

# **THE EBERLY MULTILINGUAL WRITING CENTER**

## **HANDBOOK FOR UNDERGRADUATE PEER WRITING TUTORS 2020-2021**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### 1. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center

A Note on Tutoring Remotely  
Mission, Values, and Student Learning Outcomes  
The Tutoring Experience with Second Language Writers  
Tutor Responsibilities  
Policies and Procedures  
Working the Reception Desk  
Working with International/Multilingual Writers

### 2. Writing Associates Program

Mission and Goals  
Working with Writing Groups  
Attending Classes  
Keeping Office Hours  
Meeting with Collaborating Professors  
WA Job Responsibilities  
Procedures

### 3. Tutor Essays

- Anna Ciriani Dean, “Grammar Treatment in the Multilingual Writing Center: Why and How Tutors Should Focus on Lower Order Concerns with Upper Level Foreign Language Writers”
- Leigh Harlow, “*Antidote* in the Multilingual Writing Center”
- Merit O’Hare, “Higher-Order Concerns versus Lower-Order Concerns: The Role of the Tutor and Student Expectations in Foreign-Language Tutoring”
- Christina Socci, “From Cultural Informant to Culturally Informed: Revising Theory and Practice”
- Olivia Harper Wilkins, “Adding It All Up: How the Writing Center Can Be Useful for Mathematics Students”

## **EBERLY MULTILINGUAL WRITING CENTER**

### **A Note on Tutoring Remotely**

For the Fall 2020 semester, the Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center will offering all of its tutoring remotely. Some of the information in the handbook will be specific to online tutoring practices while other information will be relevant to our work once we return to campus, as soon as it is safe to do so. We understand that there are many new challenges that come up when tutoring online and we want to support you so that you can be the most effective tutor you can be under the current circumstances. If you have a question about tutoring this fall that is not answered in the handbook or in other documents we provide, please do not hesitate to reach out to Noreen, John or Carol.

### **Mission, Values, and Student Learning Outcomes**

The Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center consists of both English and foreign language writing tutoring services. English writing tutors work with native and nonnative speakers of English, and foreign language writing tutors work with second language writers of Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

**We are dedicated to creating a diverse and inclusive collaborative space where:**

- writers' and tutors' identities are valued;
- writers' and tutors' cultural and linguistic practices are taken into account;
- writers' and tutors' ideas are encouraged to be mutually expressed, heard, engaged with, and respectfully challenged.

The mission of the Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center is to support writers from all disciplines and of all levels and abilities as they develop their writing processes and increase their repertoire of writing skills. To that end, the writing tutors are trained to:

- engage students in conversation about their writing at any point in the writing process;
- address the agenda set by writers;
- offer relevant feedback and strategic techniques that would enable writers to improve their drafts;
- increase student engagement in writing tasks.

As a result of this mission and these core values, writers should be able to:

- develop a functional writing process tailored to the writing task;
- recognize areas for improvement in their drafts;
- implement the skills and techniques needed to move the writing process forward.

## **The Tutoring Experience with Second Language (L2) Writers**

While there will be some differences between the goals of L1 and L2 writers, Dickinson's writing tutoring, regardless of target language, will follow a similar philosophy and pedagogy – that is, student-centered, collaborative, and process-oriented. In every tutoring session, tutors will act as peers and not teachers, will respect the writer's authority and autonomy, and will help the writer achieve his or her goals. L2 writers will have many goals which are similar to students who are writing in their first language, but they may also want to focus on concerns related to acquiring a second language and writing in another cultural context: understanding genres and cultural conventions in writing; improving grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation; moving from translating to composing; and developing fluency. When discussing the work of writing tutors in general, Stephen M. North said, "Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing." Similarly, our job is to help L2 writers reach their language acquisition goals rather than editing essays line-by-line in order to "perfect" one paper. The tutoring session offers a great opportunity to improve an L2 writer's grasp of the target language, but this will not happen if a tutor simply "fixes" the sentence-level problems without involving the writer. It is usually through questioning, discussing, and modifying writing in context that language acquisition occurs. So while tutors should not try to correct every mistake in second language writers' essays, they can use errors as a way to gauge students' knowledge of the target language and as a tool to promote their language acquisition through questioning and negotiating meaning.

## **Tutor Responsibilities**

### **Tutor Activities**

1. Working one-on-one with students on writing assignments.
2. Serving as receptionist. (See Working the Reception Desk section.)
3. Being a Writing Associate. (See Writing Associates Program section.)

### **Job Expectations**

1. Your work in the Writing Center takes precedence over extracurricular and co-curricular activities. Schedule your work hours at times when you expect to be free throughout the semester. Try not to schedule shifts that run up to the time a class meets or you have a meeting or practice to attend. At the beginning of the semester, if you are scheduled for hours that you realize you can't keep, see Carol right away to change your hours.
2. If you have to miss a scheduled shift, you must make a serious, good-faith effort to find another tutor to sub for you using the Writing Center Staff Moodle. You cannot request a sub for half a shift. It is your responsibility to check that someone has accepted your substitution request, and you must also check that you do not have a 'requested' appointment during this shift. If a student requested you personally, you must email the student and let him or her know you will not be available and that he or she may keep the appointment with the sub or reschedule

with you. For English writing tutors, if a student requested just your major, tell him or her that they may keep the appointment with the sub or reschedule with you or someone of that major.

However, OSAs who are foreign language tutors cannot sub. OSAs will need to switch shifts with another OSA tutor or Dickinson tutor since they are not paid through the Writing Center and must keep their hours constant.

**If no one has accepted your request, you are responsible for showing up for the shift.**

To request of sub on the Writing Center Staff Moodle, post a new discussion topic with the day, date, and time of each shift that you need covered. Foreign language tutors should also include the language

Requests should include:

- Your name
- The date and time of your shift
- Email and cell phone contact info

Responses should include:

- Your name
- Email and cell phone contact info

If you have a sub for one shift on a date that you are scheduled to tutor two shifts, the original tutor's name will remain on the WCOnline schedule and that tutor will need to email any students with appointments. The tutor should let them know that s/he will not be available, but another tutor will be tutoring the appointment. If the student must work with the original tutor, the student and tutor should reschedule.

When completing the client report form, the substitute tutor will need to be sure your own name is entered as the staff/resource by using the dropdown box at the top of the client report form to choose their own name.

In cases of an emergency, such as an accident or a sudden, severe illness, call and let the Writing Center staff know the situation.

3. When tutoring remotely, please be ready to start on-time. This means you need to email writers before the session with the zoom link to contact you. Please see the sample email here below. You can respond to writers with this information when you receive the appointment confirmation email.

Sample Email:

Dear [writer],

I'm looking forward to working with you at your appointment on [date of appointment].

Please use the following link [insert zoom link here] to access the zoom meeting where the appointment will take place. You will need to have a microphone for the session, and having video can be helpful but not required. If you have a draft that you are working on, please share that with me through Google Drive or OneDrive before we meet. Let me know if you have questions about how to share documents or if you have any other questions or concerns about the session, please let me know.

When we return to in-person appointments, if a student wants a walk-in appointment and there's not a full 30 minutes (foreign language) or 45 minutes (English) left for a session, don't make the student wait until the beginning of the next session if it's clear that he won't need the full amount of time. Ask how long the paper is and tell him how much time there is left for the session. If the student wants more time, then have him schedule an appointment for another time.

4. When tutoring online, students are unable to make "drop-in" appointments. If you do not have an appointment scheduled, you will not need to wait for a writer to drop in. However, please use your paid tutoring hours to complete client report forms, set up zoom meetings, or prepare for an upcoming appointment.

5. When we return to campus, you may rent key to the Writing Center for \$5 if you frequently use the Writing Center during off hours or if you work a beginning shift on Sunday or the last shift of any day. You return this key when you go abroad or graduate and your deposit will be returned. Do not loan your key to anyone. Also, be careful not to lose your key since there is a significant fine to replace it. Please do not leave the Writing Center unlocked when no one is there. Even if leaving for only a short time, lock the door and take your key with you.

If you don't have a key and you need to get into the Writing Center, please ask Noreen, John, or Carol to unlock the door. As a last resort, you may ask the on-duty supervisor at the circulation desk to lock/unlock the door to the Writing Center when necessary.

6. Check your email frequently for messages from Noreen, Carol, or John about Writing Center matters. Although we have monthly staff meetings, email is the primary vehicle for us to communicate important Writing Center announcements. Read each email carefully and respond promptly if a reply is called for.

7. If you're not tutoring, it's all right to study during your shift. You can also use the Writing Center as a place to write and study when campus re-opens.

8. When we return to in-person tutoring, if you are working in the Writing Center and there isn't a receptionist on duty, greet all students who come in and assist them as necessary.

9. You are expected to conduct yourself professionally while in the Writing Center. We work to create a safe and equitable environment for all students who use the space. Do not talk about students you have tutored in inappropriate ways; do not behave in any way that disturbs or disrupts other conferences. It is crucial that students feel comfortable and welcome in the Writing Center. When your appointment arrives, act in a friendly and professional way. Be

prompt in getting up to greet them.

10. Report any problems with rude or disruptive behavior by students to Noreen, John, Carol, or one of the co-head tutors. You should also report repeated instances of tardiness, absenteeism, or unprofessional behavior by co-workers that damage the reputation and morale of the Writing Center.

11. If there is a problem with one of the computers, call the Helpdesk (ext. 1000) to report it.

12. Be sure to fill out your time sheet regularly. Remember to include staff meetings, sub shifts, etc. Carol will check your entered hours against the schedule and sub requests and notify you of any discrepancies. You will need to make adjustments yourself and resubmit the time sheet to Carol for approval. Carol will send reminders when time sheets are due. If you fail to submit your hours to Carol on time for two or more pay periods, you can be dismissed. Any time entered that is not part of your regularly scheduled shifts needs to be explained in the comments section.

13. If a tutor's major GPA dips below 3.00, the tutor may be relieved of tutoring duties. The Director will make the decision in consultation with the tutor's advisor and/or chair of the major academic department.

14. **When we return to campus,** the computer at the Reception Desk is for use by a tutor working a shift and handling receptionist duties – answering the phone, helping with appointments, greeting students. Tutors needing to use a computer for an extended period of time should use their own computer, one of the computers in the tutoring room, or a computer elsewhere in the library.

15. **When we return to campus,** tutors are responsible for helping to keep the Writing Center neat and clean.

16. Tutors are also responsible for completing a client report form after each appointment.

Guidelines for client report forms:

- Client report forms should be concise yet informative.
- Client report forms should be descriptive and objective.
- Client report forms should not contain judgmental comments about the student, the professor, or the assignment.

Please be sure to write statements of fact rather than statements that pass judgment. Here are some examples:

- Wrong -- Judgmental: The student was not interested in the session and did not care about what I had to say or about his success on the assignment.

- Correct -- Factual: When I asked the writer what the assignment was, she said she “was not sure.” Then her cell phone rang, and she spoke with a friend for five minutes about lunch plans.
- Wrong -- Judgmental: We attempted to work on the assignment by writing an analysis of the primary source, but it was pretty clear to me that he had not read the book and he wanted me to do all the work for him.
- Correct—Factual: We were working on the analysis of the letter written by Thomas Jefferson. I started by asking him to sum up the letter in one sentence. However, he was unable to answer that question. Instead, he asked me twice how I would sum up the letter.
- Wrong -- Judgmental: The student was extremely resistant to all of my suggestions and had a really bad attitude about everything.
- Correct -- Factual: There was a pattern of subject-verb agreement errors in her essay, and so I helped her identify those errors, and I explained the grammar rule to her. She said that my explanation ran counter to her professor’s explanation, and so she did not think she had to make those changes.

Writing tutors in English should address the following questions when describing the session:

- What is the assignment, and when is it due?
- What did you work on during the session? Please be very specific.
- What higher order concerns (thesis, organization, logic, meaning, analysis) did you discuss?
- Regarding lower order concerns, did you notice any specific patterns of error?
- What writing techniques did you show the writer? (Reverse outlining, clustering, using databases to find research, highlighting in multi-colored markers to parse a paragraph, The Method, difference within similarity, paraphrase X 3, etc.)
- What specific concepts does the student continue to struggle with? Did you recommend a visit to the professor to deal with these issues?
- Did the student articulate a revision plan? What is that plan? Did the student state that she would not make certain revisions?

Writing tutors in foreign languages should answer the following questions when describing the session:

- When is the paper due?
- What is the assignment? Did the student bring a copy of the assignment?
- What did you work on during the session (in specific language)?
- Did you notice any specific patterns of error?
- What higher order concerns (thesis, organization, logic, meaning, analysis) did you discuss?
- Can you offer any recommendations to the professor for reviewing specific concepts?
- Does the student plan to revise or is s/he resisting any changes?



## Policies and Procedures

### Policies

1. Multiple visits policy: Due to the volume of business in the Writing Center, especially in the fall semester, and due to a concern that some students may become too dependent on the Writing Center, there are some limits on the number of visits:

- Students can have as many as two appointments per day.
- Students can have up to three appointments on any one paper.
- Most students, with a few exceptions, will be limited to 20 appointments each semester. Students who reach this limit will be blocked from making more appointments. If a student who has already had 20 sessions wishes to make another appointment, direct her to speak with Noreen or John.

2. Long papers and theses: Students must get papers of 10-14 pages in length to their tutor 24 hours in advance of their appointment and papers of 15 pages or more to their tutor 48 hours in advance of their appointment. Students who are writing their senior thesis must get the thesis to their tutor 72 hours in advance of their appointment. Students with long papers are advised to schedule 60-minute (foreign language) or 90-minute (English or foreign language) appointments. Students should send the draft directly to the tutor, and tutors can send long paper attachments to Carol to print out in advance. If a student does not send a long paper in advance, the tutor should explain at the beginning of the session that they will cover as much as possible but they won't be able to review the entire essay. Tutors can read long papers during their regularly scheduled hours or on their own time outside the Writing Center (put the time on your time sheet) if you are fully booked. Ideally, upper-level tutors majoring in the same field should read senior theses. No tutor should feel obligated to handle more long papers than she can reasonably manage.

3. No-shows: A student who misses an appointment or is more than 10 minutes late should be marked as 'Missed' in WCOonline. The system then generates an email alerting the student to his missed session. After missing three scheduled appointments, students are blocked by WCOonline from making another appointment. Direct students with concerns to Noreen or John.

4. Borrowing reference books (**when we are physically on campus**): If students want to take a reference book (Hacker, MLA Handbook, etc.) outside the Writing Center, they must leave their student ID card at the reception desk, which we will return to them when they return the book.

5. Tutoring papers in classes you are taking: At their discretion, tutors can work with students on papers written for classes they are currently taking unless the professor has informed the class that this practice is not allowed.

6. Study abroad applications: Students in Russian, German, Japanese, and Arabic who are applying to study abroad programs may bring their application essays to the Writing Center for feedback. However, students in Chinese, French, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish may not work on their application essays with a foreign language tutor.

7. For foreign language writing sessions, client report forms must be sent to professors for all conferences. For English writing sessions, client report forms must be sent to professors when students come in for a conference on a first-year seminar paper or when students are required to come to the Writing Center. In all other cases, client report forms will be sent to professors unless the student requests that it not be sent. In this case, if students request that the client report form not be sent to the professor, tutors should still complete the form, and when asked to choose the professor, tutors should select the [noreply@dickinson.edu](mailto:noreply@dickinson.edu) email address from the drop-down menu. This way, the Writing Center can keep accurate data of the sessions without sending any information to the professor.

## Procedures

1. At the beginning of each semester, tutors fill out an online form (English) or information sheet (foreign language), listing hours they are available to work each week for the duration of the semester.

2. A tentative schedule is sent to all tutors by Wednesday afternoon during the first week of classes. Carol will alert you to the schedule adjustment period during which tutors can add/drop shifts.

3. **Unless otherwise notified**, the Writing Center opens for business the Sunday of the second week of classes each semester.

4. Hours for English writing tutoring: Sun 12:00-10:30 p.m.; Mon-Thurs 10:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m.; Fri 10:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Hours for foreign language writing tutoring: Sun 12:30-10:30 p.m.; Mon-Thurs 2:30-10:30 p.m.; Fri 2:30-4:30 p.m. The Writing Center is closed on Saturdays, during all vacations, and during the summer. We officially close each semester on the last day of classes, but tutors who wish to tutor during finals can sign up to do so, and their names will be given to students who want appointments.

5. We have monthly staff meetings. Attendance is not required except at the first meeting of each semester but is strongly recommended.

## Keeping Records with WCOonline

We use the WCOonline database to save information about Writing Center usage, get student feedback, notify professors of student visits, and record descriptions of conferences. It is important for the Writing Center to collect the correct data for the benefit of the students, professors, and the Writing Program, so it is essential that you do your part to keep records accurate and up-to-date.

To access WCOonline, go to <https://dickinson.mywconline.com>. As a tutor, you are expected to use WCOonline to

- check your schedule and read appointment forms to see what the writer wants to work on;
- confirm that the professor and class named on the appointment form corresponds to the paper that the student brings to the session;

- complete a client report form at the end of a session that gives an accurate account of what was worked on during the appointment. This is an important responsibility that tutors must fulfill since students, professors, and the Writing Program depend on this information to be recorded and circulated.

## **Working the Reception Desk**

**When doing in-person tutoring,** English writing tutors working the reception desk are responsible for greeting students who come to the Writing Center, asking students if they've printed their papers, helping students make appointments, and answering the phone. Receptionists will be assigned 90-minute shifts.

1. Greeting and welcoming students who come to the Writing Center:
  - Ask the student if she is there for an appointment or to make an appointment.
  - If the student is there for a scheduled appointment, ask if the student has printed out her paper and alert the tutor she has an appointment with.
  - If the student is a walk-in and a tutor is available, have the student schedule an appointment on WOnline with that tutor. However, you will need to create the appointment for the student if the start time of the session has passed since WOnline will have closed the appointment at that point. Find out what the student has brought, and tell her how much time the tutor will have to work with her. If the student wants/needs a full 45 minutes (English) or 30 minutes (foreign language), tell her to schedule an appointment for the next available session.
  - During busy times, you can alert students to the waitlist which is available by clicking on the clock icon next to the date.
  - If a tutor who is scheduled to work has an emergency, such as an accident or a severe, sudden illness, you may be asked to tutor in her place.

2. Tutor tardiness: If a student arrives for an appointment and his tutor is not there, ask the student to wait a few minutes while you try to reach the tutor. If the tutor does not show up after 10 minutes and cannot be reached, give the appointment to another tutor if one is available.

3. Student tardiness: If a student with an appointment is more than 10 minutes late and a walk-in is waiting, give the appointment to the walk-in. Have the first student reschedule for a later time if he shows up and no other tutor is available to work with him.

## **Working with International/Multilingual Writers**

Some of your appointments will be with international, multilingual writers. Although most of these will proceed in the same way as any other conference, there are some points to keep in mind. The following ten tips are from the University of North Carolina Writing Center website: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/esl/esltutoringtips.html>.

1. Explain the goals, procedures, and participant roles for a tutorial. Many students may not be familiar with the peer tutoring model. They may expect explicit instruction from you, the authority on writing. A brief, but careful, explanation of how we work together can eliminate a

lot of potential frustration.

2. Emphasize the assignment. Even if you read the assignment together, ask students to explain it in their own words to make sure they have identified the critical instructions and tasks.

3. Emphasize the planning. Ask for an overview (e.g., "Before we start reading, could you tell me about your paper. What's it about? What are the major sections of the paper? What are the main points you're making? How have you sequenced those points?" etc.) You are activating a mental overview, which will help students envision the larger project and help them identify where they are having difficulty at that level.

4. Emphasize the content and organization. During the goal-setting phase, students will often say they'd like to make sure their English is okay. This is a legitimate concern, but it could be a waste of time to correct sentences that may disappear during revision. If students ask you to "just check the grammar," validate that you'll be happy to help them identify language problems, ask what other concerns they have, and then work together to prioritize their concerns. This can be a difficult negotiation, but if the student understands why you want to address global concerns before sentence-level concerns, it should be easier to make a plan for the session.

5. Ask if students would prefer to read or to listen. Some students may find it helpful to read their own work aloud, but others may find it to be an extra processing burden. In other words, students may be so focused on correct pronunciation or reading proficiency that they are not able to concentrate on (or notice) anything about the draft. If you read, you allow the student to attend to various aspects of the draft while they listen.

6. Concentrate on the macro-structure – the entire piece of writing. Is it focused, developed, and organized? Can you follow the major structure? You may be distracted by a number of errors, but keep in mind that writers working in a second language, just like those working in their first language, benefit from thoughtful questions and genuine reader response. Pay sincere attention.

7. Read through mistakes that do not interfere with your understanding. The text may have a lot of minor errors that are noticeable but not confusing. Read the text as it's written, but read naturally through the minor errors, without stopping over every little thing. If you stumble a bit with a slightly confusing error, the writer will probably notice your hesitation. If you can move forward, do so and return to that error later if necessary.

8. If some language related issue seriously interferes with your understanding, either stop reading and try to identify the problem or mark that place in the text for your attention when you finish reading. If you stop, ask the writer for clarification ("I'm not sure what you mean here. / I don't understand this sentence / this phrasing. Can you explain this to me a little bit more?"). Once the issue is resolved, continue reading.

9. Emphasize vocabulary development. Encourage students to pay attention to groups of words that often occur together ("lexical chunks" or "collocations"). If you find vocabulary errors, ask students for alternatives and give them time to think of a few before you make

suggestions. If necessary, provide several choices for rephrasing instead of a single alternative. However, if there really is only one way to say it, by all means, provide the correction. Encourage students to use their native language as a resource to convey what they are trying to say. They (and you) can work with translation when necessary.

10. Emphasize proofreading strategies. When students are ready to focus on language, ask several questions: What do you normally have trouble with? How do you proofread for that? What are you concerned about in this draft? What did you have trouble with when you were writing? etc. Learn as much as you can about the writer's difficulties and strategies, and then work with them very much as you would with a native English speaker. Explain that you will concentrate on the errors that are most confusing first and then work on the less confusing, but perhaps more frequent, errors. If the correction is rule-based, review the rule and proofreading strategies. If it is item-based, like an idiom, try to elicit the correction, but provide it if necessary.

## **WRITING ASSOCIATES PROGRAM**

In addition to tutoring one-on-one in the Writing Center, a cohort of tutors will serve as Writing Associates (WAs) each semester to provide classroom-based tutoring. Normally, Writing Associates will be attached to first-year seminars in the fall semester and Writing in the Discipline (WID) courses in the spring semester.

### **Mission and Goals**

In performing classroom-based tutoring, the goal of the Writing Associate is to serve as a bridge between professors and students in such a way as to enhance the learning and teaching of writing.

To assist with the learning of writing, Writing Associates may intervene in the classroom in a variety of ways. Some possibilities include

- facilitating the peer group discussion of papers either in-class or outside of class.
- offering in-class mini-lessons on the writing process and/or a variety of writing skills (i.e. shaping a thesis, writing conclusions, documenting sources, etc.).
- acting as a writing resource by creating a bridge between students and the Writing Center.
- modeling good discussion and learning techniques.
- holding office hours to assist with writing assignments, set learning goals, and clarify professor expectations.

Ideally, the WA will also enjoy a collaborative relationship with the professor, helping the professor to better understand the inner workings of students as they grapple with writing assignments, rubrics, and professor feedback. As such, the WA becomes a “change agent,” contributing to both faculty development and to student learning.

## **Working with Peer Review Groups**

While, as a WA, you may find yourself drawing on your tutoring skills often, you should keep in mind working with peer review groups is different from working one-on-one with writers. As a facilitator of a peer review group, your job is to teach members how to peer review. You will have been successful when you have made yourself obsolete.

### **Trust Building and Trust Maintenance**

Your success will depend on how you build and maintain trust in the group. It's important for group members to get to know the WA and each other. However, in terms of group interaction, the WA should always defer authority to the group. There are several techniques to use to create and maintain trust:

1. Take time to get to know each other, perhaps engaging in some off-task conversation.
  - Invite members to chat about their weekend.
  - Ask group members to share one or two personal things about themselves.
  - Have them think about what it means to be part of a learning group and reflect on a time when they were in a group that did not function well. Then ask them to describe a positive group learning experience they have had.
  - Talk about the best and worst writing experience they have had.
  - Have them describe one strength and one weakness of their writing.
  
2. When discussing drafts, direct the group to validate the writer and offer positive feedback before launching into critique.
  
3. Be sure to maintain trust throughout the semester.
  - After a few sessions, ask each member to say what is working and what is not working about the group.
  - Take time to learn about each writer's writing process.

### **Group Dynamics**

1. How many writers should be in each group?
  - Three or four is a good number. There are more voices involved for consensus building.
  
2. If professors ask, how do you create a balanced group?
  - Professors can give students a diagnostic essay and then work with the WA to organize the groups based on the diagnosis.
  - Groups can be made with writing skills in mind. (Put a strong thesis writer in a group with a weak thesis writer, etc.)
  - However, be mindful of the learning gap. Try not to place the weakest writer in the class in the same group as the strongest writer. Make the gap narrower than that.

3. How will you read the papers?
  - Give the students time to do a careful close reading.
  - You may want to work with the professor to instill the expectation that students come to group having read and commented on the essays.
  - You may want to allot enough time for each writer to read her paper aloud. (The writer should bring a copy for everyone in the group.)
  
4. What are some useful techniques to use with groups?
  - Ask the writer to identify his goals for the essay, thereby setting the agenda for his paper.
  - If the writer claims to have no agenda, let the group set the agenda. Intervene and set the agenda yourself only if absolutely necessary.
  - If the writers have a problem with thesis statements, start by asking each person to summarize the main point of his or her paper. If a writer cannot do that, you can help him work on his thesis statement.
  - Keep reviewers focused without correcting them. If they comment on a later order concern too early in the process, acknowledge the comment and then redirect the conversation to higher order concerns.
  - Use techniques like glossing – a step-by-step procedure – for writers unable to see how each part of the paper contributes to the whole.
  - Ask specific questions, modeling the kinds of concrete talk that inform effective writing groups.
  - If a student makes a general or vague comment, ask them for a specific, illustrative example from the essay.
  - For writers having trouble developing ideas, ask them to tell you more about certain points.
  - If the problem is coming up with appropriate examples, after identifying the main idea, ask what examples the writer will use to back up the points.
  - Make sure the writers leave with a revision plan. End with a moment of reflection in which writers jot down what they learned from the group and what they plan to revise when they go home.

### **Attending Classes**

For the most part, you will not attend classes because you are not expected to help deliver course content. However, some WAs may be called upon to attend some classes.

1. If you are asked to deliver a mini-lesson, negotiate the time limits with the professor and be sure to engage the students in a discussion – that is, make it interactive in some way. Think about creating a PowerPoint that can then be posted on the Writing Program website for another person to use. (In fact, there are a few PowerPoints and podcasts posted there already.) If you have any worksheets or handouts that you want to give to the class, you can send them to Carol in advance. She will print them out for you so that you don't have to print from your personal

account.

2. If you are asked to assist with the class, get there on time and try to spend time with each group. Some instructors may want you there to move from group to group and help students with the task at hand: narrowing a topic, brainstorming ideas, peer reviewing, etc.

3. If you are asked to model good behaviors (like notetaking, discussion, etc.), don't show off. Keep in mind that the less advanced students need the most help, so model behavior or thinking that is attainable for them.

### **Keeping Office Hours**

Some collaborating professors will request that you hold office hours with students. These hours can be used in several ways. For example, professors might ask you to touch base with each student after midterm or work with students on their drafts for the next assignment. These sessions work best if students are accountable for meeting with you or if they need to sign up for a time in advance. Ask professors if they want a report about what you learned through your office hours or about students' participation.

### **Meeting with Collaborating Professors**

Professors who employ a WA are encouraged to collaborate with the WA in the interest of their own growth and professional development as writing teachers. Specifically, they are asked to integrate the WA into the classroom learning community.

The faculty website states, "While the WA assists the students in the class with understanding things like writing assignments and professor feedback, ideally the WA will also collaborate with the professor, helping the professor to better understand the inner workings of students as they grapple with writing assignments, rubrics, and feedback. As such, the WA serves as a 'change agent,' contributing to both faculty development and to student learning."

In a good professor/WA collaboration, the professor will routinely ask you to share your insights and observations about how the students are progressing as writers.

### **Keeping Records**

You may want to keep a notebook to track your WA hours since it is your responsibility to report the hours you have worked in your contract. In Banner, you will have a separate WA time sheet from your tutoring time sheet. You can also use the notebook to chart the progress of your writers, summarize the gist of conversations with students, or make comments about peer reviews. You may want to use these notes to check subsequent drafts and monitor whether or not the writers are engaging in revision. You may also find these notes extremely helpful when debriefing with your collaborating professor.

### **WA Job Responsibilities**



1. As a WA, you promise to
  - arrive for class on time on designated days.
  - honor your appointments with individual students/groups outside of class.
  - check email in order to remain in communication with the professor.
  - attend meetings with the professor as per your contract.
  - attend monthly WA staff meetings.
  - fill out a WA time sheet regularly; remember to include staff meetings. Any time entered that is not part of your contract needs to be explained.
  - treat the students who seek your assistance with the highest degree of professionalism.
  - refer any serious problems or complaints to John or Noreen.
  
2. The professor promises to
  - make changes to the job description tasks only with your consent.
  - adhere to the contract limit of 30 hours per semester.
  - communicate directly with you about your needs and/or performance.
  - evaluate your performance at the end of the semester.
  - refer any serious problems to John or Noreen.

### **Procedures**

1. At the end of a semester, we will ask which tutors are interested in being a WA the following semester. At the same time, faculty interested in having a WA will be identified.
  
2. John will match professors with WAs, taking into account several factors: professor request for a specific WA, the WA's major, and the WA's course schedule.
  
3. The WA will be asked to approve her assignment to a professor and course before a contract is drawn.
  
4. The WA and the professor will meet to discuss the course and the WA's role, and they will collaborate to create the job description that does not exceed 30 hours per semester.
  
5. Once the contract is written, the WA will sign the contract to indicate that she has agreed to the contract.
  
6. WAs also tutor in the Writing Center.

### **TUTOR ESSAYS**

Anna Ciriani Dean  
English 214  
Prof. Lape  
Spring 2010  
Final Paper

### **Grammar Treatment in the Multilingual Writing Center: Why and How Tutors Should Focus on Lower Order Concerns with Upper Level Foreign Language Writers**

With the creation of the Multilingual Writing Center at Dickinson College, the question of how to tutor foreign language (FL) writers becomes increasingly pressing. Because they are linguistically disadvantaged compared to students writing in their first language (L1) and because writing serves more as a tool for learning the language than as a way to express ideas, tutors have to approach higher and lower order concerns (HOCs and LOCs) differently with second language (L2) writers than with students writing in the first language. Especially once students reach higher levels, it becomes difficult to discern what issues to focus on. Although HOCs become a priority in upper level classes, tutors should still focus on grammar to a certain extent, making sure that their approach is not too directive and identifying specific crucial structures, because grammar still plays a central role in FL students' writing process.

Although tutors should pay most attention to LOCs with students in lower level language classes, tutors dealing with FL writers in higher level classes should focus more on HOCs because the writing tasks are more complex. Writing in beginner level classes is simply a "support activity for the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary" and it involves linear cognitive processes, such as description, narration and exposition (Schultz 980). When students transition to literature and civilization classes, they have trouble because they have to meet new criteria (Schultz 978). In fact, instructors assign argumentative essays that require their students to write analytically and to engage in higher-level thinking that allows for a "multidimensional network

of ideas” (Schultz 981). Upper level writers have to break down their topic, integrate sources and assert their own opinions (Williams 55). They need to keep track of new writing conventions and they have to gather, analyze, organize and present ideas accordingly (Williams 12-13). Thus, writers in upper level classes need to extend their focus beyond grammar (Schultz 979). Tutors should, therefore, aid them in undertaking these complex writing assignments by addressing HOCs such as content and organization first, just as they would do with any other student.

Furthermore, tutors should direct writers’ attention to HOCs because these students have a much firmer grip on the language and can, therefore, reflect on to broader issues. Research has shown that higher levels spend more time on planning and editing than lower levels, although they still spend most of their time on formulation (Manchón 107-108). Thus, as their language proficiency increases, FL writers learn to focus more on HOCs even though they still concentrate more on LOCs than L1 writers (Manchón 107-108). In fact, the comparison between types of revisions of L2 and L1 writers shows that FL writers focus more on surface-level errors, but that both groups spend the same amount of time on improving their concepts (Schoonen 86). This research shows that L2 students spend more time on LOCs, but that they are equally capable to address HOCs as L1 writers (Schoonen 93). Although they have the linguistic skills to focus on broader issues within their papers, L2 writers are more likely to focus on problems that are easily resolved and to resort to straightforward editing (Williams 111). Therefore, tutors should push higher level FL writers to address these issues and to stretch themselves farther so that they tap into their ability to tackle HOCs.

Finally, it makes no sense for tutors to address sentence-level issues first because their concept and text might change and because explicit grammar instruction does not help the writer improve. If substantial revision takes place, the students might alter their papers to such a large

extent that grammatical mistakes might disappear (Williams 86). Furthermore, research shows that FL writers that receive feedback on content improve the most, whereas those who receive feedback on error do not show any progress in their writing (Reichelt, *A Critical Review of Foreign Language Writing Research on Pedagogical Approaches*, 589). Tutors in the writing center should try to direct upper level FL students towards revision of HOCs at the beginning of each session so that they do not waste precious time on sentence-level issues that might disappear after revision and that do not help the writer develop.

However, tutors should not completely ignore grammar treatment in their sessions with upper level FL students because the content of their papers depends on their language proficiency. The success of FL writers depends not only on their conceptual and organizational skills, but also a lot on their level of linguistic knowledge and fluency (Schoonen 83). Writing is slow because L2 students have to search for vocabulary, which detracts from their overall focus on the text as a whole (Schoonen 80-81). They are often so concerned with linguistic processing that they have little time for conceptual processing (Schoonen 83). In fact, L2 students are somewhat overwhelmed when writing because they cannot pay attention to multiple aspects of writing at once (Williams 31). Therefore, the more linguistics knowledge the students have, the faster lexical and grammar knowledge is retrieved, the better they write (Schoonen 83). In short, content and sentence-level issues are connected (Williams 86). Because of how much linguistic accuracy affects the content of papers, writing center tutors should not completely ignore grammar and vocabulary in their sessions with FL students.

Addressing LOCs is particularly important for L2 writers because they encounter more linguistic problems than L1 students, which, as explained above, impedes the communication of their ideas. Tutors should not forget that L2 writers are still acquiring the target language while

learning to write in it (Williams 2). In fact, a lot of students only control about 15% of the grammar of the target language to begin with, as opposed to 90% in English (Guadiani 4). Furthermore, because upper level students have to use more complex syntax and grammar structures in their papers, they have even less control over their grammar (Schultz 981-982). Thus, many students get to advanced levels with little ability to express their thoughts in coherent sentences even though they excel in isolated grammar and reading exercises (Guadiani 46). For this reason, despite their increased ability to address HOCs, upper level FL writers spend the most time on formulation (Manchón 107). Editing should, therefore, not be ignored completely because errors will accumulate and become overwhelming, detracting from the meaning of the text (Williams 86). Tutors need to make some time for grammar because even upper level FL students have trouble with LOCs that affect the overall content of their papers.

LOCs are also hard for tutors to ignore because upper level FL writers will pressure them to help them with grammar and vocabulary, as they find this kind of feedback the most useful and as they might misconstrue the absence of grammar corrections. First, because of how hard they work to write, they become more attached to their text and do not want to revise it and change it (Williams 84). Second, they think that writing serves as a demonstration of their students' language skills (Williams 83). Therefore, students find feedback on LOCs more beneficial than focusing on HOCs (Williams 155). Ignoring grammar is only frustrating for students who value feedback on the sentence level (Williams 116). What is more, not commenting on grammar gives students a false sense of confidence, which might lead them to think that they do not need to edit by themselves (Williams 103). Because they are so used to receiving grammar correction in lower levels, upper level students might not understand why the tutors are focusing on HOCs and how this kind of feedback helps their writing. Thus, in order to

satisfy upper level FL writers' needs, writing center tutors need to address LOCs as a supplement to broader comments.

In addition to students' attitudes towards grammar correction, instructors' emphasis on grammar also makes it important for tutors to focus somewhat on LOCs. In fact, a lot of teachers "do not view writing in a FL as an end itself, but rather as a means of overall L2 acquisition or as a support skill for other FL skills" (Reichelt, *A Critical Review of Foreign Language Writing Research on Pedagogical Approaches*, 589). For this reason, language instructors in the United States are taught to concentrate more on grammar than on ideas (Reichelt, *A Critical Evaluation of Writing Teaching Programmes in Different Foreign Language Settings*, 192). FL professors often correct grammar mistakes very strictly (Williams 153). If students leave out grammar mistakes completely, they therefore run the risk of creating a conflict between what students learn in the classroom and in the writing center. Tutors should try to match this emphasis on grammar to a certain extent so that they do not completely deviate from the instructors' methods.

However, so as to prevent grammar from drowning out HOCs and so as to teach students grammar more effectively, tutors should address content and organization first and approach LOCs in a non-directive way. This way, tutors avoid making grammar and syntax the central concern and transfer responsibility to the students. Students like explicit comments because they do not need to reflect on their mistakes and, thus, do not need to find the answers on their own (Williams 114). In the spirit of advancing their linguistic skills and improving the writers instead of the writing, though, simply feeding them the correct answers to create a perfect text does not work. In order for a session to be successful, students need to internalize the feedback they receive, which occurs when they make changes on their own and are forced to take a closer look at their mistakes (Williams 156). If the correct form is simply provided, they will only transcribe

it and probably make the same mistake again in the future (Williams 157). Therefore, tutors need to make sure not to make the necessary changes on their own, but to allow the students to do the work.

A good tool for relinquishing the tutors' responsibility over the text and to prioritize HOCs is to read through the paper and simply underline the errors that the students can then fix on their own after the session or that they will discuss if extra time remains in the session. In the case that the session ends before the tutors have been able to address LOCs, the underlined parts will serve as a springboard for the tutees to begin their editing after they have finished revising their paper. On the other hand, if there is time to go over grammar, tutors should be patient and allow the students to find the answer themselves. Because oral feedback forces writers to take on responsibility in their corrections, tutors should ask them to correct their mistakes on their own and only provide them with answers if they are visibly struggling with a structure and do not have enough language knowledge to fix it (Williams 102). However, tutors need to verify that the writers understand and are taking note of what they have said (Williams 102). Their suggestions need to be made clear enough so that the students understand what they need to do without being told explicitly (Williams 108). In fact, students in upper level classes are expected to be responsible for the linguistic accuracy of their papers because of the focus on ideas (Williams 168). Therefore, tutors should point out that there is a mistake and indicate what aspect of grammar it involves or whether it is an issue of word choice, syntax, etc., but they should not say explicitly how to change it to make it right.

Another advantage of underlining is that it allows tutors to identify which grammar issues the students are struggling with the most and focus only on a set of recurring mistakes so that the students do not feel discouraged. Commenting on everything makes students overwhelmed,

which shows that discussing every grammatical mistake is not a successful strategy when dealing with FL students (Williams 103). Furthermore, it is impossible to control all of the mistakes in one session (Williams 164). Not all errors should be corrected because they would slow down communication and thus prevent the session from flowing smoothly and productively (Williams 154). Tutors should, therefore, only focus on the main issues that they have pointed out while reading through the text.

In order to determine which errors to attend to, tutors need to know what the students can fix on their own and which kinds of errors they can successfully correct in a session. Research in the field of L2 learning has proved that students cannot learn anything that is too advanced for them and that introducing them to a new concept is not effective (Williams 157). Therefore, tutors need to make sure that their tutees themselves can identify the errors before helping them repair their mistake. This rule applies mostly to lower level writing, as upper level students will have encountered most grammar concepts at this point in their FL education. However, tutors should keep in mind that certain concepts might be beyond their level and that they should either suggest a different structure or move on to errors that are in their realm of knowledge. There are certain areas of grammar that are fixed more easily and effectively than others and that tutors should, therefore, prioritize (Williams 159). For example, systematic errors, such as conjugations, apply to a rule for a system of words and usually repeat throughout the text (Williams 159). If tutors point them out once, the student should be able to apply the correction to the rest of the text on their own time, thus making it possible to move on quickly without getting hung up on the same mistake over and over again. Tutors should also look at errors that are inconsistent, as the students have partial control over them and should be able to edit them themselves, thus learning the structure more thoroughly (Williams 159). For this reason, tutors



must choose which corrections would benefit the students the most based on their ability to correct them.

There are certain structures that tutors should also concentrate on because they prove the most problematic for students. Mistakes that “impede communication” require complex feedback because the tutors have to understand the message the students are trying to convey and to help them come up with a new formulation on their own (Williams 159). Without the help of a tutor, students would not be able to reconstruct their sentences so that the grammar and vocabulary convey coherent meaning. Tutors should also consider focusing on issues that are generally difficult for students, such as structures where the differences between L1 and L2 are not immediately obvious, that require written practice to acquire, that are rare, that have no specific meaning (such as gender agreement), and that have difficult rules (Williams 148). However, because of how discouraging grammar mistakes can be for FL writers, tutors should also make sure to praise them and to point out when they apply a rule correctly (Williams 108). This way, tutors make sure that the students feel confident in their abilities as they are tackling difficult grammar issues.

Upper level FL students benefit more from addressing HOCs, but because of how large a role grammar plays in writers’ development, tutors should not forget to focus on specific problematic LOCs in a non-directive way. Traditionally, writing centers have not been able to accommodate these kinds of students because tutors are trained to focus on the broader picture rather than on the details of a paper. In fact, writing in FL classes aim primarily to improve students’ command of the language and only start to focus on culture or literature in the language in higher level classes. Therefore, tutors’ approaches to L2 students are very different than how they would deal with L1 students.

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Leigh Harlow  
April 27, 2010  
Final Project Proposal

*Antidote* in the Multilingual Writing Center

When considering my future role as a French tutor in Dickinson's soon-to-be multilingual writing center, I'd like to take into account the resources that have proved quite useful to me in French writing. While I have never used the knowledge of a classmate or tutor—though these resources help countless foreign language students—I have always taken great pains to perfect the grammar and fluency of my papers, usually with the aid of technology. A typical student like me, with an affinity and passion for foreign languages, who attended a challenging high school that fosters writing in this area, begins writing foreign language papers between tenth and twelfth grade. From then until now, I have almost always used the website WordReference.com to help me write French papers; the site serves as a “free online translation dictionary” for numerous languages that includes a forum for help with more difficult idiomatic translations. With the help of this site, I had an unlimited vocabulary at my fingertips—my somewhat limited knowledge of French grammar made sentences awkward but comprehensible.

Dickinson, however, provides its French students with a computer program called *Antidote*, which supports its students far beyond the capacity of WordReference. According to its website, *Antidote* offers “an advanced grammar checker which corrects the whole text at once, an important collection of ten dictionaries, and an interactive compendium of grammar rules,” all of which “seamlessly integrate with major word processors,” (*Antidote: Information in English* 2010). In layman's terms, students can open their French essays on Microsoft Word, click on the

*correcteur* icon displayed in the Word window upon installation of the software, and the program will search for and locate nearly all errors within the paper in a matter of seconds.

Speaking from experience, many Dickinson French students worship this software. *Antidote* has saved dozens of students from laboriously sifting through their papers for grammatical errors that are difficult to discover as a non-native writer of the language. It has additionally saved me from shifting my schedule around in order to meet with a tutor who would accomplish what appears to be the same thing: revealing my grammatical and idiomatic errors so that my paper might ultimately sound as if it were written by a native-speaker.

However, my future as a French tutor has forced me to question the merits of this program. Do the majority of students use the software to its full potential, or are they merely exploiting its efficiency in order to perpetuate lazy writing habits? Has Dickinson integrated *Antidote* so that students ultimately learn from their errors? Is there a way in which this software can be worked into the writing center so that students might simultaneously work with tutors and improve their capacity to work on their own (i.e. with the help of the program)? These are several questions I seek to answer, for I firmly believe that while *Antidote* might be widely misused at this point in time, should French tutors in the writing center successfully incorporate it into their tutoring sessions, the program has the potential to encourage grammatical self-sufficiency in French students' writing. This would in turn pave the way for French students to use the multilingual writing center to develop their writing process and improve any commonly-made global errors.

Based on the interviews I conducted with several students at various levels in their French studies, I was shocked to discover that the *Antidote* software is often exposed to students in 100-level French classes, but only suggested in French 230 and not mentioned after that unless

students study abroad in Toulouse, France. Depending on the score of an incoming first year's language placement exam, he or she will be placed into French 101, 104, 116, or 230 ("Placement Information" 2010). Thus, the idea seems to be that most students will receive some level of exposure to the software in their first French classes at Dickinson.

However, it is precisely the level of exposure that is troublesome. Peter Wright, a sophomore and one of two students I interviewed who began French classes at Dickinson with French 116, shared that both his professor and the lab specialist told the students about *Antidote*. The specialist explained the function of the software to the class and briefly demonstrated how to use it. Peter claims, "They told you how to access it, but didn't tell you what the different colors mean," (Interview, April 21, 2010). Here, he describes the manner in which the program highlights a student's various errors; errors underlined in red simply imply grammatical errors while those underlined in orange imply a variety of other errors (i.e. orthographic, lexical, syntactical, punctuation, and typographical). By neglecting to inform students of the differences between these colors, the professor or lab technician does not properly introduce the students to the software. Furthermore, first year Elizabeth Holland, whose first French class was also French 116, stated of *Antidote*, "I have no idea what that is," (Interview, April 24, 2010). This alarmed me further, for *Antidote* has such potential to improve French writing that it is a shame the software is not introduced properly or strongly recommended to French students at all levels.

On this note, I spoke with two students whose first French class at Dickinson was French 230. Sophomore Anna Ciriani Dean explained that she had initial trouble both finding and determining how to use *Antidote*, for her first French professor merely requested that the software be used before final papers were submitted. Anna now describes the program as a "lifesaver," but states that for her first year at Dickinson, she merely used it for its *fenêtre du*

*correcteur*, or window for grammatical corrections (Interview, April 21, 2010). She did not discover its *filtres de révision*—revision filters that enable students to locate and understand “particularly delicate textual characteristics” (“*Antidote: Information in English*” 2010)—or its wealth of dictionaries until the beginning of her sophomore year. The revision filters are particularly valuable, for they highlight errors that may not be incorrect, but that infringe upon the fluidity and “native” sound of the writing.

Similarly, Samantha Richardson, a senior who studied abroad in Toulouse her junior year, was not introduced to *Antidote* until her experience in France. The Orientation Handbook for the Dickinson-In-France Program expressly states, “Never hand in an assignment without running it through *Antidote*,” (25) an instruction that should be redundant given her experience from French 230, 236, 240, and 246, but that was new to her upon arriving at the Dickinson Center in Toulouse. This direction also highlights the software’s value in grammatically improving student writing, for the individuals who contributed to the handbook were native speakers working at the Dickinson Center.

All six students I consulted described a similar system for using the software: after finishing their assignments, they would run the papers through the *correcteur* in order to locate grammatical errors; all students admitted that they reserved minimal time for this (the average being five minutes per page), and only Anna claimed to have used any of *Antidote*’s functions beyond the *correcteur*. This information struck me as interesting, for my experience with *Antidote*—though I merely heard of it through word of mouth and essentially taught myself how to use it—has led me to understand the importance of taking time to use the software to its full potential. The vast grammatical and idiomatic resources that *Antidote* offers should ideally enable each student to nearly perfect all stylistic errors in his or her writing. The process should

take longer than five minutes per page, though this depends on the number of errors a student commits (that is, the student's degree of fluency in the language).

Additionally, and it is worthwhile to mention, the *Antidote* software is far from free. The college paid “a couple hundred dollars or so” for initial usage and must pay a similar amount whenever necessary updates must be made to keep the program running smoothly (Bryant, Interview, May 4, 2010). It is not economic for the college to spend large sums of money for software that students do not use to its full potential; thus, an ideal remedy would be to better introduce students to *Antidote*. Even students with a somewhat proper introduction to the software seem to waste valuable time—and valuable department funding—misusing it.

For example, Peter admitted to misusing *Antidote* initially; he would double-click on the underlined errors, causing them to correct themselves according to the software's suggestions. Just as I did, Peter ultimately taught himself to read the nature of the suggestions before immediately accepting them, thus improving his understanding of writing in French. However, the failure of 100-level professors and the language lab technician to teach students precisely how to take full advantage of *Antidote*'s resources wastes the time of students who repeatedly make errors that they never actually learn they are committing. It also wastes valuable time during tutoring sessions: French writing tutors must devote much of their sessions to fixing grammatical mistakes rather than focusing on higher order concerns. This in turn will reduce the multilingual component of our future writing center to the dreaded “grammar fix-it shop,” for foreign language tutors will not have the time to spend addressing global errors.

The solution thus appears simple: students must learn to address lower order concerns on their own. Ideally, just as in English papers taken to the writing center, tutors should focus on the global errors—that is, the logical flow of ideas, a strong and supported thesis, etc.—and only



touch on grammatical mistakes if larger errors are non-existent (or if students ask for a proofread). This method derives from the idea that a student should not work to perfect sentences if the sentences ultimately need to be consolidated or cut from the paper. Why should this method work any differently with foreign languages? Therefore, we should work to enforce the use of the multilingual writing center to improve the writing process of foreign language papers, and encourage self-sufficiency in grammatical and idiomatic corrections.

While this seems easier said than done, for foreign language students often cannot read their papers aloud to discover errors—their understanding of the language is not developed enough to allow for this kind of proofreading—this is the very way in which *Antidote* could prove extremely useful to French tutors in the writing center. The process of using *Antidote* in the writing center would work as follows:

- Tutors would gloss the French papers of the tutees (i.e. reduce each paragraph to a single statement summarizing the main idea of the paragraph).
- Tutors would then identify the thesis—if the thesis is not clear or present, the tutor would help the tutee to develop it—and work through the paper with the tutee to ensure strong evidence to support the thesis.
- Tutors would make sure that the paragraphs, ideas, and evidence are ordered logically so as to encourage seamless transitioning and a comprehensible flow of ideas.
- *Only after all higher order concerns have been addressed*, the tutor should ask the tutee, “Have you been introduced to *Antidote*?” Should the tutee say, “Yes,” the tutor should then attempt to discern the extent to which the tutee understands the full potential of the software.

- If the tutee has a firm grasp on the software and understands its wealth of resources, the tutor should say, “You should try to use *Antidote* to work through your own errors on the writing center computers, but if you have any questions, I’ll be right over here.”
- If the tutee has been introduced to the software but has a vague idea of how it works, the tutor should say, “*Antidote* can be helpful in a variety of different ways. Let me help you get started with it, and once you feel comfortable with the software, I’ll leave you to try it on your own. If you have any questions, I’ll be right over here.”
- If the tutee has never been exposed to the software, the tutor should say, “Let me show you how to use *Antidote*. I’ll work through it with you and show you how helpful it can be in locating your errors and highlighting your repeated mistakes.”

The idea here is that French students will ultimately be trained to understand the value of the writing center tutors—as peers who encourage a better writing process and improved strength of ideas—and the usefulness of the *Antidote* software. If tutees are encouraged to use the program on their own from the very beginning (with a sense of comfort knowing the tutors are available to answer any questions or decipher any unknown French), their improvement in the language will grow hand-in-hand with a sense of confidence that they can use *Antidote* to work through errors by themselves. An article by Marian Arkin, Nora Eisenberg, and Ann Peters wisely stated, “Electronic resources abound, but as we develop, use, and adapt them, we must be sure that they advance our goals for supporting learning,” (7). However, the first necessary step toward using *Antidote* to help support learning is having it installed in the writing center computers.

That being said, the only way to instill this self-sufficiency among French students is for them to be thoroughly introduced to *Antidote* in the first place. This is another instance in which

the multilingual writing center can reach its full potential. Rather than asking French professors or the lab technician to waste their time properly introducing students to the software, the lab technician could carefully train the writing center's French tutors to use the program. In her article, "How to Tutor a Student in a Foreign Language," Iris Dolores Thot states, "It is imperative that foreign language tutors become as familiar as possible with the wealth of resources available, 99% of which students will be unaware exists," (11). This seems overwhelmingly to be the case; Anna even confirmed this by saying, "I don't think most students know *Antidote* exists or what it does," (Interview, April 21, 2010). If all French introductory-level classes (i.e. 101, 104, 116, and 230) introduced a brief writing assignment in the first few weeks of class and obligated students to visit the writing center—assuming French tutors used the aforementioned method of utilizing *Antidote*—it would not only expose students to *Antidote* properly, but also demonstrate to students the value of the writing center in their development as writers.

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### Higher-Order Concerns versus Lower-Order Concerns:

#### The Role of the Tutor and Student Expectations in Foreign-Language Tutoring

In his “obscure and inconsequential” 1984 essay, “The Idea of a Writing Center,” Stephen North establishes the necessity of working to improve students as writers rather than to improve their papers as products. While it is generally acknowledged within the writing center community today that the writing center should encourage the refinement of student writing as a process rather than serve as a quick “fix-it shop” for last-minute paper revision, however, the challenges inherent to writing in a language other than the student’s native tongue may necessitate a reconsideration of the role of the tutor in a multilingual writing center. In many department-specific writing programs, the role of the Overseas Assistant (OSA) working with American students in a foreign language tutoring program directly contradicts the role of an American tutor working with American students in English: whether out of necessity or due to differential background training, many OSAs focus on sentence mechanics and other lower-order concerns rather than on the higher-order concerns, such as the structure of an argument, which primarily trouble tutors working with American students in English. In the creation of a successful multilingual writing center, the roles of the OSAs and English-language tutors should complement each other: both, after all, must base their operations on which practices will most effectively aid the student in the development of his or her writing, regardless of the language of the sample or the ability level of the student. While some professionals have suggested a complete revision of the foreign-language tutoring program into a center which utilizes both English-language tutors with foreign language backgrounds to address higher-order concerns as well as OSAs whose competency in the foreign

language allows them to address usage errors only fluency can remedy, the integration of foreign language tutoring into an English writing center may not necessitate the development of a completely new tutoring model. Instead, most useful would be a campaign to change both student and OSA approaches to writing and teaching writing in a foreign language.

In order to recommend improvements to foreign-language tutoring, it is important to first examine current practices: according to interviews conducted with Spanish-language tutors in the Dickinson College Spanish Writing Center, the primary issues are both student misunderstanding of the objectives of the Spanish writing center and a lack of background knowledge and tutor training for the OSAs. In his explanation of some of the failures of the Spanish writing center to address higher-order concerns, Associate Professor of Spanish Wendell Smith says that “The OSAs are students who have been trained in translation, not composition. Their focus is usually exclusively on sentence-level concerns” (Smith, interview). While Jesús Cantano, one of three Spanish-language OSAs employed by the center, also acknowledges this training-specific deficit, he did not seem to understand the difference in usefulness between a background in composition and a background in translation: “Translation teaches you how to write,” he said in our recent interview, perhaps focusing on the mechanics of writing and his knowledge of appropriate essay structure rather than on composition concerns such as quote integration and the existence of a controvertible thesis (Cantano, interview). Cantano did cite a lack of training specific to the art of tutoring: while student tutors in the English-language writing center complete a full semester of training, Cantano only recalled a few brief meetings with professors to explain appropriate essay correction symbols and how he should approach a student. He indicated several personal beliefs about tutoring that contradict those of most English-language tutors with training in the art of tutoring—for example, that without knowing the content area of the paper (i.e., having read the

novel addressed by a literature paper) it would be impossible to help the student at all with his thesis or the validity of his argument.

Despite this lack of background training, however, Cantano's tutoring style does seem to cleave to North's objectives in ideology if not in practice. The OSA says that his main objective as a tutor is to "make the student think in front of me" rather than to produce a corrected paper. In theory, the Spanish writing center's procedures mirror those of any conventional writing center: "Instead of providing students with a direct response about which tense to use, for example," the site asserts, "assistants will review the differences between the grammatical tenses in question until the student is able to arrive at the appropriate response" (Spanish Writing Center). Cantano does try to follow these guidelines for tutoring in his practice. "I never give the student the answer," he says proudly, before acknowledging that "Students don't expect to participate in correction; they don't expect 'this should be present tense—why?'" (Cantano, interview). Thus, a divide exists between student and tutor expectations in a session—much as it does, English-language tutors may note, in any English-language writing center. In the Spanish writing center, however, the divide seems to be drastically more pronounced. Even student majors labor under the popular delusion that because their papers are in another language, as one anonymous student puts it, "the ideas don't have to be as good." Cantano cites sessions in which students hand Spanish center tutors their papers and then expect to return to pick them up later, fully corrected. While such cases are not alien to English-language writing centers, they are almost certainly less common. Most of this error lies in a misconception of the purpose of the writing center on the part of the student, and may be addressed through reinforcement of the idea of writing center tutoring as a collaborative process in Spanish classrooms as well as in the Writing Center.

However, even those students who recognize the importance of content sometimes feel limited by their fluency: one student who also wishes to remain anonymous says that she feels “limited by my language skills in developing my argument in a foreign language.” Students writing in a foreign language may feel more confident in their ideas than in their ability to communicate them—even to an extent which leads them to modify their ideas rather than risk grammatical or usage error. Like English-language tutors, Cantano says he tailors each session to the ability level of the student. However, unlike English-language assignments, Spanish assignments do often vary themselves based on the ability level of the student and therefore may often necessitate a focus solely on lower-order concerns. As Cantano points out, he is easily able to offer recommendations for improvements in argumentative structures of higher-level assignments; he is less able to offer critique on content, however, when the content itself is fairly basic, such as in an essay assignment in a lower-level class to describe the student’s favorite local hangout in his hometown. Such assignments are also quite straightforward in terms of organizational requirements, and often do not require a thesis or any of the other aspects of higher-level writing which are addressed in an English-language session. Another challenge in second-language tutoring is the existence of treatable versus untreatable errors: untreatable errors, or errors which the student is unable to discover by himself based on a lack of culture-specific knowledge, generally occur much more frequently in non-native language tutoring than in English-language tutoring (Hyland 98). One such example would be the inability of a non-native speaker to appropriately use foreign-language colloquialisms without assistance from a native speaker. The prevalence of untreatable errors in second-language writing may also contribute to student belief that second-language tutors, more than English-language tutors, should be willing to correct student errors themselves rather than provide the student with tools to fix errors themselves.



Therefore, in introductory-level assignments with simplified content, OSAs may be unable to focus on the higher-order concerns which compose the ideal objectives of a writing center. They may also be required to directly provide information English-language tutors aiding native English speakers would not have to address. Instead, the unique role of the OSA may require them to code-switch between thinking like a writing tutor and thinking like a language tutor: in dealing with introductory assignments, where lower-order concerns may be the main issues, OSAs may address these concerns without compromising the role of the writing center. Where untreatable errors are concerned, OSAs should be given special license to provide answers otherwise unobtainable. However, where treatable errors are the main issue, tutors should make clear their expectation that the student and tutor work collaboratively. They may first “emphasize vocabulary development” and “emphasize proofreading strategies” by indicating general errors in word-choice or subject-verb agreement without divulging specific answers. They may then provide the student with tools (dictionaries, charts of verb endings) designed to aid correction (“Ten Tips for ESL Tutors”). Another tip from Cantano, if grammar is the main concern of the session, is to ask the student which grammatical or usage issues she’d like to focus on, and why; such a question encourages self-reflection on current abilities by asking the student to identify her strengths and weaknesses. The unique role of the OSA requires the OSA to address lower-order concerns with a greater frequency than most English-language tutors: the only issue, it seems, is when lower-order concerns become the sole focus of a session. The above tutoring strategies, used by English-language tutors to help ESL students, foster the development of the student-writer as an active participant in seeking out knowledge. They address the main concerns of the student without sacrificing the ideal that the development of both student writing and student proficiency in a second language are *processes* rather than products of answers at which the student can arrive

without personal investment. The barrier between addressing writing as a process rather than as a product, then, lies for the OSA not in a focus on higher-order versus lower-order concerns but in the strategies used to address those concerns: ineffective tutoring strategies simply give the student the correct answer. Effective strategies, on the other hand, push the student toward self-discovery, and thus toward a greater understanding of the subject material.

Even in upper-level assignments, however, Spanish-language tutors often feel limited by time constraints in their ability to address both higher-order and lower-order concerns; unlike English-language tutors, Spanish Writing Center tutors must reserve significant amounts of time to address lower-order concerns even in the papers of high-ability students. The balance, as Cantano notes, is often between an ideal and a practical objective: while the theory of a writing center is inherently linked to higher-order concerns, the student expects the tutor to spend a considerable part of the session fixing pedestrian grammatical mistakes. One model to improve current practice, suggested by Professor Smith, is the integration of non-native, second-language writing center tutors into the Spanish Writing Center system. With the absence of a program such as Antidote in the Spanish department, the OSAs would be utilized exclusively to address grammatical and usage concerns—allowing students to take advantage of the OSAs' training background as translators and thereby address their more practical concerns. The non-native, second-language tutors, lacking complete fluency in the language, would instead be utilized to check paper organization and thesis development and thus maintain the ideal objectives of the writing center.

Such a system, however, would also be perhaps forbiddingly time-consuming. To avoid students visiting only the OSAs, as they would perhaps be inclined to do, professors would have to mandate visits to both tutors. However, those students completing lower-level assignments

without challenging content would likely find the visit to the non-native, second-language speaker a waste of time; nearly-fluent students working with OSAs to review routine grammar might also be frustrated. Instead, a more extensive training system for the OSAs should be implemented. While it would be impractical to expect the OSAs to complete a full semester of training, a few weeks at the beginning of the year to review tutoring basics would certainly not be amiss. The inclusion of elements of composition and general strategies to address multiple topics about which the OSA may not necessarily have background knowledge in these sessions would be useful. More important, however, may be the implementation of a department-wide campaign to change the attitudes of students toward the Spanish Writing Center and toward non-native language writing in general. In lower-level introductory classes, professors should introduce their students to the concept of treatable versus untreatable errors as well as to the concept that tutoring, even in another language, is a collaborative process. Professors should emphasize the tutoring session as a learning process focused, in the lower levels, on language mastery. In upper-level classes, educators should emphasize the importance of content with their students; ideally, they should encourage their students to visit both OSAs and non-native, second-language tutors in the regular writing center in order to stress the importance of both grammatical and argumentative accuracy. While a partnership between the OSAs and non-native, second-language tutors would be helpful for students, more necessary is the evolution of student attitudes concerning the purpose of the foreign-language writing center: until we achieve this objective, the ideology in North's essay remains as alien to students utilizing foreign-language writing centers as it was to students aided by tutors in native-language writing centers in 1983.

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### From Cultural Informer to Culturally Informed: Revising Theory and Practice

Although many of the methods of tutoring vary based on the institution, the general rule of thumb that most, if not all, writing centers follow is taken from Stephen North's seminal essay, "The Idea of a Writing Center." His assertion that writing center tutors and administrators should strive to "produce better writers, not better writing" (North 38), however, reveals a gaping hole in writing center tutoring theory and practice, with regard to how non-native student (NNS) writers are tutored. It is not enough to apply the same methods, which employ carefully balanced non-directive and directive rhetoric, to a session with an NNS writer (Blau et al. 1-2). In order to increase the effectiveness of a tutor's role as a "cultural informant" in the writing center, tutors must not only keep an open mind during a session by having patience and empathy with NNS writers, but also be taught some basics of the social etiquette and rhetorical conventions of the cultures represented by the international student population at their particular institution. An exploration of the cultural challenges the large population of students from Pakistan and Afghanistan might face in the United States, in conjunction with writing center literature about the prevention of miscommunication in a session, addresses the specific issues that may arise with this population of international students. An examination of these two factors provides general solutions to facilitate collaboration in the writing center between tutors and NNS writers.

However, a discussion about the specific needs that Pakistani and Afghan NNS writers bring to a tutoring session cannot be initiated without first examining the general reasons why international students must be tutored in a different way than native writers. NNS writers represent a large portion of the student body in colleges and universities nationwide; in 2005, according to Wayne Robertson's influential documentary *Writing across Borders*, there were over 600,000 international students studying abroad in the United States. Though this statistic indicates the importance of developing tutoring methods to better suit NNS writers, it is equally crucial to acknowledge that they cannot be pigeon-holed into a cohesive group that can be tutored in the same way. A cursory look at the contents of the veritable cavalcade of tutoring how-to handbooks will reveal that there is no one "right" way to tutor native writers, which calls into question the persistence of the one-size-fits-all mentality of how to tutor NNS writers (Gillespie and Lerner 124). It is tempting to think that international students possess the same

writing ability because they all share the common trait of participating in an education system that requires them to articulate themselves in their non-native tongue. However, Catherine Crowley, an English professor at Wright State University, points out, “they, like all writers, are diverse individuals and represent a population as complex and multifaceted as any” (2). The inability to tutor NNS writers on an individual level serves as an effective roadblock to communication and cultural understanding between tutors and international tutees that tutoring should represent.

Though NNS writers differ widely in their ability to write in English, they all can be considered “cultural outsiders” (2). This classification cannot be applied to the whole of the international student population, for some individuals may adapt to the cultural differences between the United States and their home countries better than others, but it is worth noting that all international students, to some degree, are unfamiliar with American culture, both in an academic and quotidian sense. This crucial difference between NNS and native writers explains, for the most part, why the tutoring methods that successfully help the latter become better writers only fosters miscommunication and frustration in the former. The central problem, for most NNS writers, is not with their tutors but with the predominately non-directive system of tutoring; as Crowley observes, “tutors may not realize that their essential role at the writing center situates them in the context of cultural transmitters, and culture is embodied in teaching methodologies themselves” (3). The spirit of collaboration that most methods strive to establish in tutoring sessions is, for the most part, lost on NNS writers because of the cultural disparities that exist between tutor and writer. Crowley, quoting the co-founder and editor of the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, Tony Silva, writes that “it can be a disadvantage to blindly impose mainstream educational practices on ESL writers just because they are successful with native English speaking writers” (3). To rectify this problem of miscommunication, it is clear that the methodologies themselves must be confronted as insufficient in terms of instructing tutors how to help international students become better writers.

Blau et al., by researching effective tutoring methods tailored specifically to NNS writers, support Crowley and Silva’s contentions that international students need to be tutored in a different way. Their practical advice to tutors reveals that, in order to promote communication and understanding in a session with an NNS writer, certain methodologies must be at least revised, if not disregarded completely. One important piece of advice is with regard to a

seemingly insignificant part of the tutoring process, namely having the tutee explain the writing assignment to the tutor. Blau et al. write that while “Most native speakers come in and state the assignment in a reasonably concise, clear manner...ESL students often struggle to explain the assignment to the tutor” (2). The reasons for this difference, according to Blau et al., can range from the NNS writers who do not fully understand the language of the assignment to those who dismiss the higher-order concerns of the assignment in favor of focusing on grammar (2). The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring offers similar advice with regard to tutoring NNS writers, outlining specific instances where tutoring international students differs from tutoring native writers. Some of the most important tips they offer to tutors refer to the balance between higher-order and lower-order concerns, which reflects the larger question of how to achieve equilibrium between directive and non-directive tutoring styles. For example, Gillespie and Lerner advise tutors to ask the NNS writers to explain the logic behind grammatical errors in order to correct false rules, to point out tense and agreement problems because NNS writers can usually figure them out on their own once they are aware there is a mistake, and to directly tell them about the idiomatic aspects of English that come naturally to native writers (126).

With these suggestions in mind, Gillespie and Lerner rightly point out that an open mind and patience are the best tools a tutor can have during a session with an NNS writer, for their approach to tutoring must change in order to communicate effectively (126). The benefit of revising traditional tutoring methodology, according to Blau et al., is that the blending of cultural awareness and empathy “can further the rapport, clarify the student’s approach to a topic, and help the student understand the unique expectations of an American audience” (3). However, Crowley takes this advice a step farther, proposing that:

While indeed patience and empathy are well intended solutions to the perceived problems of contrastive rhetoric, it may be even more advantageous to learn about international students’ background and try to understand the seemingly odd conventions of their writing. Finding out why a student organizes her paper in a certain way may provide clues about how to introduce the conventions of American discourse. (3)

The assertion that the tutor’s role as a “cultural informant” encompasses the awareness of his function as a bridge must be made between American culture and the culture of the NNS writer is not new. However, the idea that a tutor should possess a basic understanding of the cultures

that the international student population represents is, if not revolutionary, at least surprisingly counter-intuitive to the pervasive perception that collaborative tutoring sessions can be established regardless of the differences that exist between tutor and writer. The benefits of requiring tutors to become familiar with the cultures of their NNS writers before tutoring them are clearly visible in an exploration of the basic social etiquette and rhetorical conventions of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

However, before addressing the positive impacts of tutoring with knowledge about the cultures of Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is necessary to explain why these two cultures were specifically chosen as examples. The Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program, which is sponsored by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), illustrates the recent trend of strengthening cultural ties to Muslim countries through educational exchange programs. The YES program, which was established in 2002, specifically provides scholarships for American high school students to go abroad to partner countries, in exchange for Muslim students, to encourage cross-cultural understanding and respect (U.S. Department of State). Afghanistan and Pakistan are two of the thirty-four predominately Muslim countries represented in this program; the existence of YES indicates the importance of these two countries in terms of the larger diplomatic goal of promoting relations with strategic countries in the Muslim world, which suggests that students from both countries will attend American colleges and universities in greater numbers as well (U.S. Department of State). On a local level, the recent agreement between Dickinson College and the Army War College, signed on April 9, 2010, will promote collaboration between the two institutions with the goal of sharing resources for students interested in peacekeeping, security studies, and stability operations (Zimmerman).

With this agreement in mind, the Norman M. Eberly Writing Center and the Army War College will work together for the 2011-2012 academic year to bring the War College's International Fellows to the writing center. Though the Army officers are from all around the world, there will be representatives from Pakistan and Afghanistan, which makes an inquiry into the benefits of expanding the role of tutors beyond "cultural informants" to being "culturally informed" especially prevalent. Kwintessential Ltd., a company that aids businessmen and women who travel abroad with adapting to new cultures, makes an important point in its disclaimer, which states that "Each society, country and culture will have numerous nuances that



would make it irresponsible to suggest a uniform approach to understanding any country's social and business culture or etiquette...However, loose guidelines can assist in bettering understanding and avoiding offence.” This is the mentality that should be developed in writing center tutors with regard to NNS writers—knowing general information about another culture will improve communication in a session, as long as that knowledge is not taken as an inflexible rule that applies to every writer from that culture. By exploring the general characteristics of Afghan and Pakistani cultures, which overlap to a considerable degree, it is possible to facilitate understanding between tutor and tutee more effectively than if the tutor was only trained in the passive role of “cultural informant.”

According to both Hafizullah Emadi, the author of *Cultures and Customs of Afghanistan*, and Iftikhar H. Malik, the author of *Cultures and Customs of Pakistan*, the two countries share the distinct quality of combining tradition and modernity in their cultural practices and social values (Emadi 135; Malik 186). This blending is most visible in social interactions, in both personal and business settings. Three of the most important similarities that Afghan and Pakistani culture share are with regard to the family, small talk, and rhetorical conventions. According to Kwintessential, both cultures value the family as the “single most important unit,” and therefore protect it from outsiders; the tutor should not start a conversation about the tutee’s family, especially the female relatives, unless the writer addresses it first. Paradoxically, it is extremely important that the tutor spend time getting to know their Afghan and Pakistani tutees, for social etiquette in both cultures requires that a foundation of trust must exist between people in personal and business-like situations. Tutoring, which is similar to both kinds of social interactions, must therefore represent the balance between relationship-building and unwanted probing about personal matters. As far as the rhetorical conventions that Afghan and Pakistani cultures share, tutors should be aware that, for the most part, Afghan and Pakistani writers prefer a communication style that is indirect or circuitous. It may be necessary at times for tutors to read between the lines or persist in a line of inquiry in a directive manner in order to get an explicitly stated answer to a non-directive question (“Afghanistan”; “Pakistan”). However, there are also significant cultural differences between Afghans and Pakistanis that would be useful to know in a tutoring session in order to prevent cultural misunderstanding or, if such miscommunication is unavoidable, resolve the errors of social behavior that caused frustration or offense.

According to the Kwintessential website, the most important characteristics that these cultures do not share are with regard to the interactions between men and women in Afghanistan, the Pakistani social hierarchy, and the dichotomous perceptions of personal space. The first difference is extremely relevant to the atmosphere of the writing center, because of the large probability that a male Afghan writer will work with a female tutor. The danger of miscommunication does not lie with the fact that the writer in this scenario will not respect his female tutor, but rather with the possibility that the tutor, if uneducated about this cultural issue, might fail to act honorably within Afghan standards. Kwintessential describes that in order to preserve one another's honor, men and women should never shake hands, be left alone in the same room with the door closed, or even make eye contact ("Afghanistan"). Although the Afghan writer will probably understand that concessions to these rules must be made during the tutoring session, especially with regard to eye contact, the tutor's awareness of this gender tension is incredibly useful in avoiding social faux pas. Though this is not as much of an issue in Pakistan, the idea that older people are granted respect and the power to make decisions presents a different kind of problem, especially in light of the collaboration between the International Fellows program and the Eberly Writing Center ("Pakistan"). A tutor in this situation might have to be more formal in a session with a Pakistani writer who is not in their peer group in order to prevent offense. With regard to personal space, Afghans generally do not make sustained eye contact, even between members of the same sex, in business-like situations, while Pakistanis do not require as much personal space and will move closer than may be comfortable for the tutor during a session ("Afghanistan"; "Pakistan"). For both cases, a tutor should be prepared for the possibility that such cultural misunderstandings may arise because of these aspects of social etiquette, so they can effectively address these roadblocks to communication with their tutee.

By educating tutors about the general characteristics of other cultures, they will be prepared for any eventuality in a session with an NNS writer, which, in conjunction with the general tutoring techniques tailored for international students, will provide a strong foundation for productive writing center appointments. Yet this recommendation for changing the way in which tutors are trained cannot, on its own, help international students become better writers. The broader application of this realization that knowledge about other cultures is inherently useful to helping these writers adapt to the American education system is with the role that teachers play in assessing the writing of their non-native students. Crowley writes, "The

responsibility of communication doesn't lie solely with tutor and client. The ESL classroom instructor plays an essential role as well...Communication must begin in the classroom. If ESL students are expected to conform to certain rhetorical conventions, then those expectations should be spelled out clearly" (4). Her observation that teachers play a pivotal role in educating international students about the American way of writing is echoed in Wayne Robertson's documentary *Writing across Borders*; the film points out that, nationwide, teachers are not prepared enough for the large amount of NNS writers that attend American colleges and universities. Deborah Healey, the former director of the Oregon State University English Language Institute, emphasizes in *Writing across Borders* that professors focus too much on small grammatical mistakes or unavoidable idiomatic errors that do not detract from the overall meaning of the writing. By training teachers and tutors better ways to communicate with NNS writers and their writing, the experience of international students in the writing center and in American academia can be improved.

NNS writers, as a large population in American colleges and universities, present tutors in the writing center with a unique challenge. Tutors, in order to help international students improve their writing, must recognize that NNS writers, as a whole, need to be tutored differently than native writers, while simultaneously adapting the different tutoring methods outlined by Blau et al. and Gillespie and Lerner to the writing ability and personality of their individual tutees. However, this tutoring balancing act, which is based on the fact that NNS are at once similar to and wildly different from native writers, can be ameliorated with the implementation of training in the social etiquette and rhetorical conventions of cultures represented by the international student population in addition to the regular tutor training course material. By becoming "culturally informed," tutors will at least be prepared for instances of cultural miscommunication that might arise during a session with an NNS writer. Furthermore, though an examination of the cultures of Afghanistan and Pakistan indicates the types of situations in which misunderstanding can occur, the requirement that tutors possess knowledge about the culture of their tutees also serves to strengthen their rapport during a session. Tutors and, by extension, teachers play an integral role in the experiences of NNS writers in the American educational system; by transforming these "cultural informants" into a "culturally informed" group, Stephen North's ideal of improving the writer over the writing can be achieved for international students at Dickinson College and nationwide.

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### Adding It All Up:

#### How the Writing Center Can Be Useful for Mathematics Students

Though writing in mathematics has become much more prevalent in academic writing, addressing the needs and concerns of math students in the writing center has yet to be substantially developed. According to Professor Bernadette Russek of Plymouth State College, “Writing used to be rare in mathematics, but it’s not anymore” (Andrews 11). This raises the question of why math students do not seem to use the writing center, especially in comparison to students from disciplines in the arts and humanities. Though this answer is not definitively known, it can be assumed that part of the reason for the absence of math in the writing center is the inability of the current tutoring practices to address the vast majority of mathematical writing concerns effectively. The discourse that has taken place around this question suggests that the relatively strict parameters of math writing require input from the mathematics department when developing effective tutoring practices for non-humanities writers, specifically math writers. In order to come to this conclusion, writing center directors must first identify the needs of math writers and how those needs differ from the needs of humanities writers. Then they must determine how the writing center can tutor math students, who seem to require more directive tutoring, without straying from its predominantly non-directive approach. Finally, writing center directors will benefit from the numerous benefits that collaboration between the mathematics department and the writing center has to offer.

Like any academic writer, a math student “must write and must write well” (Russek 36). He or she is a part of a specific discourse community, specifically the academic discourse community of mathematics. Academic communities “use written discourses that enable members to keep in touch with each other, carry on discussions, explore controversies, and advance their aims” (Johns 503). In collegiate mathematics, the audience members in the discourse community are usually other classmates (Richeson), but may also include a nonmathematical audience or even the writer, who may have to refer to his or her own writing in future studies or research (Duch). At times, mathematical assignments may consist of an essay (Tremblay 15); however, math students generally write proofs.

Math writing is significantly different from humanities writing, which will be used in this paper as a generic analogy for the “standard” research paper seen in the writing center. Where the purpose of writing in the sciences is “to inform others about your findings” in order to “create consensus among your colleagues” in a quest for scientific truth, writing in the humanities does not lead to a definitive answer (Gocsik). Rather, writing in humanities addresses unanswered questions in a “compelling and authoritative” manner without the final objective of peer consensus or scientific truth (Gocsik). Unlike humanities papers, which are directed by content without a prescribed structure, math papers follow a specific format (Gocsik). Therefore, the needs of math papers are often different from those of humanities papers. The higher-order concerns of a standard humanities paper involve a variety of areas, including the best structure for the paper, organizing and grouping different parts of a paper together in a sensible manner, and ensuring points throughout the paper are developed (Gillespie and Lerner 17). Meanwhile, the later-order concerns of a paper include wording, spelling, and grammar (17). However, what are later-order concerns in a humanities or other non-science paper can be higher-order concerns

in math. For example, editing for wordiness is a later-order concern in a humanities paper whereas it is a higher-order concern in mathematics.

In order to understand what math students need in a writing center session, it is important to understand the parameters of their writing. Valid math proofs are important in ensuring that a mathematical conjecture is true (Goldberger 1). They are composed of statements, which are either true or false, based on set theory and logic (3, 5). Proofs, like any type of writing, must obey all of the usual writing "rules" (higher-order concerns) and grammar (later-order concerns) (Duch, Richeson), yet mathematical proofs are subject to specific parameters (Goldberger 3). For instance, mathematicians write proofs by convention in the first person plural (we) in the present tense, with a balance between words and symbols (Richeson). Common math operations (addition/subtraction, multiplication/division, etc.) are expressed in symbols to enhance clarity, since math is often thought of as strictly a number's subject (Duch, Richeson). Symbols are shorthand for various parts of speech and should be read as the nouns or verbs they replace. (For example, "Since  $2x > 4$ , it follows that  $x > 2$ ," should be read as "Since  $2x$  is greater than four, it follows that  $x$  is greater than 2.") Furthermore, proofs should not be creative nor include examples (Richeson).

Because the general parameters of mathematical writing are so specific, the idea of a math student using the writing center may seem rather useless or unconventional. Many writing centers follow the ideology of Stephen North, that the writing center's job is "to produce better writers, not better writing" (50). Mathematical writing does not seem to comply with this traditional writing center philosophy on the surface. Much of the emphasis in mathematical writing—specifically proof writing—rests on brevity, clarity, and sentence-level presentation with little apparent emphasis on higher order concerns, such as organization and thesis

statements (Duch, Richeson). Perhaps this is because mathematicians write proofs in a specific way: they state a claim, which they validate with the actual proof (Duch). Unlike most papers in writing center sessions, math writing generally does not contain a thesis enveloped in an introduction like that of a standard research paper nor does it have substantial room for creativity in organization. Rather, mathematical papers generally require more directive tutoring.

In academic discourse communities that have specified ways of writing a paper, the writing process is a "social act" rather than a "process of personal discovery or individual expression" (Shamoon and Burns 136). This is especially true of math writing. Imitation and observation can be helpful for novice writers in learning the specific math writing behaviors (Harris 78). Thus, directive tutoring seems to be the better option for math students since it enables the student to "observe, practice, and develop widely valued repertoires" (Shamoon and Burns 142) and "support[s] imitation as a legitimate practice" (144). By carrying out directive tutoring on a math paper, a writing center tutor can help students identify and correct some of the common mistakes made when writing proofs. One such mistake is writing a proof by example, which is actually not a proof since proofs must be general enough to be applied to all cases (Rabinoff 2). Another mistake is "circular reasoning," or assuming a result before the student proves it (3). Finally, "the easiest way to confuse a reader is to use a variable that you didn't define" (3). Rather, students should define variables either before they use them or later in the same sentence (3). By addressing these concerns, a writing center tutor can help a math student learn from experience and observation. Though this kind of directive tutoring would be easier for peer tutors who have been trained or are specialized in math writing, arts and humanities students could refer to handouts that explain these rules and provide examples of acceptable proofs.



Students who engage in directive tutoring are able to focus on the vast array of what tutors consider later-order concerns in standard research papers. Tutors can help math students identify where a proof needs more balance between symbols and words (Duch, Richeson) as well as places where there is too much or too little information. Tutors can also catch minor errors in the "usual writing rules" that may have been overlooked by the tutee, such as improper grammar and sentences that begin with mathematical symbols or numbers (Richeson). Luckily, for diehard non-directive tutors, the writing center can address most of the general later-order concerns in proof writing by providing outlines or templates, as well as computer programs such as Skills Bank 3, which includes a math module (Lutz, Dukes and Hall 10).

There are, however, various opportunities for the writing center to engage in non-directive tutoring. Of course, the occasional extra credit essay could benefit from a tutoring session focused on higher-order concerns, but higher-order concerns may also arise in the "typical" mathematics assignment (Tremblay 15). A study conducted at Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia, found that math students tend to go to the writing center to work on understanding their assignments much more often than students from other disciplines (Enders 9). Tutors in the writing center can work with math students to decipher the requirements of a given assignment, helping them to identify key words and explaining the general guidelines for various types of writing assignments.

The writing center can also help math students reflect on the clarity of their own papers, not just the clarity of the assignment. Because math students are writing to communicate in their discourse community, their audience must be able to comprehend what the paper is rendering (Johns 503). In sessions where comprehension on the part of the audience is a concern, writing center tutors can play the part of the reader and help the tutee check for clarity as they "carry on

discussions" with a peer. This is especially important since—at the collegiate level—the audience of mathematical writing usually consists of classmates rather than a professor (Richeson). For instances in which the math student needs to communicate with a nonmathematical community, a tutor from the ample supply of arts and humanities students in the writing center would be excellent evaluators of clarity, especially if the tutor had little to no experience in mathematical writing his or herself (Duch).

Perhaps the best way for the writing center to help math students is through collaboration with the department of mathematics, which can happen in a variety of ways. Many colleges and universities have math centers in addition to writing centers. Dickinson College has "drop-in help for [their] entry level mathematics and computer science classes," which provide assistance in calculus and computer science. Other schools, such as Cascadia Community College, the Northwest Indian College and Whatcom Community College have math Centers that help students with subjects from pre-algebra to the upper levels of calculus. Writing centers could help to further these math centers by encouraging a university or college's mathematics department to recruit students who have taken a proof writing or other mathematical writing course as tutors.

Writing centers could also work more closely with math professors as a resource. For instance, the Shenandoah University study revealed that a high percentage of math professors worked with a writing center on their assignment prompts, checking for clarity and making sure their students would be able to comprehend the assignment (Enders 9). Specifically, math professors of writing intensive courses could work with writing associates assigned to their class to discuss writing assignments as well as to be a familiar math writing resource for the students in a given course. Math professors could also be a resource for the writing center. Many

professors provide their students with proof writing guides, such as “The Nuts and Bolts of writing mathematics” by Professor Dave Richeson of Dickinson College and “How to Write mathematics” by Professor Raymond Duch of Nuffield College. By having these guides readily available in the writing center, peer tutors who are not adept in math writing would be able to guide visiting math writers.

Math professors could further help writing center tutors by giving a lecture about mathematical writing during tutor training sessions because the professors are the experts in math writing. They know what mistakes students commonly make as well as the freedom students have in organization and style. The writing center trains tutors for special circumstances, such as working with non-native English speakers and students with learning disabilities. Writing center training facilitators could expand these special circumstances to include tutoring math students since math papers are not the subject of a standard research paper session. Tutors with proper training in the “affective domain of learning” could increase their understanding of a larger variety of types of papers, including math papers (Arkin 5). Therefore, with proper training from a member of the mathematics department, writing center tutors could be more efficient in tutoring math students.

In order to address math students in the writing center, it is important to recall Stephen North’s solution, that “talk is everything” (56). Writing centers need to discuss why their current methods of higher-order concerns focused on organization and argument may not necessarily apply to math papers. They also need to talk about what math students’ concerns and parameters are so that tutors know what to help a student address in a session. However, theorists discussing math tutoring sessions cannot expect the writing center to revamp its principally non-directive tutoring style completely in order to cater to the more directive style of learning required for

math writing. Tutors can, in addition to focusing on the higher sentence-level concerns of a math paper, focus on clarity, identifying audience, and logical organization of a proof or other math paper. The best way for a writing center to do this is to talk to the math department at its respective college or university. The writing center and math department can collaborate to advise each other on concerns such as clarity and organization in both prompts and assignments. This collaboration could be the first step for making the writing center a useful resource for math students, not only to improve them as writers, but potentially as mathematicians as well.

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