

1997

Integrating Student Expectations Into Writing Center Theory and Practice

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INTEGRATING STUDENT EXPECTATIONS
INTO WRITING CENTER THEORY AND PRACTICE

BY

Mary J. Bonevelle

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1997

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Abstract

When students go to a writing center to be tutored, they expect a certain type of instruction based on their prior experiences. Many students are perplexed to find that the parameters of writing center instruction are quite different than they anticipated. The resulting conflict between student expectations and actual center methods often induces tensions which can impede the effectiveness tutorial instruction. This thesis explores the basis of student expectations, strategies for addressing student expectations in practice, and the importance of acknowledging these expectations in writing center theory.

Chapter 1 discusses the incongruous relationship between writing center theory and practice and how the lack of attention paid to student expectations in writing center literature has figured in the formation of this incongruity. Chapter 2 focuses on research projects which have attempted to accurately assess specific student expectations. This chapter also examines the common influences on student expectations as well as factors which promote misconceptions and unrealistic expectations. In Chapter 3, tactics for reducing the tension caused by unmet student expectations are proposed. While this chapter notes the benefits of incorporating legitimate expectations of students into practice, it details several approaches for modifying students' expectations through writing center image clarification. Chapter 4 recognizes that tutors can provide valuable insight as other writing center professionals continue to adapt and develop theory. This chapter suggests methods for improving tutor training so that tutors are better equipped to work through tensions that surface when tutees' expectations aren't met, amend student misconceptions, and employ flexibility in tutoring techniques to instruct a diversity of students effectively.

*This thesis is dedicated to those people who,
though conditioned to believe they will invariably fail,
persevere to succeed.*

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank several people for their helping me in the completion of this thesis. Most notably, I would like to thank Dr. Linda Calendrillo for directing my thesis and putting up with all the trials and turmoil involved therein. I would also like to acknowledge my readers, Dr. Randall Beebe and Dr. John David Moore. All three of my committee members provided the feedback necessary to produce a comprehensive thesis and their help was greatly appreciated. Dr. Eric Hobson deserves thanks for providing various writing center resources. I would also like to thank Jami Harris for periodically serving as a sounding board for my ideas and Kimberly Manny for lending her expertise in the mechanical aspects of writing.

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INTRODUCTION

In her introduction to *Intersections: Theory-Practice in the Writing Center*, editor Joan Mullin suggests that writing center theories have not fully accounted for students, implying that these theories need to be reassessed. Mullin remarks, “Reassessment will enable us to articulate our theories and to review practices that may not be engaging our changing student populations” (vii). She admits that “those in writing centers also represent academic culture which excludes individual voices and privileges its own language” (xiii). Many of these exclusions and privileges can be eliminated if writing center theorists acknowledge the need for change. One of the most direct but least recognized courses of action for rectifying current writing center problems is a thorough examination of how student expectations influence the dichotomy between theory and practice.

The incongruity between theory and practice, especially in terms of the lack of attention paid to student expectations, is not a result of the theorists being out of touch with practice—indeed, most of the prominent writers in the field of writing center theory have been involved for many years with the day-to-day operations of writing centers at their colleges, universities, and high schools. Rather, the gap is partially due to the fact that even though the theorists are involved in writing center operations, they are, because of their administrative status, most concerned with tutor training techniques, gaining institutional support by fighting misconceptions, trying to keep writing center theories consistent with current theories on the teaching of composition, and solving operational problems. Out of the necessity of their positions in relation to writing centers, theorists

have become most concerned with these issues; however, because the theorists have not focused their attention on the average student who visits the writing center, they have failed to integrate sufficiently these expectations into their theories and, as a result, have not trained their tutors to acknowledge and address these expectations.

As a tutor working in a writing center, I have noticed some of the problems with unacknowledged student expectations. On many occasions, a conflict arises when a student seeking help on a paper obviously does not know what to expect from the tutorial and shows disappointment. As a tutor trained in the methods outlined by modern composition theories, I have been unable to resolve the incongruity between these students' expectations and current writing center practices. These practices have not adequately trained me to meet and respond to the differences between what students often expect from a tutorial session and how tutors are trained to function in these sessions.

In "Tutor and Student Relations: Applying Gadamer's Notions of Translation," Mary Abascal-Hildebrand uses feedback from the tutors working in writing centers. Interestingly, the tutors come right out and address the conflict between writing center practice and student expectations. Abascal-Hildebrand observes, "Students usually expect that tutors are available to 'fix' their writing, or at least to tell them what to do to fix it." She goes on to say that, as one tutor has explained, "Unless [students] have had experience in writing centers that stress process, they are unaware of the relational dimension of tutoring" (176). While these important issues are finally brought to light, they are quickly abandoned by Abascal-Hildebrand, and instead, she focuses on ways to change instructors' attitudes towards writing centers. Her approach repeats itself throughout the writing center literature.

Is there a way that the theorists can be made to acknowledge students' unmet expectations within their tutoring practices, or are writing centers' hierarchical structures too imbedded in the theoretical framework to allow for these changes? The best way to remedy the current problems in writing center practice is to re-evaluate theory. The very word "theory" is so formidable to some that they feel it is too established to change. Current writing center practice is based on theory derived from composition theory. If writing center theory is to be revised, as conflicts in practice (typically, conflicts between tutors' and students' perceived roles in the tutorial) have indicated it needs to be, a rethinking of theory must, this time, be based on practice. A major aspect of practice that needs to be incorporated into a revision of theory is that of student expectations. As Lil Brannon pointed out at the 1990 CCCC, "Writing center professionals do their identities a disservice by insisting upon research which focuses upon distant, theoretical concerns." Brannon went on to say that the daily operation of the center is the best place to discover contextual knowledge and research (qtd. in Bushman 27). By examining how student expectations have figured in writing center practices, an alteration of theory can begin to correspond more closely with practice.

CHAPTER 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXAMINING STUDENT EXPECTATIONS IN REGARD TO WRITING CENTER PRACTICE AND THEORY

Almost all writing center tutors have encountered students who come to the writing center expecting a particular type of service. When tutors explain to these students that centers do not provide services such as proofreading, a tension develops—tension resulting from misconceptions on the part of the student based on unmet expectations. Karen Rodis, in her article “Mending the Damaged Path: How to Avoid Conflict of Expectation When Setting up a Writing Center,” refers to this type of tension as “Expectation Conflict.” Rodis argues that there are “many conflicting expectations that a tutor at a writing center encounters each and every time she tutors a student” (46). Where lies the fault for this so-called expectation conflict? Is it with the students, faculty, administration, or the centers themselves? Many factors contribute to misconceptions in different ways, but certainly, misconceptions leading to expectation conflict will eventually lead to what students perceive as unmet needs and what centers perceive as problematic attitudes of students.

Do centers have a responsibility to take extended measures to clear up these misconceptions? If centers do have such responsibility, how can these misconceptions of writing tutorials be countered? Perhaps the best way to clear up misconceptions is to examine the expectations and perceptions and find a common ground between perception and practice. Fortunately, writing centers do have the power to help clarify the image of

writing tutorials. At the same time, writing centers have an obligation to understand the conflicting expectations and perceptions of all clients in order to provide services that meet the needs of tutees. Rodis explains that “much of the fault for these inequities—and, therefore, much of the power to remedy them—lies with [writing center professionals]” (46). The lack of research and literature addressing student expectations shows that many other writing center professionals do not actively acknowledge this power.

The minimal amount of documented feedback from students obviously is a hurdle in finding the underlying causes of expectation conflict. Locating studies of student expectations and perceptions based on actual research is no easy task. Paul Ady suggests that writing center professionals “are reluctant to ask [students’] opinions, partly because we are afraid of failure, partly because we cannot be sure we will receive sincere answers” (11). Because writing center theorists and administrators have neglected to acknowledge the difficulties tutees face when confronted with an unexpected learning environment to which they are unaccustomed, a bond of trust between students and writing centers has not been formed. Many students see centers as just another part of a large, uncaring, self-serving institution. While this is certainly not true, all one has to do is take a look at the pervading themes of current writing center literature to see how writing centers, necessarily preoccupied with their politics and determined struggles to gain respect, appear to outsiders.

Languishing in the actual gap between theory and practice are the tutees. They are found between tutors who are struggling to be motivated by theory and the ideals these tutees themselves believe tutoring should be. Tutorials seldom mirror the ideal expressed

in a majority of the predominant theory. Kenneth Bruffee states, “What peer tutor and tutee do together is not write or edit, or least of all proofread” (qtd. in Gillam 43). In one sense he is right—what peer tutor and tutee do together is struggle to reach common ground concerning the direction each expects or hopes the tutorial will take. The composition theories behind writing center theory contribute to the fact that writing center theory itself, in its present form, is not transferable as practice. Does writing center theory need to be constrained by the expectations of students? No, not as long as many student expectations are based on misconceptions. Does writing center theory need to be constrained by the techniques that writing centers can logically and effectively support? Certainly.

The current theory and basis for tutor training only compounds the expectation conflict. Just as the literature and general focus on research has tended to disregard student expectations, tutor training techniques have likewise failed to account for these expectations. As tutors realize that their training has been insufficient in teaching them to counter conflict of expectation with students, these same tutors have developed a dialogue of their own—a dialogue that occurs, primarily, in the “Tutor’s Column” of *The Writing Lab Newsletter*. At the same time as these tutors address, discuss, and propose solutions to the dilemma of expectation conflict and the resultant problems consistently faced in tutorials, administrators and theorists have continued on their own separate path, one that bypasses central issues of tutorial tension. Writing center theory based on composition theory has been established. Now, theorists should use insight from actual practice, especially tutors’ insights, to continue to develop this theory.

Muriel Harris maintains that tutors must analyze and work with each student as an individual ("Instruction" 98). But current theory does not accommodate the type of flexibility needed in practice, especially the type of flexibility that allows tutors to work effectively with students who have expectations that conflict with theory. DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain point out that theories "have a way of becoming stripped of complexity, rigidified, and rendered monolithic as they become popularized." These theories "can become disabling rather than enabling, inducements to deny rather than to deal with unconfirming realities," a process that may alienate students (26). When students expect a different style or approach to tutoring than those techniques by which tutors have been trained to abide, either theory breaks down completely as tutors reluctantly, and almost guiltily, must go against the tutoring doctrine, or a high degree of tension results between the tutor and the student. The first place that writing center theory needs to endorse flexibility is in tutor training. If theories appear less rigid to tutors as they are trained, these tutors will be able to better function in the dynamic environment of the writing center and will be able to diffuse expectation conflict themselves to a certain extent.

The other main problem in tutor training, and an overall problem in writing centers, is that tutors are instructed in methods that are unfamiliar to both them and the students they tutor. Collaborative learning, which has been heartily embraced by writing centers all over the United States, dictates many ideals that can enhance and improve the learning process. Unfortunately, until academe as a whole adopts collaborative learning, the concept remains an ideal. In principle, the writing center is an environment where collaborative learning techniques can be easily employed. However, as Lunsford so courageously observes, it is difficult to create a collaborative environment in writing

centers because “the students’, tutors’, and teachers’ prior experiences may work against it” (112). Undoubtedly, these groups’ current experiences are also working against collaborative learning. Classrooms at all levels still maintain the hierarchical structure where the teacher imparts information and wisdom to students with little self-guidance on the part of the students. Christina Murphy has asserted that the most effective tutors will be those who utilize collaborative learning styles (32). This statement is true only when viewed from a purely idealistic, theoretical standpoint. And in some specific cases of practice, collaborative learning does create an effective tutorial session. But students’ lack of familiarity with the concept of collaborative learning frequently creates confusion.

Students will dwell on the familiar, and academic training has perpetuated students’ dependence on formal guidance in learning situations (Nash 183). College students especially have developed a reliance on instructors dictating educational methods and processes. Because the didactic, hierarchical, non-interactive classroom setup is familiar to students, they are comfortable with such environments. Students who walk into the writing center and find that they are expected to control the progress of the tutorial experience an uncomfortable, unfamiliar role. John Trimbur states that writing center professionals “must teach tutors to ‘unlearn’ the traditional hierarchical academic model in order to resocialize tutors as collaborative learners within student culture” (qtd. in Bushman 32). This is what current tutor training methods attempt to do. But what about resocializing tutees to unlearn traditional hierarchical models? Again, tutor training methods create expectation conflict by presenting students with an environment contrary to the vast majority of approaches to which they have ever been exposed in educational settings. Perhaps Trimbur should have recommended that tutors be trained to help

students understand that writing centers do not operate under the traditional hierarchical academic model.

Writing center literature has noted, however, that peer tutoring is a contradiction in terms. This creates another conflict between theory and practice. Tutors are instructed to act as though they are on the same level as their tutees. Yet, how can tutors act as peers and collaborators when they do know more about what they are tutoring (Cogie 166)? When writing tutors refuse to portray themselves as authorities in their field, students become confused. Students come to the writing center seeking, expecting, a resource who is an expert in writing. If students wanted to talk to someone on their own level, they would seek out a struggling classmate. The idea that tutors need to pretend they are on the same level as students needs to be re-examined to help avoid expectation conflict. The other option, trying to clarify to students that tutors are no more knowledgeable than they, will only undermine the mission of the writing center by causing students to question tutors' qualifications. A re-examination of tutor training methods is one of the best ways to counter misconceptions and acknowledge student expectations.

Integrating the analysis of student expectations into writing center theory and practice has many implications. Other positive results are evident beyond improving the effectiveness of tutorials. Writing centers are not independent—the work of these centers carries over into other aspects of academics and education. Writing centers are undeniably connected with their institutions. Institutions provide funding, resources, tutors, administrators, and tutees. And writing centers can help an institution show enthusiasm for helping students to be better educated. “Just as we cannot look at the

function of the writing center, narrowly, we cannot accept it as an isolate, apart from the institution and the system in which it lives. We are part of a larger whole and a larger effort—to effect change in the way our students are educated” (Fishman 4). Writing centers and their institutions have a mutual relationship—writing centers help improve their institutions and institutions help improve their writing centers. Addressing student expectations will help improve the center in the eyes of the students. And if students have a more accurate conception of the writing center, contentment, acceptance, and approval generated by expectation clarification will carry over into the institution as a whole and can even contribute to institutional student retention.

Improving writing centers can improve an institution’s overall writing program. Obviously, students who better their writing competence in centers will have a higher success rate in their composition classes. Raising student success rates in composition classes is another way that writing centers can help their institutions and help retention. Students who pass their writing classes are less likely to be discouraged, will not be upset at having to pay to take a failed class again, and therefore will be less likely to transfer. When students at an institution graduate with higher writing skills, the institution’s overall image will be improved as those students enter the work force. Clearly, the implications and potential benefits of improving the writing center are limitless. Understanding student expectations is the most immediately necessary step to improvement.

Acknowledging and addressing student expectations will help writing centers clarify their image and clear up misconceptions. But this process will result in something much more important—the long-sought-after, so far elusive connection between theory

and practice, or at least the basis for a connection. “Theory without practice is likely to result in ungrounded, inapplicable speculation. Practice without theory, as we know, often leads to inconsistent, and sometimes even contradictory and wrong-headed, pedagogical methods” (Ede 100). Inapplicable speculation and contradictory methods can be avoided, in part, when more attention is given to the problems that can result from expectation conflict. Steve Inman defines the mission of service establishments such as writing centers as making patrons happy (3). Reluctance to discover what students expect, what it is that will make them happy or at least content, contradicts this mission. According to Jeanette Harris, “Successful writing programs are those that involve the entire university community” (44). Writing centers can only contribute more to successful writing programs when they do involve the entire university community—and the concept of the university community for writing centers needs to be redefined so that students are the emphasis of both theory and practice.

CHAPTER 2

STUDENTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS TO WRITING CENTERS

“What can we do about our image?” asked a tutor in our Writing Center staff meeting last year. “People don’t seem to understand what we do here.” This tutor had just been explaining for the umpteenth time, to a student who showed up asking to have his paper proofread, that we are not a proofreading service.

That was only one of the misunderstandings the tutors are forever having to correct. (Leahy and Fox 7)

Surely, this same conversation has taken place in tutor meetings at virtually every writing center across the United States. The relationship between students (tutees) and writing centers is very complicated. This relationship becomes more and more complicated as various factors contribute to student expectations and misconceptions, which are sometimes synonymous. As Martha Maxwell has so precisely stated, “What students expect to gain from tutoring may be an important determinant of whether they continue to use the service and how much they profit from it” (14). If students find their expectations are not met or are in conflict with espoused tutoring methods, students will probably not find writing centers valuable resources; therefore, it is imperative to understand the sources of student expectations.

Theorists' invalid assumptions about student expectations appear frequently in writing center literature. For example, Stephen North, in "The Idea of a Writing Center," contends that "in most cases the writers come prepared, even anxious to get on with their work, to begin or to keep on composing" (442). North also believes that each student needs "to talk about his or her writing, preferably to someone who will really listen, who knows how to listen, and knows how to talk about writing too" (440).¹ Annette Rottenberg concludes that students who visit writing centers are "interested in global changes" and want to examine their work as a total presentation (11). These types of claims are somewhat idealistic rather than realistic.

More recent articles have portrayed a realistic picture of students' wants, needs, expectations, and goals. These assumptions are based on writing center professionals' experiences. Even after "image clarification" attempts at the writing center at Boston University, Susan Blau found that "students still want [tutors] to proofread their work" (3). Maxwell observes that a student whose goal is to graduate from college as quickly and easily as possible (and how many students do not have this goal?) will only expect tutors to help them pass (15). As Phyllis Sherwood mentions, "Tutees often expect to learn everything at once. They are impatient and hopeful for a quick, immediate solution to their problem" (102). And Steve Sherwood mentions that other students "need us to help them generate ideas, calm their fears, and set them back on the right road (or show them they never left it)" (66). Remarks such as these are realistic and are made by writers who are not afraid to put writing centers and their relationships in a less than ideal light. While some theorists make assumptions about students that, though inaccurate,

correspond with theory, other theorists document true student expectations to challenge theory by gathering information and conducting research.

Of course, the best way to discover student expectations is to devise ways to get feedback from them, before, during, and after tutorials. Such feedback can reveal the expectations of students who have not visited the center, those who plan to visit the center, and those who have already visited the center. Understanding the expectations of all students in all stages of the writing process can provide a comprehensive view of student expectations and help writing center administrators and personnel investigate the relationship between expectations and problematic attitudes.

Only a few research projects dealing with tutee expectations are documented in literature. These studies provide a valuable perspective and resource for understanding what students expect, and how these expectations differ from accepted assumptions. In 1990, R. M. Akah interviewed 125 minority students at Ohio State University. Many of these students, all of whom had participated in tutoring at their school, said that they expected tutoring to “give them hope.” In other words, these students expected their tutors to help build their confidence. Other surveys have discovered that tutees feel that tutorials that offer high problem-solving techniques are the most successful (Maxwell 15).

Paul Ady conducted a study at Rhode Island College to discover student perceptions. Of the 96 students he surveyed, only one had ever previously used the college’s writing center. Ady’s study found that students expect the tutor to control the discussion, expect that all tutors are English majors, expect that tutors will rewrite their work, and do not expect to benefit very much from a tutorial (11). A survey conducted at

the University of Vermont revealed that many tutees expected tutors to be more knowledgeable than they were (Kiedaisch and Dinitz 93); the tutors probably were very knowledgeable, but the collaborative approach did not convey this image. Naturally, students with expectations such as these experience confusion when tutored for the first time. This type of confusion is common in writing centers where student expectations do not correspond with tutoring practice.

In 1994, the Valdosta State University writing center personnel designed a survey to determine student needs and expectations. The students surveyed provided feedback and points of concern in areas such as environment, professional attitude, scheduling, and software programs in VSU's center. Those surveyed indicated that they had expected a quieter environment, a more professional attitude from tutors, and more availability for walk-in tutoring (Inman 3). Gary Olson's survey of University of Alabama tutees showed that students expected a punitive, critical, and condescending environment—"Over one-third of the respondents claimed that at first they had felt 'anxiety or fear' about attending the writing center. In addition, eighteen percent of the respondents felt 'threatened' by being referred to the center . . ." ("Problem" 166). In some cases, students expect a tension-free, professional center staffed by knowledgeable students, while in other cases students expect a more condemning environment staffed by authoritative tutors. The results of surveys such as these indicate a wide range of tutee expectations, all of which need to be further analyzed to integrate successfully the consequences of such expectations into theory and practice.

One of the most comprehensive and conclusive studies of student expectations was done by Karen Rodis in 1988. Rodis informally surveyed writing center constituents

at three Cleveland, Ohio area universities—Cleveland State University, Case Western Reserve University, and Baldwin-Wallace College. Her goals in the study were to trace the development of expectation conflict at each school, detect variances in the degree of expectation conflict between institutions, and find the relationship between the structure and organization of each writing center and the degree and type of existent expectation conflict (47). Rodis distributed one set of questionnaires to tutors, one set to the school's instructors, and one set to students who had used the writing centers at these universities. In her questionnaires for students, "Students were asked what they expected from writing centers and what they thought they actually accomplished by going to the writing center" (48).

The four expectations cited by students at these three schools on the questionnaires were better grades, help with grammar, improved writing, and proofreading (Rodis 57). At Cleveland State University, more than fifty percent of students surveyed had expected better grades. Only ten percent stated that they expected to become better writers (50). Rodis discovered that the number of students who sought help in the writing center at Case Western Reserve University was very low because the school had "not overcome its reputation as a remedial service; consequently, the number of students seeking or willing to seek help there is very low" (52). Apparently, the students surveyed at Case Western Reserve expected tutoring to focus only on basic, fundamental writing skills. At Baldwin-Wallace College, though, the results were much different. More than fifty percent of the respondents there indicated that they expected help in becoming better writers. Less than thirteen percent expected better grades, and less than four percent surveyed expected proofreading (53). Baldwin-Wallace's center

had successfully reduced expectation conflict in their center by making its mission and purpose clear to students.

The factors that motivate students to visit writing centers directly relate to their expectations. They expect that their specific reason for visiting the center, their needs, will be addressed. For many students, the reasons they decided to visit the center correspond with the theory-based practices of the center. Some students “want to talk to a tutor to clarify the assignment or to get some initial ideas down on paper” (Kail and Trimbur 204). Other students may bring in graded papers to go over instructor comments (204). Some students will bring in papers because they are seeking a dissenting viewpoint in order to strengthen their argument (Wangeci 74). Students who are looking for encouragement go to the writing center to find a coach or cheerleader figure (Maxwell 15). When faced with perplexing writing assignments in classes other than English, students will go to writing centers for help as problems arise (Fishman 3). In all of these cases, students are most likely to find exactly what they are looking for. Their expectations match the ideas governing writing center practice. In many ways, students with these expectations are the ideal tutees. However, more likely than not, it is a coincidence that their needs and expectations fit in so nicely with writing center practice.

The first step in addressing expectations is to categorize those expectations which are unrealistic or misconceived. Misconceptions are usually based on false information while expectations that result in conflict may not necessarily be wrong. Perdue notes that “teachers and students alike see writing centers as first aid stations and tutors as paramedics call in on emergencies to resuscitate failing papers” (10). Richard Leahy and

Roy Fox have pinpointed the main misconceptions about writing centers, misconceptions they call the Seven Myth-Understandings about writing centers. These are as follows:

1. The Writing Center is a remedial service for poor writers.
2. The Writing Center is mainly concerned with competency exams.
3. The Writing Center is only for students in English classes.
4. The Writing Center does work for students that they should be doing on their own.
5. Faculty should require students to visit the Writing Center.
6. The Writing Center only helps with essays and term papers.
7. The Writing Center is only for students. (7)

With the exceptions of numbers five and seven, the misconceptions listed here are a starting point for unraveling students' unrealistic expectations.

Most students' misconceptions and unrealistic expectations revolve around what they expect their tutors to do. One of the most prevalent unrealistic expectations is that tutors will do the students' work for them. Maxwell affirms that "Certainly there are students who expect tutors to do their work for them . . ." (15). This expectation is especially problematic for tutors, and some tutors' observations about this dilemma are present in the literature. Galskis hints at the pressures tutors face when confronted with the expectation that tutors will rewrite papers—"Because we are not allowed, by good sense and academic integrity, to edit or rewrite student work, and because we do not have a magic wand to wave, we may disappoint a student further" (9). In her article "Getting Started," Merri-Lynn Roques reveals her frustration with students who are reluctant to participate in tutorials and, when asked for input, look at tutors with an "Isn't that your

job?” look in their eyes (9). Furthermore, some tutees expect that tutors will provide background knowledge for paper topics. Under the section titled “Tutoring Strategies and Center Policies,” the Eastern Illinois University tutoring handbook warns tutors that “Literature students may see you as a walking set of Cliff Notes.” Presumably, students other than those in literature also hope to encounter a tutor whose knowledge base is equal to an encyclopedia set.

Students frequently believe that a tutor’s purpose and function is to tell them how to get good grades from their particular instructors. These students’ concern is not learning how to write. They fully expect that in visiting a writing center, their grades will always significantly improve, regardless of how much they contribute to the tutorial. “They want to get an ‘A’ on their paper, and they want . . . tutors to show them how” (Krapohl 9). Students who have been unable to earn the elusive “A” from their professors but feel they deserved an “A” present another difficult situation for tutors. These disgruntled students will expect tutors to be their advocates. Tutors are trained not to side with students in grade disputes, but not doing so can create tension with students, especially those who see their tutors as fellow soldiers in the war for academic success. A tutor at Southern Illinois University wrote in a tutoring journal, “‘On one occasion, I remember being tempted to agree with a student who voiced his disapproval of a professor’s grading system. I wanted to agree with him simply because I wished to maintain our good working situation” (Cogie 163). This tutor felt, firsthand, how expectation conflict can cause tension that affects the atmosphere and tutoring environment.

Other centers are plagued with students who expect to receive comprehensive help at the last minute. Because they are not fully aware of the process model followed by writing centers, these students have no idea that the interactive tutoring methods take more time than the twenty minutes a student may have before a paper deadline. Urgency of this type is another form of pressure that tutors often have to endure, and when tutors try to explain to procrastinating students that only so much help can be given on short notice, the expectation conflict compounds.

The most commonly documented misconception or unrealistic expectation of students is that they believe writing center personnel will proofread their papers and make notations and corrections. Students who are seeking proofreading become irritable when tutors try to get them to participate in the tutorial. One tutor at Merrimac College remarked that “students want ‘proofreading services,’ and that when apprised of ‘the true nature of the Writing Center as a process and writing oriented structure, most refuse to stay’” (DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain 33). This observation portrays the worst result of expectation conflict—students leave the center without ever understanding the benefits individualized instruction can offer.

Problematic attitudes will always be evident in a certain percentage of students who use the writing center’s services. But the frequency and severity of problematic attitudes increases as expectation conflict grows. Unmet expectations can breed anxiety, impatience, and indifference, among other attitudes. Students who expect the writing center to be a punitive, critical environment exhibit hostility (Olson, “Problem” 159). Hostile students also experience fear and anxiety, but some students can be afraid and anxious without being hostile. A survey at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, showed

that thirty-five percent of tutees acknowledged experiencing fear or anxiety before coming to the writing center (Bishop 35). Students who are shy and withdrawn are often so because they are “afraid that what they say will sound ‘dumb’” and will be criticized or laughed at by tutors (Healy 5). Tutees must get over the fear of being judged, being wrong, and being corrected before they can do well in tutorial situations (DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain 34). The core of anxiety and fear is inaccurate expectations of the nature of tutoring in a collaborative environment. Muriel Harris perceives reluctance to participate as a direct result of fear and anxiety: “Some students become reluctant to ask questions because they see [tutorials] as another grading situation . . .” (“Bother” 8). Fear and anxiety, though serious problems in tutees, are more easily remedied than other problematic attitudes which have roots deeper in students’ dispositions.

Some students who come to the center do not want to exert the necessary effort for improving papers—instead, they want instant results. “Instant gratification is the perfect paper, now, the good grade, now. The delayed gratification of becoming a stronger writer takes weeks, months, even years of effort. The small beginning steps seem like very poor reward indeed” (Dossin 16). Laziness coupled with the desire for instant gratification causes students to expect help with the product not the process. An obvious conflict results when students encounter tutors who have been trained to emphasize writers rather than writing. John Roderick concludes that “the entire process is very time consuming, of course, and it is difficult to justify this effort to the student for anything other than an assignment in progress” (37). This is a bold statement because many students will not accept process even for an assignment in progress. Students view writing centers as part of the same academy that has, for years, emphasized through its

deadlines, attitude of finality, and demanding nature, and in turn taught students to emphasize, product. Why would students even think about expecting a different philosophy from writing center instruction?

Impatience leads many students to display apathy or indifference. Healy understands that “one of the most frustrating situations writing center tutors face is trying to work with apathetic students” (5). Indifferent students do not take writing center sessions seriously because they see them as one of those distasteful tasks that must be performed in order to get through school (Olson, “Problem” 160). They do not expect to gain any long-term benefits from tutoring. Similarly, students who do not expect ever to use writing in their future lives will not expect to profit from writing center services. Students frequently fail to see the relationship between their writing assignments and future professional demands (J. Harris 42). Eggers stresses, “Until students realize that writing counts to them personally, academically, and professionally, our efforts to teach are effective for only short spells” (3). A more practical claim is that until students expect to gain useful and necessary experience and knowledge in tutoring situations, problematic attitudes will continue to work against established writing center practice.

The most unfortunate problematic attitudes derive from shame and embarrassment. Students who are ashamed or embarrassed are reluctant or timid during tutorials, limiting the degree to which a tutor can be effective. Olson’s survey at the University of Alabama determined that forty-two percent of students felt insecure about being seen in the writing center by their classmates. “These data more than any other underline a specific and widespread problem among students on most campuses: the writing center is often perceived as a place for rejects.” He adds that “this perception is

so strong that it still affects many students even after they have found the center to be helpful and pleasant” (“Problem” 167). Peer pressure, the constant nemesis in the lives of college students, has even infiltrated academic assistance. Students expect they will be made fun of for visiting the writing center because they know that their classmates, as they also may, see the writing center as a remedial resource for students who have low grades or learning problems.

Outside factors contribute a great deal to the formation of students’ misconceptions. Understanding what these factors are is the best way to develop a strategy for clarifying the image of writing centers and to determine ways to influence student expectations. Obviously, student conceptions as a whole affect the attitudes of students who want to visit the center. Yet, these students may resent the writing center “because of misconceptions among their peers as to exactly what the center is” (Olson, “Problem” 160). Most theorists and writing center administrators agree, though, that faculty perceptions impact student expectations to a greater degree than perceptions of fellow students. As Hughes maintains, “Some professors do a good job of explaining the writing center to their students and encouraging them to take advantage of center instruction; in fact, faculty endorsements can be highly persuasive to students” (41). While this is certainly true, the opposite is more often the case. A high percentage of college-level instructors are unfamiliar with the premises governing writing center practice. Misconceptions about writing centers are higher among instructors than any other group. Instructors may dislike or disapprove of the writing center for any number of reasons; lack of faith in the capabilities of writing center staff and a belief that peer tutoring results in plagiarism are two of the most common. So when an instructor

conveys cynicism and skepticism about the writing center to students, the negative attitude begins a vicious cycle.

The other way that instructors make impressions on students is by using the writing center as a threat or a punitive measure. When an instructor expresses frustration with a struggling student by recommending that he or she visit the center, the implication is that the writing center is a last resort for students experiencing difficulties. Some instructors have embarrassed students by telling them, in front of their classmates, to visit the writing center. Students in these situations may easily perceive that being asked to visit the writing center is a teacher's way of intentionally humiliating them. In such cases, students understandably develop misconceptions and problematic attitudes.

Another influence on student perceptions and expectations is typical classroom structure. Krapohl alleges, "During their initial visits to the writing center, many students expect the tutorial to simply mirror the average classroom, where they sit at desks and take notes; and even though their eyes may be open, their minds are closed." These same students are used to having information supplied to them in class, and so they expect the same system in writing centers (9). Muriel Harris claims that it is easy to understand why students go to writing centers expecting to be given answers if actual classroom trends are analyzed ("Trends" 32). Because so many students are not used to thinking for themselves in academic environments, they do not expect to confront such a strategy in writing centers.

Another result of classroom structure that influences student expectations is the punishment / reward system used by instructors. Students expect rewards for any extra work they do just as they expect punishment for failing to complete tasks. The rewards

and punishments, especially on the college level, are grades. In fact, Bishop's survey at the University of Alaska found that many of the students who responded to the survey felt that they should be rewarded for visiting the writing center. These students also indicated that instructors should automatically give them higher grades on papers or give them extra credit for going to the writing center. Other students believed that teachers could and would threaten to lower their grades if they did not go to the center (37).

Unfortunately, so many students, because of their prior classroom experiences, are unable to see that writing center instruction can have lasting benefits and more value than just extra credit.

Student and faculty misconceptions have resulted, in part, because writing centers have historically inadequately conveyed a clear mission and purpose. As North acknowledges, "Perceptions of writing centers . . . are in large part a function of the failure of writing center professionals to define clearly what they do, to offer a united theory and pedagogy they have tested themselves" ("Research" 28). Likewise, actual writing center practices contribute to students' misconceptions and inaccurate expectations. Often the formalities and technicalities of day-to-day writing center operation contradict the personal atmosphere that writing centers try to encourage. "It is easy to become yet another uncaring bureaucracy if students have to navigate a system that makes access to tutoring a lot of bother" (Simpson 104). While this incongruity is easily remedied by changing center procedures, other writing center practices, those practices fundamental to instruction, contribute to misconceptions and cause expectation conflict.

Collaborative learning strategies are among the biggest culprits in creating expectation conflict. As previously stated, collaborative learning strategies differ markedly from traditional classroom procedures. David Klooster illustrates the typical results of conflict resultant from collaborative learning:

The tutor, well trained in collaborative techniques, works persistently to engage the writer in a conversation about the paper, probing for information about the assignment, about the writer's involvement with the paper, about possible directions the paper might move. The writer gives one-word answers, and every attempt to begin a conversation falls flat. Finally the writer gets annoyed and says, "Look, just tell me what to do to fix my paper. That will save us both time." (1)

When students' expectations, right or wrong, are not met, the consequence is that they will probably not continue to use the centers' services, not because they did not receive valuable help but because they are frustrated by a learning style they did not expect.

Ironically, students who do have a sense of collaborative learning and peer tutoring are also discouraged as they see collaborative tutoring as ineffective—though they understand the center's style, they would rather consult about their writing with an expert. Formo and Welsh observe that students tutored by fellow students often feel "as if working with another student is multiplying ignorance rather than gaining access to the higher status language" (108). In addition, Cheryl Reed reports that "students often resent or distrust [a tutor's] own student status and question the legitimacy of his or her authority to evaluate writing" (95). In all cases, students are confused by collaborative learning and peer tutoring strategies because they expect tutors to be experts, authorities

who will control the tutorial, provide answers without being asked questions, and reveal the secrets of receiving high grades in composition.

Another concept fully integrated into writing center practice is writing as a process. Writing as a process emphasizes revision, a task that many student writers view as too time consuming or even unnecessary. Jane Cogie establishes that “whatever tutoring mode is used . . . the focus must still be on the improvement of writers, not of papers” (165). The importance of process over product is not accepted by students more concerned about completing their assignment satisfactorily by the deadline than about their overall improvement as writers. Rottenberg believes that “writing as process or a series of operations sometimes threatens to overwhelm the significance of product” (11). In theory, this statement may hold true, but in practice, students’ urgency to produce overwhelms tutors’ attempts to instruct writing as a process. Composition instructors usually teach writing as a process, but instructors in other curricula are less likely to take such a stance. Students are most concerned with producing for their teachers, and they expect that tutors will understand and accommodate this need.

A serious contradiction between process and product results at institutions where writing centers are utilized to help students pass writing competency or other related tests. A student who has completed all coursework but cannot graduate because he or she has yet to pass the writing competency test has little or no concern for becoming a better writer by improving his or her process. In such situations, a tutor must concentrate on teaching the tutee to produce a specific product, or the tutorial will fail miserably. Yet, teaching to improve writing not writers goes against the philosophy of writing centers. Students expect to be told what to do to pass these types of tests. This is one case where

student expectation conflict does not occur. Interestingly, it is the one instance where writing centers defy their underlying theory. Exactly how much this distorts the image writing centers are trying to portray is not known; however, it undoubtedly sends mixed signals to the student body as a whole.

Only when actual student expectations are uncovered can a determination be made about which expectations need to be modified, which are purely misconceptions, and which should be considered when revising theory and changing practice. Almost all the expectations mentioned here can negatively affect the outcome of a tutorial, most notably when those expectations do not correspond with practice. An understanding of the underlying influences on expectations leads to a simplified analysis of misconceptions and more effective approaches for dealing with the resultant problematic attitudes.

CHAPTER 3

WAYS TO ALLEVIATE THE TENSION OF EXPECTATION CONFLICT

While there are so many approaches for countering misconceptions and diminishing expectation conflict, writing center theorists and administrators have operated from limited perspectives in prescribing solutions. The majority of writing center literature suggests that the best way to counter expectation conflict is through image clarification geared towards instructors. Jeanette Harris recommends that instead of directing image clarification at students who might use a writing center, writing center administrators “must direct [their] efforts primarily toward instructors” (42). This assessment implies that instructors are the primary cause of expectation conflict, an assumption that has already been shown to be false—many diverse factors create this type of conflict. In focusing on instructors, writing center administrators are, perhaps deliberately, refusing to acknowledge that their own practices have also contributed to misinformation about their function and philosophy. Rodis presumes that writing center administrators, personnel and theorists should examine their “part in Expectation Conflict, to see precisely how much of the responsibility lies with [themselves]” (46). It is important to target instructors, as they are a factor in inaccurate student conceptualization of writing centers, but all factors demand consideration—there are many directions writing center theorists and, more importantly, administrators and personnel can take to eliminate student expectation conflict. The actual methods for alleviating expectation conflict can be grouped into three categories: 1) modify writing

center practice to correspond to students' expectations, 2) change students' perceptions of the writing center to make their expectations consistent with center practices and policies, and 3) compromise between changing and meeting student expectations.

MODIFYING WRITING CENTER PRACTICES TO CORRESPOND TO STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Without question, if writing centers formulate their practice based on student expectations, conflict would cease to exist. But doing this would require a re-evaluation, and likely call for discarding all current writing center theory and relative composition theory. Maxwell hints that practice needs modification to enable correspondence with student expectations:

Current studies on student expectations . . . are shedding some light on why tutoring interactions seem so complex and why it's difficult to prove that tutoring improves student achievement. The results of these studies suggest that understanding and making accommodations for these psychological . . . factors will improve the quality and effectiveness of college tutoring programs. (14)

One of the most obvious ways to modify practice is to change the tutoring emphasis so that collaboration and process are not stressed. After his study of student expectations at Rhode Island College, Ady concluded that writing center professionals "must respond to those who want more guidance by alternating between a directive and a collaborative approach." He also asserts: "[Writing center professionals] must not let a 'hands off' credo get in the way of helping the student improve. Not all students are alike. Some

need more guidance” (12). Likewise, focusing on process when a student truly desires and needs help with completing a product may counteract a writing center’s underlying philosophy—helping students.

CHANGING STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE WRITING CENTER TO MAKE THEIR EXPECTATIONS CONSISTENT WITH CENTER PRACTICES AND POLICIES

However appealing the simple solution of changing practices to meet expectation seems, the major flaw of this tactic is that it disregards decades of research and theories about the teaching of composition. Writing centers should not, and most would refuse to, compromise their instructional standards just to alleviate the tension of expectation conflict. Yet, expectation conflict does need to be mollified. One way to counter expectation conflict without compromising principles is to take measures to change student perceptions of the writing center. Helping students and the rest of the institution understand the philosophy behind writing center practice will reshape expectations so that they more closely match practice. Perdue asserts that because students are so familiar with traditional classroom relations, writing center personnel must re-educate students who visit centers (10). In addition, changing the behavior and attitudes of students who are mistrustful or cautious about tutoring “is often an unavoidable mission of the writing center” (Croft 170). Changing student perceptions is a two-fold operation that calls for clarifying expectations of students who already visit centers and of student populations in general. Certainly, a part of this procedure calls for attempts to modify faculty, administrative, and institutional viewpoints that affect students’ ways of thinking.

Changing the perceptions of students visiting the writing center

Students' perceptions of writing centers can be changed during tutorials. This will help clarify expectations for those students who already use the center. Muriel Harris suggests that first-hand experience with tutorial collaboration will change students' perceptions ("Solutions" 77). Klooster even discusses an original idea—tutee training. He states that tutees "need to learn that writing centers are places for talking about writing, places that encourage discovery through conversation, places for collaboration" (2). Ultimately, the responsibility for helping tutees better understand tutorials falls to tutors, whose first task is to help tutees realize the focus, process, and purpose of tutoring sessions.

In Eastern Illinois University's tutor training manual, tutors are instructed to "define objectives" by discovering what a student wants, what a student needs, and what a student sees as problems. The manual advises that "putting objectives into words avoids misleading assumptions and wasted effort." Tutors who take this advice to heart will have fewer confrontations resulting from expectation conflict; while they still will have to deal with expectations formulated outside of the center, pre-establishing the course a tutorial will take not only dispels some myths students have, but prevents them from becoming more bewildered as the tutoring session progresses. Telling students ahead of time what to expect serves as a sort of disclaimer that lets students know they must abandon all pre-conceived notions of writing center instruction. Explaining the process and purpose of tutorial methods can also clarify expectations. As Roderick has

summarized so distinctly, “The learning process is simplified, however, when the student sees the value of each step—that is, each step takes him or her closer to completing the assignment” (37). Irritability and impatience are less common in tutees who understand from the beginning that the goal of the tutorial is to enable process to result in product.

Some students not only misunderstand the writing center but, more specifically, misunderstand the role of the tutor. These students expect tutors to be answer-supplying pseudo-teachers. Healy has determined that difficult tutorials will ensue when a student has pre-established expectations about a tutor’s role. He recommends asking a tutee at the beginning of a tutoring session, “What do you think the role of a tutor is?” (5). Based on this response, tutors can easily judge whether they must clarify the function of a tutor to avoid the tension of expectation conflict.

In conjunction with explaining their roles, tutors should also help tutees understand tutors’ limitations, both practical and professional. According to Patricia Teel Bates, “Tutors should avoid giving guarantees or promising instant miracles” (207). Raising student expectations in such a way will only perpetuate problems with misconceptions. Patricia Sherwood stresses that “tutors need to feel comfortable saying ‘I don’t know’” to a student (104). Tutors are under pressure to perform and most genuinely desire to help tutees as much as is ethically feasible. It may be hard for a tutor to admit that he or she does not know the answer to a specific question, but doing so will help students develop realistic and practical expectations. Indeed, the EIU tutor training manual also counsels tutors, “Don’t be afraid to say ‘I don’t know’ to a student.” Steve Sherwood recommends warning students to be aware that tutors make mistakes but also remarks that tutors should be willing to refuse services to students when the requested

services go against writing center policy and philosophy (69). In cases where students expect tutors to estimate a grade, side with them in a grading dispute, or rewrite portions or all of their papers, this suggestion is particularly applicable. Likewise, Blau identifies learning to set limits as an important skill for tutors to possess (3). Tutors who do not define their role or limitations will not only disillusion tutees but will put themselves in a position where they can easily be manipulated.

The best way to change students' perceptions during tutorials is to get them involved. Getting them directly involved in the tutorial will help them to understand that a writing center endorses a much different environment than traditional classrooms. Asking questions enables students to generate ideas that, in turn, help them to take pride in their writing (Krapohl 9). Also, giving the tutees a chance to raise their own questions gives the tutees a feeling of authority over their writing and makes them feel they are part of the actual learning process rather than passive listeners (Roques 9). DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain have noticed that getting writers more involved in their ideas keeps them from wanting to focus so much on grammar and mechanics (34). A tutor who shows students how to set their own goals and priorities does these tutees an important service because the students will then become more confident and independent (Eastern Illinois University). The consequences of encouraging students to take an active role in the tutorial provide long-term benefits for tutees, but also afford benefits for tutors who can begin to combat the expectation that tutors are supposed to direct the tutorial.

When tutees are put in a position where they must do their own work and take responsibility for their education, the goal of teaching students to help themselves can be more easily achieved. Insisting that tutees do what they can for themselves by showing

them how to fix their own mistakes produces writers who have the confidence to begin relying on their own knowledge (S. Sherwood 69). Bates concurs that tutors must “encourage students to assume an appropriate share of the responsibility for improving their own work” (211). Tutees should be led away from the expectation that remaining flaws in finished papers reviewed by a tutor are not the tutor’s fault. Tutees cannot expect to pass on the blame for poor grades to writing centers. A tutor who encourages students to take interest and initiative in their work will ensure that tutees understand that they are ultimately accountable for their own writing, an important long-term lesson for students and an important clarification to protect tutors from undue blame.

Changing perceptions institution-wide

Although clarifying the center’s purpose and philosophy for students who do attend the centers will prove extremely beneficial in the easing of expectation conflict, centers must also actively pursue solidifying their identity throughout their respective institutions. Most centers’ public relations efforts focus on trying to bring students to the center rather than embracing a dual purpose of trying to bring students into the center but helping students to know what to expect when they do come for tutoring. Not only should centers be concerned with the whole segment of student populations who have not used writing center services for various reasons, but some attention needs to be paid to the perceptions of instructors and other school personnel who may influence students’ beliefs about writing centers. Rodis reports that the most important lesson learned from her study is that “the perception of the writing center—both the perception of its purpose

as well as the perception of its staff—often needs to be changed” (56). Because, as Eric Hobson remarks, “Often writing center professionals are the only people at their institutions to understand what writing centers do and what writing centers mean” (qtd. in Saling 148), directives to change perceptions institution-wide need to be aimed outward, outward and away from English departments where image clarification attempts have traditionally been focused. Klooster implicates a primary goal of image clarification: “Writing center directors are familiar with the endless public relations tasks we face, and I would suggest that we make this work a deliberate effort to retrain our campus communities about what to expect when a writer walks in the writing center door” (2). Recognizing that clarifying expectations for prospective clients is a crucial step towards beginning to address the incongruity between theory and practice may remedy inadequate and ineffective public relations efforts at centers where a high degree of expectation conflict exists.

A variety of modes and techniques for image clarification have been suggested in writing center literature. While some may be more practical than others, each individual center should decide what strategies fit the resources and needs of its institution. Bates has identified five general steps that should be part of all effective writing center public relations programs: 1) listening to the needs of various groups, 2) planning techniques for meeting these identified needs, 3) providing information about the services offered by the center, 4) implementing or continuing these services, and 5) evaluating the public relations as well as the writing center program to determine whether needs are being met (206). Particular activities to execute these goals are vast in number and should be decided upon only if center personnel can carry them out to the fullest potential.

However, the starting point for all writing center image clarification is summed up by Steward and Croft: "To be trusted and accepted, a writing lab must be known" (89). If people, especially students, do not know first that writing centers exist, all image clarification efforts will be useless.

Presentations and demonstrations

Presentations and demonstrations are one easy, inexpensive way for writing centers to promote themselves and shape student expectations. Most presentations do not require a great deal of time to complete, nor do they require ongoing preparation. Class visits are the most direct way to reach students, especially those students taking required composition classes. Students in required composition classes are one group that is most likely to use the writing center as many of them have majors outside the humanities. Also, because basic composition classes consist primarily of freshmen, misconceptions prevail as these students have most likely had no prior exposure to writing center instruction.²

Writing center directors who send their tutors to make class presentations should develop a sound strategy before undertaking this task. Writing center personnel who make a bad impression on students in class presentations only alienate students and defeat the center's purposes. To begin with, writing center personnel should advertise to faculty that they are able to make class presentations. Hughes advises sending a memo to faculty that clearly outlines the purposes, format, and benefits of class presentations by writing center staff. He also recommends making it easy for faculty to request these presentations by including a detachable request form that faculty can fill out and return to the writing

center staff (44). Ironically, Bishop's survey found that the "influence of . . . staff visits to classes was surprisingly low" in prompting students to visit the writing center (34). Only four of the one hundred eighty one students in her study cited this as their primary reason for deciding to seek tutoring (35). Because Bishop's study was conducted only at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks and did not take into account the methods used by classroom presenters, this information may be misleading.

Klooster, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance and the benefits of class presentations. During the first weeks of a semester, when invited by instructors, he visits freshman writing and writing-intensive classes to stress the importance of writing (2). Klooster reports, "My goal in these class visits is not simply to tell students where the writing center is and when it is open, but more importantly to begin fostering a view of the center as a place to receive significant responses to their words on paper" (3). In his presentations, he intends to shape the expectations of students who may be under false impressions. Hughes also recognizes the value in molding perceptions; the goal of his writing center's staff is "to confront directly some of the misconceptions about the writing center . . ." (42). Some writing center administrators and theorists have written comprehensive articles of advice on presenting the writing center to classes. As in other public relations efforts, each individual writing center must decide what types of approaches will best suit the needs of the classes to whom they will present. More than likely, a well-thought-out class presentation will encourage students to consider visiting the center and will preclude student misconceptions that have begun to form.

A more complex and time-consuming form of the class presentation is the live tutorial. This method is endorsed by North:

The standard presentation, a ten-minute affair, gives students a person, a name to remember the Center by. The live tutorials take longer, but we think they are worth it. We ask the instructor to help us find a writer willing to have a draft . . . reproduced for the whole class. Then the Writing Center person does, with the participation of the entire class, what we do in the Center: talk about writing with the writer. (“Idea” 441)

The disadvantage of live tutorials is that teachers may be more reluctant to allow such an extensive presentation to take up their class time. Also, smaller centers especially do not always have enough personnel to send out of the center and into classrooms. But, at the same time, live tutorials’ greatest advantage is that they leave no doubt in students’ minds as to what exactly transpires during a tutoring session. Students who have viewed a live tutorial in their classroom will come to the writing center knowing precisely what to expect. Live tutorials are an excellent method of image clarification, a method that can significantly reduce expectation conflict.

Class presentations can also affect faculty perceptions, and faculty perceptions may keep students better informed about writing centers. Leahy found, at Boise State University, that more tutees had learned about the writing center from their instructors than from any other source (150). Findings such as this need to be taken seriously to realize the effect that instructors have in influencing student behavior. In Bishop’s survey at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, many students suggested that they wished their instructors would do more to stress the benefits of writing center tutoring. Some students wrote that instructors should “have groups go to [the] center together,” “[provide] positive assurances,” and “convince students it will help them” (37). Faculty can also

help in forming positive student attitudes early-on in students' college careers. Rodis gives some suggestions for ways that instructors can assist writing centers in helping students develop proper expectations: 1) explain the benefits of the center to students often during each semester, 2) accompany students on a class visit to the writing center, 3) invite tutors to classes, and 4) during class time, encourage students to share stories of their positive tutoring experiences at the writing center (39). While this type of extensive cooperation from instructors would be ideal, writing center personnel should at least aim to clear up the faculty's misconceptions to prevent these from being disseminated to students.

One way to interact with freshmen early in their college careers is through orientation programs. Simpson claims that conducting orientation presentations is a superior alternative to using brochures and printed information sheets for acquainting new students with writing center services (105). In orientation sessions, new students can be given sound facts by writing center personnel before they even have the chance to be misinformed by other students. At Boston University, as Blau explains, writing center personnel go to orientation meetings to "emphasize that [writing centers] are not grammar dry-cleaners where students can drop off soiled papers and pick up clean ones in twenty-four hours" (3). Just as with class presentations, poorly planned and organized orientation presentations will be self-defeating, so it is imperative that writing center personnel take measures to make the best impression possible as they make the center's first impression on students.

Other presentations can be given to campus groups. The writing center personnel at Virginia Tech give writing presentations to various campus groups and have found that

this increases the general understanding of the center's work (Smoot 7). Writing center administrators can look for opportunities to talk to faculty and student groups, including honor societies, social organizations, and academic assistance and continuing education programs. Writing center information presented to group members will, to some extent, disseminate throughout the institution, contributing to image clarification.

Center programs for students

Other programs do not go out to students, but invite students to the center for activities that do not necessarily involve tutoring. DePauw University's writing center hosts lectures and programs featuring prominent campus writers which often lead to discussion about varying writing methods. DePauw's center also conducts workshops to teach students about collaboration, resume writing, cover letter writing, or a variety of other topics (Klooster 3). Mills and Nesanovich assert that students who come to workshops are not as hesitant about the writing center because they are part of a larger group. Students who have not visited the writing center and do not know what to expect will benefit from attending workshops in other ways:

The student who heretofore hesitated to make an individual appointment gets some help. Discovering where the facility is located and getting to know the personnel tend to make him more comfortable. Seeing other students make appointments, listen to tapes, or work on units makes him realize that he isn't the only one who needs help. (9)

Muriel Harris points out that sponsoring workshops on topics such as planning, audience awareness, persuasion, and revision helps to clarify the public's image of what the writing

center can do. At the same time, she adds that workshops take away from time allotted to individualized tutoring (“Solutions” 77). By far, though, writing center programs of guest speakers and writing workshops familiarize students with the writing center, dispelling myths and misconceptions. Presentations held in the writing center allow students to experience, without commitment or pressure, the writing center environment.

Another way to enlighten students about the writing center is to sponsor writing support groups. These groups may be for classmates who want to work together or for any other group of students involved in writing-related tasks. Support group meetings do not need to be assisted by tutors, but they can be. Fitzgerald, Mulvihill, and Dobson find that writing groups help graduate students help each other. In this situation, these students do not feel the authoritative presence of faculty who are often overwhelming to graduate students (134). Special groups such as ESL or learning disabled students might need a place to meet to share their common concerns about writing problems. Writing centers that patronize writing support groups show that the center is not a corrective, didactic establishment but an earnest advocate of all student writers.

Written image clarification

Written publications and communication can be more or less effective methods of image clarification depending on the needs of an institution. Written image clarification is most beneficial when used to supplement other types of public relations efforts. Some writing centers create newsletters for distribution to English departments or to all school faculty, staff, and administrators. At Boise State University, the writing center publishes a newsletter called *Word Works*. This newsletter publicizes the writing center and

explains the services available through the center. The newsletter often contains articles written by writing center tutors that provide descriptions of tutorial methods (Leahy 150). A main purpose of the newsletter is to dissipate misconceptions and reduce expectation conflicts. Leahy distinguishes that, through *Word Works*, his center is “trying to convey . . . the message that the Writing Center is not just a place to send students with writing problems; it’s a support facility for students and faculty alike in our mutual effort to improve teaching and learning” (148). Leahy also reports that the newsletter has resulted in “increased cooperation with faculty and a solid increase in clientele” (146). *Word Works* is a publication directed towards faculty. Not many writing centers produce publications for the student body in general. The average student has little interest in reading an entire publication about a campus service they have rarely used or never used. While newsletters help clarify student expectations through an increased understanding of the center on the part of the faculty, students should be reached through print by other means.

Student newspapers are one of the most common ways that students gather information about their school. Student newspapers are student-run and focus on issues of interest to students; therefore, students are most likely to seek information in this source. Muriel Harris proposes that centers convince their schools’ student newspapers to do in-depth articles about the centers. She perceives that student newspapers can “discuss tutorial instruction in ways that can be enlightening for teachers as well as students” (78). Student newspapers can also run center announcements, profile tutors, and provide updates on center changes. Student newspapers are one of the best ways to reach the general student population, and maintaining a good relationship with the

newspaper's staff allows a center's staff to utilize this resource to help clear up misconceptions and the resulting expectation conflict.

Because word of mouth is the most convincing and credible source of information for students, using student testimonials is a superb way to influence student perceptions. Rodis affirms that "testimonials from satisfied customers are perhaps the best form of public relations" (55). Tutee testimonials can, with the tutee's permission, be used in all sorts of writing center publicity. These testimonials are especially effective in student newspapers when they reach the greatest number of students. When students learn of the positive experiences of their peers in the writing center, anxieties decrease.

Formulating a mission statement is one way for a center to clearly identify its purpose. Mission statements, when thought-out carefully, can help the image of a writing center by simplifying and summarizing the philosophy and goals of the center. If a mission statement shows that students are the focal point of a center's work (assuming that the center truly abides by its own mission statement), students will see that they are valued customers and that the writing center personnel are their allies in education.

Mission statements can be used in written publications. The writing center at Massachusetts Bay Community College created a mission statement that contains the center's current theory and philosophy and is now a part of all the center's publications (Saling 151). Some view mission statements as dry, administrative jargon; however, if written and related properly, mission statements can augment public relations and image clarification efforts to a certain extent.

Many other forms of written image clarification exist, all of which have the potential for diminishing expectation conflict. Statements about the center in the college

catalogue, student handbook, or other appropriate publications will reach many students (Steward and Croft 89). Posters, English Department publications, course descriptions, and bookmarks given out at various campus locations are also fine ways of proclaiming a center's ideas. At Boise State, the school bookstore distributes writing center bookmarks with all textbook purchases (Leahy 151). Brochures and flyers at Boston University are specifically geared to dispelling misconceptions about the school's center, such as emphasizing that the center staff will not proofread or copyedit (Blau 3). (This blunt, straightforward approach runs the risk of alienating some students, but in the long run, it prevents students from being alienated as a result of expectation conflict and keeps students from having to encounter tension in tutorials.) Additional written advertisements like eye-catching flyers and informative brochures will reach at least some students. All written publications of a writing center should be updated periodically to avoid perpetuating misinformation.

More traditional methods of written image clarification are letters, memos, and follow-up notes to faculty. In fact, all three of these modes are usually directed towards faculty. Again, changing faculty perceptions is not the focus here, but helping faculty better understand the writing center indirectly helps students understand it better because information is passed on from teachers. When it comes to follow-up notes to faculty, writing center personnel should be aware that the messages they send to instructors regarding students reveals much about the professionalism, the seriousness, and the philosophies of the centers. Follow-up notes should be written carefully, as should all center publications, because poorly written communications can create negative publicity.

Setup and organization of the center

As stated previously, one factor that confuses student expectations is the setup of the writing center, physically and theoretically. Rodis' observations are completely legitimate:

The degree and kind of conflict vary from institution to institution but seem to be firmly rooted within the very structure, the very set-up, of many of our writing centers. Changing the structure of our centers could lead to centers that run more effectively, freed from the burdens of Expectation Conflict. (46)

Most writing center administrators can, upon close examination, find at least one or two areas where the center setup could be improved in ways to help alleviate conflict tension for tutees.

Rodis alleges that "the way a writing center is set up can and does determine the kind of Expectation Conflict it will experience" (54). The most common flaw in writing centers' setup is that they were originally designed and have become thought of as places where remedial help is a primary concern. When writing center directors realize that this perception is widespread, they try to remedy this through public relations. Rodis, however, feels that public relations fall short of achieving these goals and that desired changes in perception will be more swiftly achieved by restructuring a writing center (54). Neuleib concurs that a remedial center is stigmatized as a place where students with serious academic problems go (233). In her study, Rodis found that one of the main reasons that expectation conflict was minimal at Baldwin-Wallace College is because the writing lab there was not opened as a remedial center and instead stressed that the center

offered services for all students with all types of compositional needs (52). The average student should expect that he or she will be treated as intelligent by the center staff.

Refusing to set up a center with the implication that it mainly serves remedial students prevents students from expecting tutoring to be an embarrassing, humbling experience.

In a more physical sense, the appearance of a writing center can contribute to student expectations in either a positive or negative way. In her article, "Writing Lab Make-Over," Susan Donovan suggests using soft colors, colorful decorations, marker boards, and bulletin boards to help a center reflect a professional, original, inviting, upbeat, and supportive approach to writing (8). A writing center physically structured similarly to a classroom will convey the idea that the writing center's instructive methods are similar to that of a classroom. A writing center with a relaxed, indefinite physical setup will help students expect a more lenient and relaxed tutoring style rather than a strict and condemning approach to learning.

Just as physical characteristics can create a positive atmosphere in centers, so can the general attitudes of tutors. Writing centers should be non-threatening, tension-free, friendly, and personal in atmosphere (Croft 172). As Farell-Childers maintains, "Laughter is not foreign to writing centers; in fact, some of the best learning occurs once anxieties are lessened in a comfortable atmosphere conducive to learning" (112). Tutors create the atmosphere in a center as they are the ones who work closely with students. If tutors are positive, friendly, and supportive, student attitudes improve (Olson, "Problem" 161). When tutees enter a center, they may be very hesitant and reluctant, expecting to be chastised for their poor written performance. If tutors in the center receive the student as a bother or an annoyance, the student's tension will only increase. Contrarily, if tutors are

welcoming and calming to students, the student expectations for the tutorial will change to become more accurate. A positive, supportive atmosphere in a writing center is extremely important to portraying the correct image of the center.

What's in a name? For writing centers, the answer is "image." The name a center is given can influence student perceptions immeasurably. In this thesis, the name "writing center" has been used in my references as a general name for the place where students go to find composition tutoring. At some schools, however, the facility is not termed so. Some of the greatest perpetuators of the belief that writing centers are for remedial services are names like "writing clinic," "writing lab," and so on. "With names like 'clinic' and 'lab,' it is no wonder that students believe that those who go there are diseased" (Olson, "Problem" 160). When a writing center has a name that makes it sound like it could be a department in a hospital, students will expect that going there will result in some type of scientific repair or reconstruction. Medical procedures are some of the least interactive and most unpleasant episodes people experience. Writing centers whose names connect them with medical procedures tell students that their learning style is also non-interactive. Muriel Harris has found that some writing centers designate sub-titles to areas of the center such as "Comma Corners" or "Noun Nooks" ("Growing" 8). Writing center directors' intentions in using such names are to be creative, but names like these help substantiate the myth that the writing center focuses on grammar and mechanics. Directors must choose carefully the names for their centers. And while changing the names of centers called "labs" and "clinics" may initially create short-term confusion among students, the benefits of image clarification and the reduction of expectation conflict through renaming are long-lasting.

Even the most carefully constructed and set up center is ineffective in changing student perceptions if the staff and tutors in the center are unprofessional and do not themselves understand the purpose and goals of the center. In training, tutors can be taught the importance of professionalism and the center's mission, but there is no guarantee that all tutors will commit to these ideals. In rare cases where tutors have problematic attitudes, tensions in the center increase as tutees' expectations are skewed by unprofessional behavioral displays. Arfken recommends that those considered for tutoring positions have, among other characteristics, "commitment to the writing center's philosophy and training" (112). A hiring process that places importance not only on candidates' academic qualifications but on their individual work ethic, disposition, maturity level, and ability to handle conflict effectively can prevent tutor-tutee tensions as well as problems within the staff. Tutors who are professional will gain tutees' respect and trust and therefore will be better able to diffuse expectation conflict (Rodis 55). Tutors should not assume that behaving professionally involves behaving in a condescending manner. Tutors must be able to behave professionally while also treating tutees as peers. At the few remaining centers where tutors are volunteers, placing strict demands on their behavior is unreasonable. But, at schools where tutors are paid or receive some other sort of credit, the writing center director has the leverage to ensure that tutors behave appropriately.

Electronic mediums

Radio and television can be used to promote the writing center and to help students understand what to expect from tutorials, but use of these media is often

complicated, expensive, and reaches people outside of the university community who have no concern for composition tutoring. If the writing center administrator can figure out what radio stations are most popular among students, advertisements explaining the center and its services can be placed on the air. Placing ads on television is possible but even more expensive and impractical. In a time when most centers are struggling just to procure the funding they need to maintain their day-to-day operations, convincing the department or the institution to allocate money for this is highly unlikely. A more sensible approach to this type of publicity is closed-circuit television. Many universities and colleges have closed-circuit monitors in campus buildings where messages and announcements are displayed on the screen in alternation. Writing center information exhibited in this way needs to be short and to the point, but changing and updating the center messages weekly or bi-weekly can help to minimize expectation conflict to a certain extent and convince skeptical students to try center tutoring.

The Internet is one medium that can provide a vast amount of information about writing centers for students as well as the general public. Many writing centers across the country currently maintain web pages. On-line writing labs have become popular, and are basically extensive sites dedicated to specific writing centers. A comprehensive web site will contain the center's hours, location, procedure for making appointments, list of tutors, contact information, philosophy, goals for tutees, and a description of what takes place in a tutorial. Some centers' web sites have included links to advice on paragraphing, organization, sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation. If a web site is adequate, a student who explores the information contained therein should know exactly what to expect if he or she visits the center. A web site is one of the best ways to make an

abundance of pertinent information available to students. The major drawback of using the Internet for image clarification is that there is no way to know how many students are exploring and understanding the information on the web site. At the same time, though, this is one medium students can easily access. Students who are shy or reluctant to visit the center are more willing to find the information they seek on the Internet, information that may encourage them to feel more confident in seeking tutoring.

Presentations, demonstrations, programs, written image clarification, actual writing center setup, and a variety of other techniques can surely play a role in reducing expectation conflict. A wise writing center administrator will employ a dynamic combination of these techniques to reach as many students and members of the university community as possible. The more a center's instructional styles, philosophies, goals for tutees, and mission are publicized to students, the less likely it is that students will walk into that center without having any idea what to expect from a tutorial. Also, image clarification does wonders for eliminating misconceptions institution-wide. Writing center tutors can work with fewer distractions if they do not have to worry whether they are disappointing students.

COMPROMISING BETWEEN MEETING AND CHANGING STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Changing student misconceptions is important. But, assuming that all student expectations that do not match current writing center practice and theory are unreasonable is irresponsible and insensitive on the part of writing center administrators. Solving

expectation conflict by changing writing center practices to meet student expectations is just as one-sided as changing student expectations to meet center practices. Writing center theorists and administrators need to realize that many student expectations embody legitimate needs that are not being met. One practical approach to reducing expectation conflict can result in improved writing center services—writing centers should find a compromise between meeting and changing student expectations. This compromise can be achieved by using any combination of all the methods so far explained here.

Before centers can determine what student expectations reflect justifiable needs, all prevalent student expectations need to be ascertained. Bates alludes to this idea: “Both the director and the staff should listen to students’ expressions of their needs, both in the lab and at any other place on campus where their concerns might be voiced” (207). For too long, writing center administrators have been concerned with providing the type of instruction that gains approval from academic colleagues. When writing centers begin to make an earnest effort to incorporate actual needs of students, as perceived by the students (who are, after all, the primary reason writing centers exist), writing centers and students will become partners in learning, forming an educational partnership that is imperative to the survival of college and university writing centers as a whole.

There are other ways writing centers can involve concerned students in writing center decision making and operation that show students their feedback is really valued. For example, at Massachusetts Bay Community College, weekly writing center meetings are open to anyone who wants to attend so that students will have “a legitimate voice on campus” (Saling 153). As with surveys, not all suggestions from students are practical for application. Yet, when students feel that a writing center really cares about their

opinions, a bond of trust forms or strengthens. One mistake a center can make in permitting students to participate in writing center decision making is allowing students to voice their concerns only as a gesture. Writing center administrators who decide to bring tutees into writing center processes must have a genuine interest in incorporating student feedback into center policies and operations.

An obvious compromise between meeting and changing student expectations is to re-evaluate writing center policies to make them more flexible. Some writing centers' adherence to theory is unwavering. But avoiding orthodoxy can allow centers to be more flexible in meeting student needs (Saling 153). Under the section titled "Model for Tutoring Sessions" in the Eastern Illinois University tutor training manual, tutors are directed to vary their styles when necessary: "Use your experience. Be flexible. If [a tactic] looks good, try it but be prepared to change the approach." Helping tutors understand that this ideology is acceptable will go a long way in reducing expectation conflict. While there are certain principles to which tutors must adhere during tutorials (such as not doing students' work for them and being objective when tutees relate friction between themselves and faculty), even formerly unquestionable commandments such as "thou shalt not proofread" can be modified to a certain extent. This is particularly true when a special needs student is being tutored. For example, as Neff explains, "Working with [learning disabled] students in the writing center is sometimes difficult because it means modifying or changing the usual guidelines, and it may mean more and longer appointments . . . and a writing advisor may need to proofread" (93). Understandably, this type of modification can also help ESL students.

Some theorists believe that a modification of the proofreading / grammar dictate can be used for all students. DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain insist that “Grammar is a part of the writing process—face it!” (34). Since so many composition instructors emphasize grammatical correctness, it is unfair to students to refuse to give them comprehensive help in these areas if that is the type of help they need. It would be wrong, however, for a tutor to conduct non-interactive proofreading—the point of writing center tutoring is to teach students to be able to help themselves. Therefore, it is advisable to compromise with students regarding grammar concerns. When students come to the writing center expecting only proofreading, Muriel Harris suggests attending to their request for help with grammar and mechanics first and then look at the paper globally. This approach satisfies the student’s request while also engaging him or her “in a broader conversation about the focus, organization, and so on” (“Solutions” 78). Another way to compromise with students is to go over proofreading techniques with them on the first page of their paper so that they know what to look for themselves in the rest of their paper (67). At the same time, tutors must make it clear to tutees that writing centers’ main concerns are the other aspects of writing so that the tutees do not come to believe that the writing center is a proofreading palace. Blau relates that the many tutors at Boston University “see their job as delivering on the promise to let the students set the agenda, including producing a grammatically perfect paper” and call this approach “flexible” (3). Every center must decide what degree of compromise is appropriate without compounding misconceptions about the center’s practices. Likewise, even if centers do decide to compromise in areas such as proofreading, promoting this philosophy is not wise as it will also contribute to misconceptions making expectation conflict greater rather than lessening it. The fact is

that tutees can learn from tutors who teach proofreading skills. A tutee's principal concern is generally the grade. Tutees expect that writing tutors, if truly the academic partners they claim to be, will help them with what they want most—finding the way to get a better grade from their instructors. This can mean proofreading.

Compromising practice is the best way to diffuse expectation conflict. And expectation conflict can be diffused without compromising the foundations of writing center theory. The more a writing center clings to specific technicalities and policies in practice, the more the center distances itself from the main goals of writing center theoretical foundations, the main foundation being to help students learn to write well through all aspects of the composition process.

CHAPTER 4

INTEGRATING RESEARCH WITH STUDENT EXPECTATIONS INTO THEORY, TUTOR TRAINING, AND TUTORIAL METHODS

Changing writing center practices so that student expectations are managed more productively may seem difficult, but sufficiently integrating methods for assessing, acknowledging, and applying resulting knowledge into theory is by far a more complicated process. Before regard for student expectations can be advantageously merged with theory, more research needs to be completed. Beyond research, though, is the possibility of seeking a wealth of information from previously untapped sources—tutors. Taking into account the varied experiences of tutors who have frequently dealt with expectation conflict allows for the evolution of tutor training methods. Because tutors know best what types of additional or alternative training would have helped them better minister to student expectations, they can provide vital understanding of means for remedying the flaws in current tutor training techniques. The amount of energy and ardor required to complete this process is extensive, but the payoffs for students, tutors, writing center administrators, faculty, and entire institutions can be immeasurable.

REASSESSING TUTORING

The fundamental stage in addressing student expectations lies in conceptualizing the roles that tutors can play in minimizing this type of conflict. Roderick rightly asserts

that “Tutors are, indeed, the heart and soul of the writing center experience” (39). So, in terms of mending expectation conflict, tutors are the heart and soul of the solution.

Writing center administrators must change tutor training to teach tutors skills for clarifying expectations, managing the tension of expectation conflict, and modifying the various approaches to tutoring when necessary.

Although “flexibility” is a word often used in literature that discusses tutoring methods, the full connotation of this concept is rarely explored. “Flexibility” means, to many theorists, a tutor’s ability to work with tutees of varying cultural, economic, and educational backgrounds. But merely understanding tutees enough to work with them does not indicate that these students’ needs are being met. Flexibility in tutoring should mean, rather, that tutors understand their tutees’ expectations and know how either to meet these expectations or help adjust perceptions. In training, tutors need to understand that meeting student expectations is not always improper and will sometimes alleviate tension. MacDonald suggests that tutors be trained to use the two patterns of tutoring, initial and informational, and to recognize when to use each method. The initial pattern is one where questioning of the tutee encourages a greater degree of interaction and allows the tutee to provide the direction for the tutorial. The informational pattern can be used when the tutor senses the tutee needs more direction. In the informational pattern, less questioning occurs and more information is given, but the tutor still provides opportunities for the tutee to take a more active role in the tutorial (10).

However, such a technical approach to tutoring styles, while teaching flexibility, still strictly dictates and defines the limits of flexibility. As long as they understand the goals of tutoring, the philosophy behind tutorial methods, and what exactly is

unacceptable in a tutorial session, tutors can be trusted to use any degree of flexibility necessary to help tutees learn. Some writing center administrators and tutor trainers may be reluctant to endorse this approach because, as Muriel Harris suggests, telling tutors to be flexible “appears to reinforce the seeming lack of direction in a well-run session” (“Instruction” 98). But isn’t a distaste for the rigidity of other academic settings the basis for the composition theories underlying writing center theory? Abascal-Hildebrand observes that tutors “become better tutors when they learn that their tutoring is always about relationships, interpretations, and translations, and not about models, methods, or templates” (179). Bringing tutees into an environment where, contrary to their prior academic experiences, they are expected to provide the majority of direction and initiative creates observable obstacles. At the same time, if a tutee wants to take control of a tutorial, he or she should be allowed to do so. Or maybe some students are most comfortable being tutored when they feel responsible for a portion of the direction in the tutorial. Teaching tutors to be flexible in their approach and techniques ensures that the needs of virtually all students are accommodated in the best way possible.

Flexibility is especially crucial in working with special student groups. Tutors must be taught that different approaches to tutoring are particularly appropriate when dealing with special student populations. When discussing student expectations, acknowledging the expectations of special student populations who use writing centers is crucial. English as a second language (ESL) students are one special population whose expectations are different than those of native speakers. ESL students also have different anxieties and needs than native speakers. Non-native speakers are often anxious because they do not know what is supposed to happen in a tutorial or because they are concerned

that tutors may not understand their English clearly enough to conduct a productive tutorial (M. Harris, "Diagnosis" 322). Mary Dossin maintains that ESL writers want tutors to "go through papers line-by-line, pointing out mistakes and making suggestions." She adds, "In their quest for the perfect, error-free paper these writers are often quite happy to have us fall back into those habits that our tutor trainer tried so hard to eradicate: focusing on lower order concerns, ferreting out all the errors we can spot, and dominating the talking" (15). Dossin implies that it is improper for a tutor to lapse out of the collaborative mode, but Ady disagrees. He states that "with the ESL student the hands-off, non-directive approach fails terribly." ESL students become frustrated when they do not receive enough guidance from tutors (11). Because ESL students are sometimes unable to rely on their own cognizance when going over papers written in English, they fully and reasonably expect tutors to supply at least some answers.

Another group needing varied tutoring approaches because of varied expectations is learning disabled students. Like ESL students, learning-disabled students expect more guidance from tutors. The study done by Kiedaisch and Dinitz showed that learning disabled students, of all student populations, gave the lowest ratings regarding the success of their tutorials. One of the complaints from learning disabled students was that they were not allotted a long enough tutorial session (91). Julie Neff, in her article "Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center," agrees that learning disabled students need more time and more guidance during tutorials (81). She establishes that though these students' learning disabilities vary, they "need a different, more specific kind of collaboration than the average student who walks through the doors of the writing center" (81). At the same time as they desire more direction and time, they do not expect to be singled out by tutors.

They expect a greater degree of assistance in accordance with their disabilities, but they do not want to be treated in a condescending manner by writing center personnel.

Developmental studies students, on the other hand, have had educational experiences that cause them to expect failure in academic situations. Developmental studies students may come to the writing center because they expect their work is not passing level, but at the same time, they might expect to be discouraged at the writing center where they worry their work will be viewed as typically inadequate. Expressing the important role a writing center environment can play for developmental studies students who do not have a backlog of successes, Curtis Ricker declares, “An important function of the learning center tutors, then, is to see that all of the students add to their stores of success experiences . . .” (272). Working with developmental studies students is definitely an occasion, then, where working against expectations is preferable. Every tutor should communicate to these students that they are expected to succeed.

Of all the writing center constituencies, graduate students are probably the smallest group and the least acknowledged. Many undergraduate students feel that the writing center can only offer help for beginning or struggling students, but this belief is more prevalent among graduate students who feel that the writing center exists to serve, at the least, remedial students, or at the most, undergraduates. Graduate students often believe that they cannot find anyone in their field or level of study who can help them with their writing (Fitzgerald, Mulvihill, and Dobson 133). If graduate students at an institution believe that their writing center is not sufficient to help them, it is usually because the center has not communicated otherwise. Those graduate students who do use writing centers may have very high expectations as they, as Inman explains, tend to be

very serious about their studies. The study at Valdosta State revealed that graduate students there expect and want help to be available whenever needed. They experienced dismay because of periodic difficulties they experienced when trying to visit the center without a pre-established appointment (2). Graduate students not in the field of English are just as likely as undergraduates to expect proofreading and to expect, if not demand, that tutors be experts. Also, in cases where graduate students are being tutored by undergraduates, the principles of peer tutoring can no longer be assumed as it is likely that neither tutors nor students see their counterparts as peers in an academic sense.

The number of non-traditional aged students attending colleges and universities continues to increase dramatically each year. While non-traditional aged students are not a new phenomenon in schools, the necessity for developing strategies for dealing with large populations of these students is relatively recent. Very little research into non-traditional aged students' expectations has been done. Muriel Harris affirms that non-traditional students are going to be even more prevalent in colleges and universities in the future; therefore, their needs and expectations concerning writing centers will also need to be addressed ("Trends" 35). Certainly, though, writing center personnel should realize that the same factors that cause misconceptions and unrealistic expectations will affect non-traditional aged students and all special student groups.

Not only do tutors need to be trained to apply flexible methods, they need to be trained to address a wide range of student concerns. Teaching tutors how working with special student populations differs from working with the general student population gives tutors a scope of knowledge that encompasses a greater variety of potential tutoring situations. The greater the diversity of instructional tools a tutor has, the greater his or

her ability to offset expectation conflict and improve the quality of a writing center's services.

One of the most important tools a new tutor can acquire is the ability to listen carefully to tutees to determine how well a tutoring approach is working. Based on the degree of responsiveness of a tutee, a tutor can assess how much direction is needed in a tutorial. Some students benefit most from fully collaborative or student-centered models of tutoring. Others may not receive the type or degree of help they need from a collaborative tutoring session (Cogie 165). At Boston University, Blau and the rest of the writing center staff found that insistence on a purely collaborative approach can lead to other difficulties:

We realized that collaboration is a goal that may not always be achievable or even desirable, that letting students set the agenda can backfire with students who have problems with control, that "helping the writer, not the writing" sometimes leads us into murky areas of moral relativity, and that the "no proofreading" rule opens a Pandora's box of problems. (4)

At Merrimac College, administrators found a workable solution to the problem of training tutors to be flexible by asking tutors to revise portions of the tutoring handbook. Under the section titled "Theory," the handbook now gives tutors insight into the complexities of flexibility in tutoring:

Tutors will encounter writers with many different needs. It is the responsibility of each tutor to be responsive to these needsSince many instructors use methods and philosophies different than those of the Writing Center, tutors need to attempt, through collaboration, to find out

how they can best benefit the writer in a session. Attempting overtly to convert the writer . . . to the collaborative view is not always productive and can impede open conversation. Instead, the tutor should discover, through dialogue with the writer, which method will best help him or her. (DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain 36)

Part of flexibility in tutoring is changing student expectations gradually—student expectations cannot be changed overnight (or over one session) and attempting to do so risks alienating tutees. Tutors who are flexible can gradually ease students into the collaborative method. The amount of time required to make this transformation will vary according to individual student needs. Training tutors to be flexible and teaching them that there are circumstances where modifying theory to accommodate practice better is acceptable and even preferable helps progressively dissipate the tensions of expectation conflict and creates a more effective learning environment.

Tutor training methods must begin to teach tutors to recognize student misconceptions. Some tutors who are afraid they will alienate tutees if they elucidate misconceptions actually end up alienating tutees more. When a tutee is obviously operating under a false assumption, he or she should not be ignored in the hopes that he or she will catch on to reality sooner or later. Tutees with misconceptions need to be told the truth about writing center practice, and when this truth seriously contradicts their expectations, tutors should be able to find ways to work around the resulting conflict. Tutors who have in-depth training in recognizing misconceptions will find working with problematic attitudes derived from misconceptions is easier. As Olson explains, “Ultimately, the center staff is most concerned with proper student attitude because it

determines whether or not the center is truly effective” (“Problem” 159). He also asserts, “If tutors are trained not only to provide the student with accurate advice about composition but to make the learning environment pleasant and painless, the effectiveness of writing centers in overcoming many attitudinal obstacles will be increased significantly” (162).

Assuredly, clarifying expectations is frequently a prerequisite for improving student attitudes. Tutor trainers who take expectation clarification seriously will undoubtedly instill in tutors the idea that expectation conflict must be addressed. Again, teaching tutors to be flexible is the best way to help them overcome expectation conflict. But teaching them to respect tutees’ opinions and be honest in addressing these opinions is also an important notion that tutors must begin to understand from the beginning of their tutor training. All the techniques previously discussed for changing students’ perceptions of the writing center during tutorials must be undertaken by tutors. Yet, without proper training, tutors are unlikely to help tutees understand the focus, process, and purpose of the tutorial.

One way to enhance tutor training is advocate the participation of members or directors of special groups in tutor training sessions. For example, a faculty member who has expertise in teaching composition to ESL students can attend a tutor training session to give tutors an expert perspective on the special needs and expectations of these students. At the University of Vermont’s writing center, learning disabled students, special student services personnel, ESL students, and the ESL coordinator all attend tutor training or tutor meetings at various times to help tutors better understand the needs and expectations of special student populations (Kiedaisch and Dinitz 92-93). Outside staff

and students from special populations are normally willing to provide information to tutors as everyone benefits from the improvement of writing center services.

Almost as important as the initial training tutors receive is on-going, continuing training. Pre-employment training is extremely advantageous for tutors, but, because at this stage tutors do not yet have an accumulation of experiences from which to draw in considering applications of the tutoring tactics being taught, they may not fully realize their relevance and pertinence. Therefore, when training continues throughout each semester, tutors will be able to better conceive as well as contribute to discussions of the tutorial methods. Continuing tutor training should furnish tutors with relevant, useful, and interesting information or tutors will lose interest and either not attend or not pay attention in training meetings.

Advancing technology affords new opportunities for strengthening tutor training. Conferencing software, on-line interactive journals, and even electronic mail allow on-going education for tutors. The writing tutors at the University of Richmond use Daedalus Interchange software to teach new tutors about the complexities of tutoring (Essid 45). Using this software, groups of three to five tutors meet on-line bi-weekly to discuss problems they had encountered in tutoring. Then, tutors log on to an Interchange conference in which a fictional tutoring scenario is described, detailing a fictional tutee's questions and attitudes. Through this program, tutors discuss with each other ways to work with each scenario presented (46). The University of Richmond tutors found that the simulations provided by the software were realistic and helped in preparing them to deal with actual tutoring problems they encountered (47). Electronic conferencing's one main benefit over face-to-face tutor meetings is that the software can be programmed to

allow tutors to participate in discussions anonymously. Many people, in general, are less reluctant to engage in discourse when they can do so in anonymity. Even in cases where tutors' identities are apparent, conferencing software enables more participation from everyone—one or two individuals who may dominate a verbal discussion will have a more difficult time doing so on-line where everyone's comments are relayed without interruption.

The Merrimac College writing tutors use on-line interactive journals. Unlike conferencing software, on-line journals are asynchronous and similar to an electronic mail Listserv. Tutors all record their journal entries through computers and then, through the software, read and make observations about each others' perceptions. Tutors read each others' responses, receive advice, and share experiences. The primary purposes for the interactive journals are to “engage in discussion designed to work through the thorny issues [tutors] address in scholarly journals and conferences” and to “attempt to determine the relative merits of adhering to theory as opposed to conceding our service role . . .” (DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain 33). Essid has found that transcripts of conferences can be quite useful to future tutors, especially when those transcripts bring out important points or issues, especially if these transcripts were gone over with small groups of tutors (51). The University of Richmond tutors were in agreement that the conferencing software and the transcripts adopted from the conferences helped them accomplish much during training and throughout the year (52). Conferencing software, on-line interactive journals, and transcripts of these dialogues give tutors previews into the types of conflicts and attitudes they will likely encounter during tutoring and provide a forum for tutors to

discuss among themselves the best ways for dealing with all types of conflicts and misconceptions as well as for accommodating flexibility in their tutoring styles.

Many other formulas for continuing tutor education provide additional information for tutors who are experiencing conflicts with tutees. Fact-to-face interactions such as meetings, inservices, and guest speakers build tutors' wealth of knowledge. Also, written materials such as informative and interesting articles or other relative pieces on flexibility in tutoring and research into student expectations supplement tutor training. Another way to help tutors learn is to solicit their involvement in center decision making and policy formation. For example, the writing tutors at Merrimac College proved their capabilities in rewriting the theory portion of their training handbook: "Their articulation of writing center theory and practice in the revised handbook illustrates precisely what [writing center administrators and theorists] try to do as we seek to marry theory to practice" (DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain 36). Tutors who feel that their input is valued will take a greater interest in and show more enthusiasm for their work. Also, because tutors are in touch with center patrons almost every day, their experience and insight will surely prove valuable to writing center administrators. By giving specific case examples, tutors can contribute much in the area of managing ongoing tutee expectation conflict, a conflict that exists on a substantial level and to which many writing center administrators are oblivious.

Accommodating legitimate student expectations extends even into the realm of what types of tutors are hired. A diverse group of tutors is better able to understand the expectations and meet the needs of what will always be a diverse group of students who use the writing center. Any prospective tutor, regardless of his or her background and

skill level, should first and foremost demonstrate a desire to help tutees and work with tutees as individuals.

Some writing center directors are hesitant to hire ESL tutors because their writing skills in English may not be at a sufficient level to help advanced composition students. However, Ady recommends hiring at least one successful ESL student as a tutor who can best understand the needs and expectations of ESL tutees (12). When cultural conflicts or the rhetorical structures of English become confusing, an ESL tutor will be able to find the underlying cause of the difficulty more quickly than a native speaker. In some cases, though, an ESL student may not want tutoring from another ESL student because native speakers are viewed as being more knowledgeable about composing in English (M. Harris, "Solutions" 69). Blau points out that "international students . . . come to the center specifically to find an authority in their new language" (2). So, there are advantages and disadvantages to having an ESL tutor on a center's staff. The one often unperceived benefit is that an ESL tutor can teach his or her colleagues about recommended differences between tutoring ESL students and native speakers.

Some theorists have brought up the possibility of hiring tutors of different educational levels. This is an idea, like so many, that fits better with theory than practice. For actual *peer* tutoring to take place, tutee and tutor should be equal. In 1977, researchers S. Rosen, E. R. Powell, and D. B. Schubot found that tutees were more satisfied with their tutoring and performed better when they were tutored by a tutor whose grades were equal to theirs. Bruffee also alludes to this equity in his description of collaborative learning (Maxwell 15). But how many students come to the writing center looking to be tutored by someone with grades equal to theirs? Just like ESL students,

even native speakers come to the writing center looking for an authority, someone who can provide the answers they seek. Besides this, having tutors of varying achievement levels on staff would require hiring students whose academic achievements have been less than satisfactory, as many tutees have a corresponding level of academic achievement. A student who has trouble keeping his or her grades up may experience further difficulties if he or she has the added responsibility of working in the writing center as a tutor. And even a little logic reveals that students experiencing difficulties in school are going to be able to offer little, if any, help to other struggling students. Ady's recommendation is much more sensible; he believes that tutors should be trained "to help the more advanced writer as well as the basic one" (12). Tutors trained to help students on all levels without being condescending or demeaning best reconcile the principles of collaborative theory without compromising the realistic demands of practice.

As adoption of writing across the curriculum becomes more pervasive in academic institutions, the need for writing centers to hire tutors from majors other than English becomes quite apparent. Farell-Childers asserts that "The writing center is indeed a center for writing in all subject areas" (116). As an increasing number of students from classes other than composition come to the writing center for help with papers from other fields, a strain is put on tutors who are only familiar with MLA documentation and the acceptable style for writing literature papers. Many English-major tutors are perplexed by questions regarding APA documentation or other scientific styles of writing, questions that tutors from other disciplines would be able to answer much more easily. While it may be convenient to have a staff made up of tutors from all different majors, the majority of students who visit the writing center are still those

having difficulties in their composition courses, indicating that English-majors are still generally the best choice (with exceptions) for writing tutors since their composition experience is most extensive in the style in which composition students are required to write.

A reasonable alternative to hiring tutors from outside the English department is extensive tutor training in the styles of other subject areas. All tutors should know something about writing styles in individual disciplines and learn the specific conventions governing writing in different disciplines (Tinberg and Cupples 14). Students expect to be able to find tutors who are knowledgeable in a variety of subject areas and writing styles, and the best way to meet this expectation, a reasonable expectation reflecting a legitimate student need, is to make sure that all tutors, regardless of their major, are trained to some degree in the writing styles of other disciplines. Or, at the very least, tutors should be taught methods for simply and quickly accessing information requested by students writing papers in diverse subject areas.

The training of tutors and the makeup of writing center staff can have a direct impact on student expectations. In cases where tutors are not taught flexibility and not taught how to deal with expectation conflict, tensions and problems will continue to plague centers. And a tutoring staff that is carefully constructed to meet the legitimate needs of students will reduce the amount of tension and conflict in the center. Emphasis must remain, though, on hiring tutors who are willing to take their work, their tutees, and writing center practice very seriously. The overall importance of the tutorial staff cannot be overstated.

CONTINUING RESEARCH TO PROVIDE A REALISTIC BASE FOR THEORY

Before any writing center administrator can fully commit to recognizing and evaluating student expectations and the needs such expectations convey, he or she must have an awareness of the importance of continuing research. Some theorists, such as Grimm, have only obscured the purpose of writing center research. She scoffs at the idea that researchers focus on finding ways that centers can “help students write better assignments,” “train tutors to be more effective at helping students write better assignments,” and improve images and promote services. She also believes that it is impractical to ask students how their needs can be better met and that writing centers should, instead, promote research that examines the effect of curriculum and teaching practices (5). Grimm is putting the cart before the horse in refusing to note that curriculum and teaching practices are doomed to fail in writing centers if students’ perceptions and expectations are in strong conflict with actual practices. Continuing to assess the effectiveness of tutoring practices without first changing practices leads to dead-end, repetitive research in which the writing center’s failures are repeatedly exposed. Unlike Grimm, Ady understands that “If those of us connected to the writing centers in our schools are really committed to improving the quality of the service offered there, we must obtain honest and detailed feedback from the tutees concerning what works for them and what does not” (11). His study, like those of Rodis, Olson, Inman, and others, sought specific feedback from students and revealed new insight into many of the problems that go on in tutoring sessions. As more and more studies are done which seek the honest opinions of students in regard to writing center practices, a much larger, more valuable body of knowledge will be formed from which changes in theory can be

derived to combat the conflicts of expectation that are so pervasive and problematic in writing centers. But, this body of knowledge must be substantiated further to avoid prematurely basing the adjustment of theory on unsupported and unconfirmed research findings.

What is the best vehicle for writing center research? Ady insists that writing center researchers “must provide a mechanism for getting reliable tutee feedback” (12). Administering a pre-tutorial questionnaire is one of the most uncomplicated ways to uncover student expectations. In surveying their own constituencies, writing center administrators and personnel can confirm hunches, spot trends, and find ways to develop stronger programs (Bishop 40). Muriel Harris recommends that tutees fill out a short questionnaire before their tutorial session. Among the questions that are on the questionnaire at her center (Purdue University) are “Why did you come to the Writing Lab?” and “What is the most important thing YOU want to learn in the Writing Lab?” (“Diagnosis” 320). Analyzing and often following up on the answers to these two questions gives tutors a better idea of what these students expect and the best methods for helping these students (322). The biggest drawback to surveying is that, unlike verbal questioning, tutors may be unable to understand the tone or attitude surrounding various answers. However, surveying definitely gives concrete evidence of student expectations.

Verbal discussions with students immediately before a tutoring session give tutors instant feedback as to what students expect and need. Muriel Harris cites the benefits of questioning students before a tutorial—understanding tutees’ anticipations enables tutors to plan for future sessions in a way that will meet the needs of tutees (“Diagnosis” 319).

She feels that honest discussion between tutees and tutors is a starting point for establishing an effective learning environment:

In sum, when we work with a student on an individualized basis, we cannot proceed directly to the instructional stage. Some preparatory discussion concerning the students' motivation, possible sources for present difficulties, attitudes, interests, reservations about the situation they find themselves in, and time constraints will lay the groundwork for more effective learning. (323)

Harris does not specifically name but implies expectations as a discussion topic, but discovering expectations before a tutorial session will only help the tutor and the tutee to understand each other's mindset.

Croft and Eggers both recommend having students freewrite before tutoring sessions. Freewriting about attitudes towards writing helps students to see themselves as writers, helps tutors to understand how tutees feel about writing, and helps writing center personnel decide what writing strategies are best (Eggers 6). Because a writing center's main focus is writing, having tutees freewrite about their expectations and feelings before a tutorial can help tutors assess tutees. Such writing will not only help tutors understand their tutees' expectations, but would begin to build a resource from which writing center administrators could draw to ascertain a wide variety of common student expectations.

A student's attitude about writing in general can affect his or her attitude towards being tutored in composition. Discovering tutees' attitudes about writing either before, during, or after tutorials is one way in which tutors can assess their tutorial situation. Students who have low expectations about their writing ability may also have low

expectations for a writing tutorial. Students who always expect instructors to criticize their writing may also expect tutors' criticisms as well. Learning about students' attitudes towards writing can provide insight on student expectations. Angelique Galskis emphasizes that "the most significant thing [tutors] can do during a student's initial visit is to discover [his or her] *attitude* about writing" (9). Indeed, negative feelings towards writing will promote negative feelings towards composition tutoring. The sooner a tutor discovers such feelings, the sooner he or she can take the necessary steps to counter it and create a positive learning environment for a tutee.

A more scientific approach to determining students' attitudes and expectations is a written apprehension test. Apprehension tests can be administered before a tutoring session starts. Croft suggests the Daly-Miller Apprehension Test (172): "When administered in a center, this kind of test can provide information about high or low apprehension; it can also serve as a starting point for a discussion of the writer's attitudes. Students and tutor can talk over the survey, compare reactions, establish a basis for rapport" (173). The danger of apprehension tests is that they may make the student feel like the object of an experiment because of the impersonal, often threatening, nature of standardized tests. By drawing so much attention to students' apprehensions, their level of fear and uncertainty may only increase, potentially affecting a student's perceptions about the personal atmosphere of a writing center. Any type of examination may make students nervous and feel as if they are expected to provide "correct" answers. The likelihood of useful feedback from such tests is uncertain.

Tutors need to be alert to a range of verbal and non-verbal signals from tutees that indicate expectations, attitudes, needs, and goals during tutorials. Students provide what

Muriel Harris calls “instant and constant feedback” during tutorials. Body language and verbal responses during tutoring can give tutors indications of how the student really feels about the progress of the session. Body language and the tone of verbal reactions to questions lets tutors “know fairly quickly when materials aren’t effective, when teaching strategies succeed or fail, when our services are or are not adequate to meet the needs of our students . . .” (“Growing” 6). In other words, it is often painfully obvious to tutors when expectation conflict is a cause for concern.

Certainly, one of the best ways to obtain feedback from students is through post-tutorial evaluations. Evaluations show writing center administrators where their tutors’ methods may be lacking, if students feel they are receiving adequate help, if the tutorial process corresponded with student expectations, and if students have developed a new perception of the function of the center. At Eastern Illinois University, for example, the tutoring manual specifies under the section entitled “Writing Center Flow Chart” that tutors must “ask each student to complete a student evaluation” after the tutorial.

Kiedaisch and Dinitz have developed an evaluation in which one of the questions, unlike the evaluation at Eastern Illinois, provides information about student expectations. The question reads, “Were your goals for the session met?” and students are able to answer on a scale of one to five, one being “not met at all” and five being “fully met” (98). While this is a well-intentioned step in studying student expectations, the survey does not ask students to explain what their expectations were and why their expectations and goals were not met, if that is the case. Anonymous evaluations will generally receive honest answers from students, and brief questions that do not require a lot of in-depth writing and explaining make students more willing to take the time to answer the questions

thoughtfully. Demanding evaluations may require too much time to complete and frustrate students.

Institution-wide surveys in the form of questionnaires are currently viewed by many researchers and writing center administrators as a method for gathering information about all student populations in general, not just those students who already visit writing centers. Surveys are simultaneously inexpensive, accurate, easy to administer, and least time consuming for respondents. Kail and Allen point out that surveys also reach large samples and provide quantifiable information (237). Surveys can be distributed to students who attend the writing center, but they can also be given to composition instructors for their students to complete. Some centers may even solicit the cooperation of instructors outside the English department in administering the surveys.

Any survey that is conducted should be well-prepared. A survey that is not well organized will be confusing for respondents and will furnish pointless data. Surveys are useful when used with discretion and care. Before writing a survey, it is best to consult a guide or other source to ensure that a well-written, objective survey is constructed. The five types of questions on surveys are multiple choice, ranking, fill-in-the-blank, yes or no, and short-essay (Kail and Allen 237). A combination of these types of questions can be used. Although short-essays elicit the most truthful and explanatory responses, respondents may become irritated at being asked to spend time answering questions that take too much time. On the other hand, the other types of questions, though simple for students to answer, are too directive and may discourage students from thinking of answers not listed as possibilities. Questions always need to be worded in the least

suggestive manner to avoid unreliable results. Short, open-ended questions are the best compromise between the essay and provided-answer questions.

Preparing the survey is extremely important, but so is thorough interpretation of survey results. Steward and Croft provide a conclusive recommendation for approaching completed surveys:

Any or all types of evaluation must, of course, be interpreted and used.

Lab directors discover what trends emerge in comments and answers, note specific recommendations, and consider what action to take. They ascertain the number of returns: this has a bearing on the validity of results, is an indicator of interest in the lab and, by extension, of the lab program. Directors should also re-examine the evaluation instrument itself to determine which questions elicited clear and complete responses and trends, which did not, which questions need to be rephrased, deleted, added. (93)

Center directors able to obtain funding may wish to hire a research consultant to conduct the survey. An outside party can contribute necessary objectivity to the study. At the same time, an outside agency may not fully understand the importance, best approach, or implications of a student survey in the same way that writing center professionals do.

Surveys are only one form of research. Case studies that monitor the interactions of tutees with tutors are another way of attaining information about student expectations and expectation conflict. The greatest disadvantage of case studies is that if tutees or tutors know they are being observed, their behavior may vary from normal because they are aware that they are being watched. Experimental tutoring processes are another way

to learn about the interactions between tutors and tutees. The disadvantage of experimental tutoring methods is that they may unjustly compromise a tutee's ideal learning environment. If experimental tutoring methods are used, they must be conducted with the understanding that the experiment should be aborted if it appears that a tutoring style is not helping a tutee learn. Case studies and experimental tutoring are more time-consuming and require more preparation and analysis than tutoring and provide information that may only be applicable to specific individuals rather than demonstrating large-scale suitability. Nevertheless, case studies and experimental tutoring can provide results that are useful on a limited basis and information that cannot be gathered from surveys. Concrete examples of expectation conflict are best found in observatory research.

Some of the most valuable research is that which is retrospective. Looking back on their experiences, writing center personnel can provide a broad base of examples of the types of problems that occur in tutorials. Tutors know more than anyone, probably even more than students, about expectation conflict. But those who write about theory and practice in writing centers do not frequently solicit tutors' contributions. Ironically, writing center administrators, generally the same people who create writing center literature and the resultant theory and practice methods, are often as distanced from the actual tutees and tutoring as any other campus administrator. In a survey of writing center directors, Mullin received the following response from one director who concisely stated the dilemma facing so many directors today: "More and more, my work seems to involve administration, sitting on committees, task forces, etc. It makes staying in touch with the basic issues of tutoring *much* harder." In response to this, Mullin ponders,

“Does the writing center director then become entangled in so many administrative duties that she loses sight of the center?” (“Empowering” 13). Certainly, not all center directors have become distanced from the actual operations of their centers, but it is a trend that is growing as centers are gaining credibility and respect at their institutions. Some directors may even choose to distance themselves from center operations to help tutors feel more autonomous. Regardless, tutors clearly have an enormous advantage over center directors in assessing not only expectation conflict, but all types of issues surrounding tutees.

Tutees have practical knowledge about the tutoring process, and their education as tutors is ongoing. Writing center administrators have, most likely, prior experience tutoring and a background in writing center and composition theory. Together, tutors and administrators can come together to close the theory-practice discrepancy. Regarding tutors, DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain have noticed that theoretical conversation “as played out at NCTE, CCCC, and the . . . NWCA conferences, too often ignores these key players in writing center operation” (32). Perhaps a greater trust needs to be developed between these two groups before such a goal can be achieved. Tutors need to be able to feel that they are collaborators and colleagues with administrators when it comes to addressing the problems in theory and in practice. Administrators are responsible for the difficult task of creating this type of camaraderie without undermining their authority in running the center. At the same time, administrators need to respect tutors as fellow academics who, though lacking the theoretical preparation, can contribute a world of insight into how theory succeeds and fails in practice.

Simply put, tutors now serve as the bridge between theory and practice.

DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain, in response to the question of how writing centers can meet

students' needs in a manner consistent with writing center theory, believe that those concerned with writing centers "may begin to find answers and the basis for more theory in informed practice, especially by talking and listening to those caught in the middle between theory and daily demands to serve functional literacy: our tutors" (32). They also contend that the most appropriate theory comes from practice: "In other words, while writing center theorists debate with one another, a parallel conversation among tutors and tutees is constructing real theory" (26). The reason for the incongruous relationship between theory and practice could not be summed up more precisely. Tutors are forced to work with inapplicable theories every day as they encounter the reality of tutoring—namely, expectation conflict. Yet, tutors' contributions are rarely pursued. Truly, "leaving all decision making to those the most removed from the fray can be devastating not only to the campaign but to those engaged in it as well" (32). A deliberate or inadvertent unwillingness to seek tutors' recommendations in revising theory shows a lack of genuine concern for the welfare of tutees. Administrators truthfully concerned about improving the tutoring practices of their writing centers would request all available help re-examining theory to help better the services of their centers and of centers everywhere.

Blau agrees that "writing center theory should be informed by what writing fellows and their clients actually do in their conferences" (1). Tutors have much to teach about the elusive connection between theory and practice—it is time that theorists begin using tutors' ideas and observations to construct and revise theory (DeCiccio, Rossi, and Cain 34). The greatest irony of all is that collaborative theory is the basis for writing center tutorials. In light of this, why are theorists so unwilling to collaborate with tutors

(36)? Not only does writing center theory need to be evaluated, but so does the importance of the tutor in the universe of writing tutorials. Tutors are much more than remote planets silently revolving around the illuminations of theorists. Tutors are bombarded with asteroids of conflict in tutoring, and the craters that remain reflect a great deal of light.

CONCLUSION

Writing centers , as they now exist, are great additions to the academic communities of colleges and universities. Writing center tutoring has helped countless students gain better grades on papers, but most importantly, tutoring has helped them become better writers, the very goal towards which writing center practice strives. When writing centers first began to spring up in schools across the country, many skeptics thought that writing centers were just a passing fad, a trend that would die out in a few years'. In the past decade, though, writing centers have blossomed and begun to gain respect from academic communities.

Still, the one basic nagging enigma concerning writing centers is why theories and practices infrequently correspond. A partial answer to this question emerges in the examination of unaddressed student expectations. Inman insists upon a change, "that more centers make themselves accountable to the students of their particular institution" (3). Writing center professionals have concentrated on making themselves accountable to theorists, some of whom are distantly removed from actual practice. When writing center professionals become so absorbed in theory that they fail to observe the difficulties of transferring this theory into practice, namely due to conflicts between student expectations and the methods to which tutors religiously adhere, the initially commendable purpose of writing centers is undermined.

Research has found that those students whose expectations have been modified are very likely to use the services of the writing center regularly. Ady found that over eighty percent of students said they would revisit the writing center after their perceptions

about tutorials had been changed in their first visit (12). Olson discovered that most students felt more comfortable about tutoring after they had been tutored once, largely due to tutors who effectively countered negative perceptions and reactions ("Problem" 167). These findings are very encouraging in showing that attempts to change perceptions and attending to expectations are well worth the effort.

Similarly, when writing center administrators and theorists become so absorbed in theory that they fail to incorporate the infinitely valuable contributions of tutors, opportunities are missed to improve writing center services dramatically through revising theory and, in turn, making practice more practical. As has been made clear, writing centers are one of the best ways for an institution to augment its composition program. At the same time, writing centers could do more to not only decrease misconceptions among students, but to make their services more parallel with the needs of tutees. Students' concerns and expectations must be brought to the forefront of all writing center discourse.

NOTES

¹North, in "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center,'" recanted such claims. His revised conceptions are acknowledged later in this section. However, his revised article never received the attention or the acclaim of "The Idea of a Writing Center." See "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center.'" in *The Writing Center Journal* 15.1 (1994):, pages 7-19.

²Freshmen who have been exposed to writing centers while in high school are best prepared for college writing centers. But, high school writing centers governed by the same principles as college or university writing centers are a rarity, mostly because few high school students are qualified to tutor their peers in composition effectively. Even those high school writing centers that do not wholly subscribe to collaborative learning can have a positive influence on students. Muriel Harris understands that when good writing centers are established in high schools, students used to composition tutoring will not have so many misconceptions and unrealistic expectations in college. In addition, she remarks, "As students become used to having the support system of a lab in a high school and realize the need for individualized help with their writing, they'll come to college, expecting to continue dropping in the lab when they need help" ("Growing" 8). There are other reasons high schools may not be as likely to start a writing center, such as funding constraints and the fact that high school students do not write outside of class as much as college students. In response to these concerns, college and university writing centers might consider working with local high schools to develop writing centers for secondary-level students.

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