed support during the composing struggle" ("Collaboration is Not Collaboration" 371). These tasks can be difficult to accomplish without first establishing rapport between tutor and client. This happens when "[y]ou talk about everyday stuff—like what

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[1] Before answering those questions, a distinction must first be made between "tutors" and "peer tutors." "Peer tutors" are tutors who are typically undergraduate students working with mostly other undergraduate students on their writing. A tutor who is a graduate student is not called a peer tutor even if they are working with another graduate student as their client. Some writing center scholars focus specifically on "peer tutors" in their research, while others speak of tutors in a more general sense. Some writing centers hire only graduate students and some hire a mix of graduate and undergraduate students to serve as tutors. For the purposes of my argument, I will use the term "tutor" to cover both types of tutor unless a scholar is specifically referring to undergraduate tutors or I am comparing the two types.

somebody likes and hates about writing, the hour of the day (or probably night) when people like to write, and the kinds of places somebody likes to be in when they write" (Bruffee, "What Being a Writing Tutor," 7). In his research on effective tutoring, Kenneth Bruffee found that "spending a lot of time talking with tutees about writing is just as important a part of a writing peer tutor's job as helping tutees plan their position papers" ("What Being a Writing Tutor," 7). In this talking, the tutor moves from building rapport to getting the student to think about their writing as more than just something that needs to be proofread: "The tutor's job is to help writers move beyond requests for someone to "proofread" or "fix" their papers" (Harris, "Collaboration is not Collaboration," 371). In this way, tutors teach through their talking and help students see themselves as capable writers.

Tutors are informal teachers who can't give grades or lecture a student about not doing their homework. They talk with the students, hold conversations rather than lectures, and work with students, one-on-one, to improve their writing skills. They teach students "how to proofread, how to let go and brainstorm, how to capture a flood of ideas in the planning stage…how to draw back and figure out if the organizational structure is appropriate, or how to check on paragraph development" (Harris, "Talking in the Middle," 33). Tutors can model the writing process, suggest writing strategies, and observe the student while they write and provide in the moment feedback (Harris, "Talking in the Middle"). Tutors also help students "gain confidence in themselves as writers by attending to their affective concerns and assists them in learning what academic language about writing means" (Harris, "Talking in the Middle," 40). This confidence gain can also come about when tutors help students understand what their

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instructors want them to do to revise or complete an assignment. Harris describes tutors as being "other than teachers in that they inhabit a middle ground where their role is that of translator or interpreter, turning teacher language into student language" ("Talking in the Middle," 37). Bruffee seconds that concept in his article, "What Being A Writing Peer Tutor Can Do For You" by stating, "[o]ne thing you do as a writing peer tutor is help students understand what professors are asking them to do…You help your tutees to write in one of the ways that you have already learned to write" (Bruffee, "What Being a Writing Tutor," 7). Helping students with their writing and in understanding instructor expectations involves empathy and the ability to listen (Robertson). All the talking that takes place in the writing center does no good if it is not balanced out with listening. Good listening leads to effective talking, so the better listener a tutor is, the better they can help a student with their writing.

All of these things that tutors do for and with students are influential, to say the least. A student may bring in one assignment and never come back, or a student may come every week with a different assignment. Either way, the work of tutors makes a difference in their clients' academic ability and even in their personal lives. Bruffee argues that writing tutors are influential in a number of ways, the first being that the act of tutoring writing itself "has influenced American college education for—what is it?— more than 25 years" ("What Being a Writing Tutor," 6). Bruffee explains that influence by stating, "as a writing peer tutor, you influence how your tutees go about their studies, and you influence how they feel about themselves, "[b]ut the greatest importance of being a writing peer tutor is that being a writing peer tutor influences *you*" (25). The second way tutors are influential is that they influence how their clients engage in their

education/studies and how their clients feel about themselves (Bruffee, "What Being a Writing Tutor"). As mentioned previously with the hub concept, being a writing tutor helps the tutor become a better writer along with the clients they tutor. All the talking about writing between tutor and client reveals things about writing to both that they may never have questioned or thought about much before, like the power of word choice or the huge difference reordering a thesis statement can make.

Talking to clients and listening to them talk about their ideas and their writing is a collaborative effort. The role of the tutor in helping the writing center meet its purpose of talking to writers and improving their writing is one of collaborator more than formal instructor. This collaborative learning is the basis for writing center work and for writing centers meeting their goal of making all students feel welcome. This is accomplished through all of the conversations that take place between tutor and client. Without collaborative learning, writing centers would not be the "new" writing centers colleges employ today. Research on writing centers and writing center scholars all agree that "tutoring in writing is a collaborative effort in which the tutor listens, questions, and sometimes offers informed advice about all aspects of the student's writing in order to help the writer become a better writer" (Harris, "Collaboration is Not Collaboration," 371). Tutoring without collaboration is not tutoring, and it is this collaboration between tutor and client that help the center create a place of community and welcome for all students. It is the foundational learning/teaching method on which the "new" writing center operates.

The concept of collaborative learning as applied to the writing center was introduced by Kenneth Bruffee in his 1984 article, "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation

of Mankind.'" This essay presented the concept of collaborative learning as a conversation between tutor and client and presented their roles as equal. Elizabeth Boquet refers to Bruffee's concept and cites him in her book, *Noise from the Writing Center*, as follows: "[p]eers work together in a given community, Bruffee explains, to experience learning as 'an activity in which people work collaboratively to create knowledge among themselves by socially justifying belief' (12)" (Boquet 28). It is only through working together can knowledge be created, or so that is Bruffee's claim. Anyone who has spent time in a writing center will see that to be true, whether it be in the conversation between a tutor and a freshmen student struggling with commas, or the debate between a tutor and a graduate student on the best way to present a counterclaim in their thesis. The art of successful collaboration is necessary for a tutoring session to succeed, and within that collaboration it is important to understand the ways in which clients perceive their tutors-for there is a fine line between the tutor as friend and the tutor as instructor.

This concept was mentioned somewhat earlier, but here the idea of tutor as peer or friend needs to be fleshed out in order to better understand both the process of collaboration during a tutoring session and how that process helps create a sense of community in the writing center. First, can a tutor, even if he/she is an undergraduate student working with another undergraduate student, truly be that student's peer? Tutors are the "experts" on writing and therefore already occupy a position of authority and knowledge the student does not. Tutors also have the home field advantage of feeling at home in the writing center while their clients may feel uncomfortable or awkward in the space, especially since they are in a space where they must admit their writing weaknesses and ask for help (Godbee). Writing experience, familiarity with the center,

and the varying level of confidence in writing ability all separate the writing tutor from their client, so perhaps tutors are not "peers" of their clients in the traditional sense, but what about other definitions?

Beth Godbee examines this concept in her article, "A (Re)cognition of Peerness as Friendship," in which she argues tutors and clients will never "be 'peers' in the sense that many writing center theorists might describe us because our school and writing experiences create divisions," and so, rather, "[i]t is in life experience and our basic humanity that we find equality. Rather than striving for peerness (sameness), we should get to know writers as people and work toward friendship" (Godbee 15). "Friend" over "peer" is an interesting way to view the relationship between tutor and client, and it might be a good way to think about that relationship, particularly when working toward building a sense of community in the writing center.

With that idea of a tutor in mind, perhaps the term "peer" really means someone who, while not on the same academic level as the client, is still able to listen, learn, and give advice almost as if they were a friend who just happens to be good at writing. Godbee believes "that peerness should be conceived less as a matter of status equality and more in terms of opportunities for co-learning or shared activity in the writing conference" (4). In her argument, Godbee refers to Bruffee's concept of peer tutoring as a "a two-way street, since students' work tended to improve when they got help from peer tutors and tutors learned from the students they helped and from the activity of tutoring itself," in order to prove that the learning goes both ways and also demonstrate that collaboration works best when tutors are treated as wise writing friends rather than as informal instructors (Godbee 14). As part of this idea, Godbee believes that "relative

success in tutoring is rooted in our enjoyment of each other's company and our subsequent open conversations about writing. Perhaps co-learning grows out of friendship more than from peerness" (Godbee 15). Also, Godbee claims that the concept of "friend" over "peer" "may also lead to shared active roles that counter writers' passivity and instead promote collaboration" (15). And with this "tutor as friend" idea, it is important to remember that friends have differences and those differences allow them to learn and grow together, which is one of the goals of the writing center.

"Tutor as friend" helps build a comfortable relationship between tutor and client, thus allowing the client to ask what they deem to be "dumb" questions without fear of being reproached. Harris remarks on this situation in two of her articles. In "Collaboration is Not Collaboration is Not Collaboration," she states that, "[t]utors are likely to get both honest answers and honest questions from students…because the tutor has the unique advantage of being both a nonjudgmental, non-evaluative helper…one who the writer trusts as reasonable knowledgeable," and so "the tutor can encourage open discussion about a variety of problems that may be affecting the writer's writing" (376). In her article, "Talking in the Middle," Harris remarks that as the conversation goes on in a tutoring session, students begin to talk more freely and honestly because there aren't "penalties for asking what they perceive as 'dumb' questions" and they also feel more comfortable developing their own ideas in their tutoring conversations (28 and 31). So, whether students see tutors as "peers" or as "friends," they feel much more comfortable talking about their writing with them than they do an instructor, which leads to more effective collaborative learning and enables the tutors to really engage with student writers as they "naturally model a sense of equality, of two minds exploring an idea

together" and the "learning is not disrupted by the imposition of a 'higher authority' in the form of teacher or scholar or text" (Papay 5). If tutors are seen as wise writing friends, they can best help writing centers achieve their purpose of helping students with their writing as students' perceptions of them as that persona allows students to open up about their writing and get the help they really need, help they do not want from a teacher or authority figure who lowers their confidence level; friends lift each other up and encourage success, and that's what writing tutors do.

Not only should tutors be "friends" or friendly with the students they tutor, but they should also try to befriend each other, as the way they interact with their fellow tutors can impact client comfort and ability to learn. In order for clients to feel a sense of welcome and community in a writing center, that sense must first be developed amongst those who work there. If the tutors are uncomfortable with each other or don't get along well, a feeling of tension fills the center and can make clients uncomfortable. They may feel like they are intruding or like they are causing the tension and may not return for more help. A writing center can be an intimidating place for many students, so it is very important that centers do what they can to lesson that feeling and developing a strong tutor community is one way to go about doing that. Bruffee would argue that such a community is imperative to collaborative learning since "being a writing peer tutor is related to all kinds of productive relationships among human beings," meaning that "[y]our tutees learn from you, you learn from your tutees, you learn from the writing peer

tutors you work with, and they learn from you" (Bruffee, "What Being a Writing Tutor,"

5). All this learning is only possible, and is most beneficial, when everyone gets along[2].

Tutors who get along and are comfortable with each other benefit their clients and themselves in the following ways. First, by being comfortable with each other, tutors are more likely to turn to their fellow tutors for advice regarding tutoring. This could be during a session or immediately afterward, but "everyone could stand to learn from each other for the benefit of students coming into the center" (Gyekis 1). Tutors should see each other as resources and be willing to not only ask each other for help, but also be asked for help themselves at times. However, this resource use "will not take place if they do not know each other or have a forum to exchange ideas" (Gyekeis 1). In Grouling and Buck's study on the relationships between writing tutors, they found that "most seemed to agree that the social friendships formed in the center helped tutors be comfortable with one another when they needed professional support as tutors-asking for advice, sharing common struggles, and sharing a love of helping others with writing" (Grouling and Buck 57). If tutors can turn to each other for help, it will improve their tutoring ability/skills, and therefore better help their clients with their writing.

Second, tutors who get along with each other are happier tutors, which makes them more inclined to do their best when they tutor as they enjoy what they do. Tutors in Grouling and Buck's study remarked on the social aspects of working in a writing center and believed that those aspects made the job fun and made the center a pleasant working environment. One of those tutors, "Adam," discussed the importance of just "hanging

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[2] There is a fine line between "getting along" and becoming too friendly. I am not advocating here for tutors to try and become best friends with, or date, their clients. Professional conduct should always be present between tutor and tutee.

out" with other tutors when there weren't any clients to help or when clients did not show up for appointments. He stated "that this time is not only productive for building friendships, but that it also 'spilled *over* into being beneficial for the clients' by creating an overall welcoming and friendly atmosphere" Grouling and Buck 57). Another tutor, "Rich," believed the reason tutors became close was because "they 'notice the same stuff and have some of the same beefs with clients'" (Grouling and Buck 57). As a result, and as mentioned above, "[w]hen shared repertoires failed, and problems arose, tutors felt able to discuss those issues and that discussion helped them feel close to the community in the writing center," and sometimes "these connections extended to social communities outside the writing center" (Grouling and Buck 57). The relationships between tutors clearly have many benefits for both the tutors and the clients, but can these relationships be built between tutors who are not on the same academic level? Can undergraduate/peer tutors and graduate tutors work together in the same writing center to build a sense of community that makes the writing center beneficial for its clients?

Writing centers vary in the type of tutor they employ, so if a center hires only graduate students as its tutors, the above questions are moot, but if they do hire both, this is certainly an issue the center's director needs to address. Undergraduate writing tutors and graduate writing tutors are at two very different places in their academic careers and this can impact how they interact with each other. Grouling and Buck's study not only examined tutor relationships in the writing center in general, but it also examined, specifically, the relationships between undergraduate and graduate writing tutors. The first thing they note is that the way in which tutors come to the center/are hired by the center makes a difference in how each group approaches their job. They found that the

gift of choice made the most difference as undergrads enjoyed tutoring more because they chose that job, and graduate tutors did not because the tutoring was mandatory. As a result, "how tutors came to the writing center had a real, tangible effect on the professional community" (Grouling and Buck 58). Tutors "Mary" and "Elaine," who are undergraduate tutors, "both expressed difficulty interacting with their graduate student colleagues who formed their own groups on the couches talking about their courses rather than their tutoring" (Grouling and Buck 58). The undergraduate tutors in the study admitted that they probably would not seek help from the graduate tutors or share advice with them because they felt a strong sense of intentional separation. This separation of tutors demonstrates how "different identities in the writing center can impact our writing center communities" (Grouling and Buck 58). If tutors are segregating themselves and choosing not to interact with other tutors, that can make working at the center unpleasant, and if tutors aren't enjoying their job, they might rush through each appointment or present a frustrated attitude, thereby providing their clients with sub-par tutoring.

The writing center can't achieve its purpose of helping students improve their writing skills through talking if its tutors can't even talk to each other. On this issue, Grouling and Buck recommend "that directors and tutors be aware of this dynamic and work actively to build community among tutors of various backgrounds, particularly between undergraduate and graduate tutors" (59). The solution is not to choose one group of tutors over another in the hiring process as both groups of tutors benefit the center in their own way. Hiring only graduate tutors who end up working with mostly undergraduate clients "exacerbates an already-recognized power imbalance" (Godbee 13). Having both types of tutors is beneficial for the clients, and so it is imperative both

groups communicate with each other and learn to get along. As for whose responsibility it is to help those two groups develop a strong community, Grouling and Buck suggest graduate assistant directors, not the director him/herself. They argue that graduate assistant directors of writing centers are "in a unique role to help bridge the gap between graduate and undergraduate tutors" since "[t]hey can be on the look-out for instances where graduate students may drift to talking about their schoolwork while an isolated undergraduate looks on, and they can model their own professionalism" (Grouling and Buck 59). The graduate assistant director occupies a space between tutor and director and so has authority to mentor and guide tutors without the tutors feeling like they are being reprimanded by the director. As they are graduate students themselves, they can relate to the graduate tutor's desire to stick to other graduate tutors, but they recognize the harm that can do to the center's purpose and the overall feeling of welcome it presents to its clients. While the director could help as well with fostering relationships between these two groups of tutors, such a task is easily delegated to the assistants, though he/she could step in when needed.

The task of developing community amongst writing tutors in a writing center is no small feat, particularly with undergraduate and graduate tutors, but it must be done in order for the center to fulfill its purpose of providing the best conversations with students about their writing that they can. Joe Gyekis argues that "by paying special attention to building community and what to do once a harmonious, familiar environment exists, the writing center can be much more useful as a service institution" (Gyekis 1). Indeed, the question of usefulness and worth is often something writing centers must contend with in maintaining their space on college campuses, and building community within the center

just might help them prove those two traits. A well-established sense of community in the writing center makes the tutors better at their jobs and enjoy what they do, thus improving the tutoring that center provides. Gyekis states that, "[i]n the process of building interpersonal relationships between directors, peer tutors, and other staff, an open line of communication can help a writing center to solve problems more quickly, disperse information and expertise more freely, and develop and implement innovative programs more efficiently" (1). And, familiarity will lead to a less stressful, even stress-free, working environment for both tutors and clients, thus leading to better thinking and collaborative learning. For these reasons, and the many others provided above, it is imperative that writing centers focus on developing a sense of community within the center.

CHAPTER 2: BUILDING COMMUNITY WITHIN THE CENTER

Before going further, it may be necessary to define "community." Community here should not be confused with the term "rapport," which is the sense of connection between a tutor and a client developed to put the client at ease and to help the tutor better understand the client's needs. Developing rapport is important and is related to "community," but it is not the same thing as "community." In arguing for developing a sense of community within a Writing Center, the term "community" means a feeling of welcome, comfort, friendship, understanding, and togetherness.

The term "community" as used here is not in reference to a "learning community," a "community of practice," "academic community," or a "discourse community." Such community types are examined and defined by Joseph Harris in *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966's*, namely "Chapter 5: Community," where he traces the word "community" through composition scholarship (namely during the social turn) in order to determine what this word means to the field. Harris examines "community" and how it can define a particular group or set of individuals, as well as what holds them together in their community. Harris invokes and cites many composition scholars, such as David Bartholomae, to demonstrate the wide range this term enjoys in the composition field. Harris states that, *"[c]ommunity* thus becomes for Bartholomae [in "Inventing the University"] a kind of stabilizing term, used to give a sense of shared purpose and effort to our dealings with the various discourses that make up the university" (136). Then, Harris presents Raymond Williams' definition of community,

which describes "community" as a "warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships," and it is a term that "seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term" (134). Starting with these two definitions, Harris focuses on "community" as a group of people, not as a feeling between people. By the end of his chapter, though, he begins to move in that direction.

Along with using "community" to define particular groups, like a discourse community, for example, Harris uses it to describe the senses and feeling of a particular group. In remarking on the power of the term "community," Harris states that while there are other words that describe the effects of social forces on our writing, no other word "carries with it the sense of like-mindedness and warmth that makes community at once such an appealing and limiting concept" (144). Harris' focus on a community's impact on individual writers pertains to my definition of community because the group of writers present/coexisting in a writing center influences not only the clients, but also the tutors themselves, and creates that sense of warmth and like-mindedness that Harris claims the word carries with it. So while for the most part, "community" refers to particular groups and could refer to a learning community or community of writers at a writing center, I am using "community" more for the sensation or feeling it brings to said groups. The sense of community I argue for here is less a type of group (a learning community, for example) and more a feeling of harmony and openness that the center exudes via its tutor-to-tutor relationships, and thereby its tutor-to-client relationships. The feeling of community that should be created by a writing center encourages collaborative learning and collaborative socialization.

Some might argue that the feeling of "community" recommended here is akin to the concept of the writing center as a homey or cozy atmosphere. The writing center as a cozy space is taken up in Chapter 3 of Jackie McKinney's book, *Peripheral Visions of Writing Centers*. She states that, "[o]f all the pieces of the writing center grand narrative, I think the idea that a writing center is—and should be—a cozy, homey, comfortable, family-like place is perhaps most firmly entrenched" (20). This concept began as a result of writing center directors' choosing to make the centers' physical space less like a lab and more like a welcoming, non-threatening area of campus: "Boquet notes the move toward the homey decor was a conscious move away from the early auto-tutorial writing labs. The desire not to be the skill-and-drill lab led directors to "characterize the lab spaces as non-threatening'' (McKinney 23). So, this is the reason why many writing centers, if not all, attempt to achieve this homey, cozy atmosphere through the inclusion of things like couches, art, coffee pots, plants, and such. McKinney attaches the concept of "family" to the cozy writing center when she states that, "[p]rofessionals in the field created friendly centers, or what they imagined were friendly centers, for conscious reasons…they wanted students to feel welcome and like one big family" (23). The concepts of "family" and "friendliness" are related to the idea of "community" argued for in this essay, so most writing centers are already off to a good start in their efforts to build community within their centers.

However, the idea of a writing center as a cozy space where community can blossom is interrogated by McKinney as she sees such a space as counterintuitive to the aims of the writing center. McKinney believes, first, that the writing center tutors use the comfortable and welcoming atmosphere of the center to "show themselves as insiders in

the field of writing centers—to show that they know the writing center grand narrative"
(24). She states that, "[t]hinking of our writing centers as cozy homes…can certainly
make us feel good…But, as Beth Daniell warns, we ought to 'be careful of literacy
narratives that make us feel good'" (McKinney 25). It is dangerous, McKinney argues, to
make writing centers into cozy homes because some students see school as an escape
from home and would rather not be reminded of home (26). Also, according to
McKinney, seeing writing centers as a home works against the aims of the center for if
students feel overly comfortable, they may be unwilling to work since they don't see the
space as an academic environment: "Couches, beanbag chairs, pillows, low lights, and
lava lamps may put students in the mood to lounge, sit back, relax. It may not
communicate to students that they will need to be active agents in the tutoring session if
it's going to work" (McKinney 27). And if writing centers are putting so much emphasis
on being homey and comfortable, they may make students think serious work does not
happen there or that their work will not be taken seriously (McKinney 27). Truly,
McKinney wonders, does the comfortable space even matter to the students, or does it
matter just to the tutors? An example McKinney provides of removing "cozy" objects
like plants and art demonstrates that a change in comfort level of the center did not matter
to the clients, but it did matter to the tutors. After pointing out all of the flaws and
dangers of creating cozy writing center homes, McKinney concludes with a call to action.
She argues that, "[w]hat we ought to stop doing is using descriptions to fortify a narrative
of cozy homes simply because it allows us to imagine that our spaces are (or should be)
friendly or that writing about our centers in particular ways marks us as belonging to the
writing center culture" (34). Overall, in McKinney's opinion, a cozy writing center is an

ineffective writing center and centers should not present themselves as places of comfort or their tutors as a "family."

McKinney's argument destroys the image of the writing center most tutors are familiar with and seems to advocate for a return to the drab "lab" atmosphere of the writing center's early days. Such a return, she argues, would better enable writing centers to help students with their work as it would demonstrate to students that their writing is valuable, and the center is an important academic space on campus. The concept of community is not mentioned in her argument, excepting the reference to "family," and she is unconcerned with the need for comfort in the writing center in order to facilitate collaborative learning. She points out that the coziness of a center is more for the tutors than for the students, so why bother? The writing center as a cozy home is somewhat abhorrent to McKinney as she calls for a change in how writing centers present themselves to students since friendliness and hominess is giving students the wrong idea about what happens in a writing center.

It is unlikely writing centers everywhere will suddenly remove all vestiges of coziness after reading McKinney's argument as the way she views writing center work seems contrary to what actually happens in a writing center. Her view is certainly conflicting with the argument being made here as she disregards the feelings of tutors and students as people and focuses solely on the center as physical space uninfluenced by those who inhabit it. The example of tutors being more impacted by a change in the center than the students were may be true, but as mentioned previously, if tutors are not happy and are not comfortable where they work, it shows in their tutoring. What's wrong with some art, plants, and couches if it makes the tutors feel welcome and if it helps them

enjoy their work more? Couches become places to hang out and discuss tutoring strategies with each other. Art becomes conversation pieces or ice breakers between tutors meeting for the first time. Keeping plants alive becomes a task all the tutors can get involved in, and plants brighten up a room that is often a basement or relegated corner of an academic building. If tutors are happy and comfortable, it seems reasonable to think that their clients will also feel comfortable.

As for McKinney's claims that cozy writing centers take students less seriously and that some students don't want to be reminded of their homes, they are problematic. While an empty, sterile space with desks and computers may feel more academic, it also feels like a testing center or like a weird waiting room. Students know that the work of the center is serious because of the way the tutors respond to them and their writing. As long as the tutors take the work seriously, what harm does a couch or a coffee pot do? And while some students do have harsh and unwelcoming homes with their parents, that does not mean every home they enter reminds them of that home. If that were the case, they would be unable to visit friends' houses or be able to make their dorm cozy. The writing center as cozy home is a home separate from their own and could show them that not all homes are bad. It is a different home with a different family that would love nothing more than to help students with their writing and welcome them to a new academic space full of community. The coziness is what enables comfortable conversations between tutors and their clients, and it is what makes clients feel safe in expressing their writing doubts and concerns. The coziness of the writing center helps it build community between tutors and between tutors and their clients.

Creating a cozy center is a good start in actively building community within the writing center. However, a question that arises when determining how to build community is, should writing centers and/or their directors work to explicitly build community within the center? Elizabeth Boquet examines this question in a chapter of her book titled, *Noise from the Writing Center*. She, like McKinney, examines the transformation of writing centers from drab labs to comfy centers, though she, unlike McKinney, acknowledges the social aspect of this change. Boquet explains that the social nature of centers changed when the employees became peers/students instead of faculty, and "[a]fter that change, the atmosphere and environment of writing centers became more social (couches, plants, etc.)" (29). With this new social setting, "[c]ommunity would flow naturally…and the nature of the writing centers, where small groups of people often work together quite closely for several years, seems well suited to community formation" (Boquet 29). However, in many instances, such community is not flowing as naturally as the cozy setting initially predicted it would. So, to build community or to not build community, that is now the question.

In her text, Boquet examines her own attempts to create community in her writing center and wonders why they are not working. She organized a beginning of the year gathering, set up a holiday party, and left food around as she thought such efforts "might create a sense of community rather than emerge from one" (Boquet 26). Her attempts at community were unsuccessful and resisted by her tutors, thus leading her to realize that "such a community is not mine to create; it is not mine to sustain" (Boquet 27). Boquet's declaration is interesting as it takes the community creating agency away from the director and places it on the tutors themselves, leaving the director out of the community

equation entirely. But, is this fair and/or feasible? How can tutors build their own community, particularly if they are made up of undergraduate and graduate tutors who won't talk to each other?

Putting the burden of community building on tutors seems unfair, particularly if the center is made up of tutors who only spend a semester there and then never look back. writing centers can often present as a collection of rotating tutors, graduating tutors, new tutors, etc. and expecting these tutors to create community on their own seems difficult. Perhaps such community building, if not the task of the director or the tutors, could be the task of an assistant director. Boquet does not mention such a position, but many centers do have an assistant director (or at least graduate students acting as assistant directors as mentioned by Grouling and Buck) and perhaps building community within the center could be one of his/her tasks. The question of who will build community is now answered, but how will an assistant director build this community within his/her Writing Center?

While there isn't a handy dandy handbook on how to build community in a writing center, there are various activities and exercises directors and assistant directors alike have implemented in order to start building community amongst their writing tutors. Upon asking the Writing Center listserv for the ways in which they (writing center directors, assistant directors, etc.) have worked to create community amongst their tutors, a plethora of activities and exercises presented themselves. Most of the suggestions were based on team-building exercises, tutor retreats, and even a tutor training course. In "The Idea of a Writing Center Course," the authors present a "three-hour upper-division academic course that blends practice with theory and invites participation from everyone

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in the writing center—a tutoring course designed to renew [their] center's culture by continually integrating and educating professional faculty and peer educators" (Schick, Mankowski, McDonnell, Bryant, Wendt, and Moghtader 2). The course in this article, according to the authors, "now serves as an incubator for our center's culture—one that not only cultivates a common understanding of tutoring writing but also nurtures collegiality and ongoing professional development" (Schick et. al. 2). Such a course sounds ideal for creating and also sustaining community in a writing center. The authors present this "Tutoring Writing" course as a continually evolving and adapting thing, a place where both undergraduate and graduate tutors learn to work together and pass on their knowledge to the next incoming group: "[i]n a professional setting devoted to excellence, we believe that our course has created a harmonic balance that leverages change and enables us to accumulate, revise, and pass on our expertise. Indeed, the Tutoring Writing course never really ends" (Schick et. al. 5). With tutors sometimes only able to work a semester and others able to work a year or more, a tutor course may help sustain the community the first group of tutors developed and create a safe space for tutors of varying degrees of experience and expertise to gather on equal ground and work together to provide the best tutoring they can, making their center not only a comfortable place to work, but also to receive excellent writing assistance.

For writing centers that are unable or do not wish to create such a tutoring course, there are several community-building activities available. The following is a list of activities and the name of the writing center scholar/director who posted them. Many of these suggestions came from the WClistserv archives (2012 and 2017) and were recommended by Bonnie Devet at the College of Charleston. Most focus on the

beginning of the academic year as the time for such activities, though, since tutors often start anew each semester, activities could probably be used whenever a new group of tutors begins work.

1. "Cut a wide variety of pictures from magazines (before the meeting). You should have many more pictures than attendees. Then, lay the pictures out and ask tutors to pick the picture they like the best (if you want general insight into a person) that represents why they chose to be a tutor, etc. (for more specialized answers). Then, you ask them to share their reasons for picking that photo with the group" (from Melody Pickle).

2. "I have a small group of tutors, but I have also done this same icebreaker at a conference with over 30 people-either way works great. Each tutor is told to find one partner. Once everyone has a partner, they have to find something that they have in common. Once everyone has finished they all share. Then, we add two groups together until there are only groups of 4 and they all have to find something in common. Make sure everyone shares before the groups are made bigger. Keep adding to the groups until everyone is in one big group and they all need to find something in common. I would suggest that the tutors choose someone they do not know well, but depending on the number of tutors, that can be hard. Also, I made them go deeper than for example, 'we are both wearing shoes,' unless that really was the only thing they have in common. This allows the tutors to get to know each other and it also lets them know they have similarities with people they thought they may not" (from Elizabeth Gillman).

3. "I had good success with putting new and veteran tutors in front of a white board and inviting them to share their fears, hopes, and dreams about tutoring and being part of the writing center. Create a column for each category on the white board and record every one and take the time to talk about it, to probe a little. I emphasized that repetition was both inevitable and okay. The main thing was to express them all and to talk about them. It is the sharing that both breaks the ice and starts some bonding. Talking about fears is especially important, because it is a subtext in tutoring. But the hopes and dreams shift things back to a positive tone. Important to let the initial silence just last until finally someone speaks up. After that, the conversation will move right along. And it's important to let the conversation go as long as it needs to" (from Jeanne Simpson).

4. "Each year, I take our consultants on a retreat (as early in the fall semester as possible, concurrent with the first semester for new hires). No matter the level of their experience, consultants consider this a highlight of our training. We begin with fun: food, games, even some pool time if our rental house has it. We then move to getting-to-know you games (a personal experience 'scavenger hunt' is always my favorite), usually the morning of our 'real' first work day [hey, they don't need to know that relaxing together is also the work of team-building]. Next, and with a more serious attitude, we tackle some team-building exercises that may rely on interpersonal skills, leadership strategies, and writing. Finally, we move to the formal theme for the retreat, something that changes year to year. The year we upgraded the training course from two hours to three, I asked the writing consultants to help me decide what would be more helpful to expand on or to add.

Both times we updated our strategic plan, we used the retreat as a forum for that work. Possibly the most enjoyable retreat theme was "Flip This Center," where we looked at how to overhaul a tired-looking center on a shoestring budget. Even the consultants who know each other well or who have worked together for a year or more come home from retreat knowing different, important things about each other. And the whole group works more cohesively. Things click after retreat that never had before.

Your team-building and training exercises can serve two purposes: teach these six to work together as a team AND to learn more about how to consult with writers" (from Shannin Schroeder).

5. "Activity One: "What are you good at" & "What do you fear"
    a. Divide staff members into 5 groups with a mix of veterans and new ones. Ask them to share information about themselves with each other within 10 minutes (name, major, one thing you're good at, one thing you fear.
    b. Activity Two: "Build a Balloon Tree Together"
        i. Stay with the same group. Toss each group a bag containing a package of balloons and two rolls of masking tape. They have seven minutes to construct the tallest free standing structure they can devise with what is in their bag. Announce the winners!" (From Lingshan Song)

6. "As for a starting question: I ask tutors to write about a time they tried to do something new, struggled, and asked for help. It could be anything: playing tennis, sewing, reading a hard book on their own, cooking, whatever. The idea is

to help them remember what is like when something is unfamiliar, strange, where the fine points aren't known, and where getting even a little better or little sure came in the form of advice, coaching, help of some kind. Then they swap with another, read one another's piece, and pick one thing in the reading that as a reader they wanted to know more about. Then we talk about that -- the experience of learning and getting help, and the power of asking for more information, a kind of active listening." (From Nick Carbone)

7. "I like to ask some of the returning staff in advance to share quick stories around one of these themes:

   a. A funny (at the time or in retrospect) story about something at the Writing Center.

   b. A difficult consultation and how they either dealt with it or followed up on it.

   c. Personal writing disasters (hopefully caught in later proofreading).

I deliberately de-emphasize success as a criteria for these stories – for one, knowing that things don't always go as planned (and that they're not expected to be perfect 100% of the time) reduces the new tutors' stress; also, it's good to humanize the returning staff so that the new tutors feel comfortable asking for help/advice/etc." (from Basil Considine).

The above activities and exercises make it clear that building community within the writing center is a priority for many, if not all, writing centers. It is something all centers can do, whether they choose to create a course, run a retreat, do weekly get-to-know-you activities, or focus all the building on the first weeks of the semester within the

course of tutor training, all centers can and should make building community amongst their tutors a priority. It benefits both the tutors and the clients they serve, and thereby helps demonstrate the usefulness and effectiveness of writing centers, for once there is harmony and community within the center, building relationships between it and other departments and programs on campus will be much easier.

Community building in the writing center is easily done, and the importance of building such community is evidenced the fact that in the field of business and education, both business leaders and educators take time to encourage community building in their own space. As a writing center is a place of education but is also a sort of small business (within the much larger business of the college itself), perhaps some of the ways businesses and educators facilitate community building could be useful in the writing center as it works toward creating a sense of community for its tutors and clients. In an article for *Huffington Post*, Amol Sarva, a successful business man in the tech industry, states, "[c]ommunities are inherently different from networking organizations. Communities are networks with shared ideals or demographics. People concentrate on building relationships rather than using each other," and this is a good way to think about community in a writing center, as a way of building each other up based on the shared goal of helping students with their writing. Sarva goes on in his article, "Community Building 101," to give many tips for how to build community in a business. His first tip recommends building community around ideas and connecting around shared experiences, which matches some of the recommendations for writing center community building that were provided by the WCListserv. Sarva also recommends setting the culture of the community early on "because if you don't, someone else will," and the

culture that is set during the first impression will stick so, "[s]et the tone from the moment you meet your guests. Do it deliberately." The number one rule Sarva provides for building community in a business, that also applies to writing center community building, is "[j]ust do something. Anything. Don't be a victim of inertia. Put yourself and your ideas out there." This rule relates to Boquet's dilemma of whether or not to actively facilitate community because it did not seem to work for her no matter what she did. According to Sarva, it is more important to at least try and make community than just hope for the best and see what happens as time goes on.

A successful business requires a strong feeling of community, much like a writing center, in order to be successful. As writing centers are in the business of education, let's consider what recommendations for community building writing centers can take from the field of public education. An essay by Ellen Booth Church published on the Scholastic website, "Building Community in the Classroom," lists many reasons why community building in the classroom is important, and ways that teachers can help facilitate that community. In terms of when to build community, Church, like myself, believes "[t]he beginning of the year is a time for creating a sense of community," and the classroom or the center is "the gathering place" where all students "can feel secure, nurtured and supported by the environment, each other, and YOU." This early focus on community, according to Church, teaches students how to learn for the entire year, thus reiterating my argument that a strong sense of community encourages and improves the collaborative learning taking place in the writing center. Many, if not all, of Church's recommendations for building community in the classroom argue for the creation of the cozy home writing center that McKinney argues against. Church recommends making the

classroom a warm and beautiful place through decorating with fresh flowers, soft pillows, and other things that make "a homelike environment" (Church). She emphasizes the importance of building community through developing trust between student and teacher by making eye contact, listening to their ideas, and acknowledging their feelings, which are all things tutors are trained to do when working with clients in the writing center in their efforts toward building rapport. At the end of the essay, Church states, "[u]ltimately, the essential element to creating a sense of community in your classroom is YOU," not the items in the space or the space itself. In that final remark, Church acknowledges that community building starts with the people in the space, though it is enhanced by what's in the space and how the space feels to students. The recommendations for community building in the education field, as presented by Church, match up with the recommendations for community building presented via the WCListserv and are supported by my overall argument and supporting research as to why community building in the writing center is important.

All of the recommendations (presented here) for community building and for sustaining that community can and should be applied to writing centers that have not made such tasks priorities. But, as most current/existing writing centers have done so, the recommendation for community building between tutors and between tutors and clients is best applied/put into use by new/emerging writing centers. New/emerging writing centers have many issues and concerns to address their first year in operation. Building community should be one of their top priorities as it will help them address and conquer issues, such as proving their usefulness and demonstrating their value to the campus as a whole. Proving usefulness is accomplished through assessment. Writing center

assessment can be done either qualitatively or quantitatively and typically involves surveying center clients, tallying the number of students who come to the center in a given year, evaluating tutor performance, etc. The easiest way writing centers prove their worth is by determining the number of students who visit their center, how many are repeat visits, and what sorts of assignments are students bringing to their appointments. These data not only demonstrate how many students need the center's services, but also what assignments students struggle with the most and which majors need more writing assistance than others. In this way, the writing center can not only help itself, but also establish relationships with other departments and instructors, particularly those whose courses have high drop/fail/withdrawal (DFW) rates. Then, writing centers can offer their services via workshops and class presentations, extending the reach of the center far beyond the center's physical walls.

In order to extend its reach across campus and to get as many students/clients into their center as possible, the center must be a place to which students want to come and get writing help, and working toward building community within the center can make that happen. First impressions are everything, and that is true for how students perceive the writing center as well. A new writing center, unlike an already existing writing center, can focus on incorporating community into its physical design from the beginning, rather than trying to layer it into the center's identity years later. Centers can do this by presenting themselves as McKinney's dreaded "cozy home:" art on the walls, plants in corners, round tables for tutoring, couches for relaxing, etc. A student who walks into such a space is more likely to feel at ease and be open to collaborative learning than a student who walks into a space that is purely white space and desks. Once the physical

space is inviting, it is then up to the tutors to carry out the welcoming feeling in their responses and interactions with the clients. If tutor attitudes don't match the coziness of the space, the space may as well not be cozy at all. So along with making the physical space a welcoming environment for clients, centers should also focus on making the space a good working environment for its tutors.

Directors and even assistant directors can and should work toward making their center a pleasant work environment from day one. This is easiest when starting a new center as the first set of tutors who work at the center can set the tone and behavior for future tutors, particularly if the first tutors stay at the center for many semesters. Building community amongst these tutors through any of the previously mentioned options (tutor course, tutor retreat, training activities, etc.) should come at the beginning of the first academic year in which the center operates. Having tutors attend training all together at the beginning will help them build bonds with one another and will eliminate feelings of awkwardness the first few days they work together. As all tutors are "new," they are all starting on equal footing and so will all receive the same type and amount of training. By engaging in team-building activities and encouraging tutors to discuss their tutoring fears, directors and assistant directors can demonstrate the good that comes out of working together, and this will transfer to their day-to-day interactions in the center when working with clients because they know they can turn to each other during difficult sessions and receive help without judgement or condemnation.

Seeing each other as a sort of "family" in their "cozy home" creates a pleasant work environment for the tutors, and often their work relationships become outside-of-work friendships where they bond over the classes they are taking, the struggles they face

balancing work and school work, etc. The pleasant work environment described above

works toward building a sense of community and harmony within the center, which puts

the tutors in positive moods, thus improving the tutoring they provide their clients. As

mentioned previously with the first impression concept, if a client walks into a writing

center and senses the positive energy and congeniality present in the center, he/she will

be more likely to return to the center and to refer the center to their friends/peers who

also need writing help. Along with that, clients will receive better tutoring at a

community-focused center as the tutors there are more confident in their tutoring ability

since they know they can turn to another tutor for help if needed. This confidence level

will be more of a concern for undergraduate/peer tutors, and so, in working towards

building community, centers should encourage the more confident or experienced tutors

to guide the less experienced tutors. This will build up confidence and build community

between two types of tutors who, according to Grouling and Buck, often don't

intermingle in the writing center. In sum, if the space is cozy and the tutors get along,

clients benefit because they get more confident tutors and an inviting place to work on

their writing.

In order to work on their writing, tutors and clients engage in collaborative

learning. The level of collaborative learning that takes place between tutor and client in a

writing center session can be influenced by the level of community in the center. In other

words, clients are more willing to talk and make mistakes if they feel the center is a safe

space for their struggles. Here is where the development of community between tutors

and clients comes into play as, especially in a new writing center, the way the first set of

tutors interacts with clients sets the tone for future tutoring interactions and impacts the

reputation the first set of clients gives the center. If the early clients feel comfortable talking to the tutors and trust them with their "dumb" questions, the center will develop a reputation of helpfulness and friendliness, thus encouraging more clients to come to the center for writing help. The more comfortable clients feel with their tutors, the more effective their learning will be, and as long as this focus on comfort is established during the new center's first year, clients' will receive the best tutoring possible from day one and will continue to do so until the center ceases operation.

Building community within a new/emerging writing center will help with assessment, first impressions, reputation, and the center's relationships with other department on campus. The first year a new writing center is in operation can often make or break its existence on campus. Focusing on developing community within the center from the beginning will help the center establish itself on campus as a center committed to student success, both for its tutors (who are most likely students) and its clients. Building community within will make for a stable center that is capable of building community outside of the center, thereby making the center a hub for multiple disciplines to come together and learn from one another. This type of center is less likely to be seen as an isolated location on campus, a location where only bad writers go. It can become, from day one, a place of learning, writing, community, and togetherness for both tutors and their clients. This type of writing center, the cozy home with the tutor family, is the center that will last, turning a new center into a long-lasting tutoring establishment, a place the college and its students cannot succeed without.

CONCLUSION

Writing centers help all students with their writing through talking about that writing. This talking is improved when the tutor is confident in his/her tutoring ability and when the client feels comfortable in the center. Building community amongst tutors and between tutors and their clients increases the likelihood that writing centers will not only meet their purpose (helping students with their writing), but also prove their worth to their college campus over time. The collaborative learning that takes place in a writing center is encouraged by the physical space itself, specifically its level of coziness. That coziness is increased by the attitude of those who work at the center, making tutor happiness a priority as that happiness will trickle into their work and students will enjoy their tutoring appointments. A friendly tutor, whether an undergraduate or graduate student, can make any client feel like a peer rather than a problematic student, which makes the student more likely to be open to criticism and open to confiding their writing faults. A sense of community as defined in this thesis works toward making clients and tutors feel welcome and valued in the writing center. Writing centers with a healthy sense of community have tutors who refer to themselves and their fellow tutors as a "family," which enables the transformation of the writing center, with or without comfy couches, into a cozy home and welcoming hub for all students from all disciplines.

Building community within a writing center is easily done, as long as it is made an explicit priority of those in charge of the center itself. A good time for creating community is at the beginning of the academic year or whenever a new set of tutors is

hired. Several ways of building community in a writing center amongst the tutors have been presented above, as have the reasons why such community building is important from a writing center standpoint and from the standpoints of education and business. Building community may not have been a goal of the early writing center, or even North's writing center, but as the center moves from the supervision of the English department to the student success department, this goal grows in importance in order for tutors to help as many students as possible and be sure tutors are up to date on the types of students they will help. The writing center is no longer in the bubble of English and composition studies, and so establishing community within the center is necessary in order to establish relationships with other departments outside of the center, like Disability Resources. Overall, building community within a writing center, regardless of if it is started by the director or someone else, can only help the tutors who work there, the students who get help there, and the center's overall standing at its higher education institution. Happy tutors lead to happy, improved writers who encourage others to come to the cozy writing center and engage in successful collaborative learning with a tutor who is more like a friend than a reproachful professor, thus leading to better grades, increased retention, and shorter time to degree. When writing centers make community building a priority, everyone wins.

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