English 680:
Writing Center Theory & Administration
Spring 2020

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Description

This seminar on writing center administration will focus on the history, theory, practice, and politics of one-to-one and small group tutoring. We'll think about how writing centers have emerged, what theories of writing and learning guide their practices, and the role writing centers play (and contest) in larger disciplinary and institutional struggles around literacy, identity and access to education. Each of these areas of focus has implications for the everyday administration of writing centers, particularly in the context of assessment and broader inquiry-based research. How might writing centers housed in student support services have different structural needs than those situated in academic departments? What do we know about how students make use of writing centers, who they are, and to what effect, and how does that insight inform recruiting, selection and education of staff? How can writing center administrators and staff take up institutional priorities to advance social justice needs that may not be visible or accounted for beyond the space of individual instruction? How might writing centers cultivate deep knowledge about local teaching and learning and leverage that research to impact student, faculty and administrative cultures and processes? Throughout the semester, students will develop research projects that survey existing literature on questions that intrigue them, create relevant responses based on the scholarship, and imagine authentic outlets that complement or address needs in individual professional portfolios.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:
- Identify key historical figures and concepts around writing centers and their guiding pedagogy.
- Articulate the theoretical and methodological questions around key issues in writing center administration.
- Develop a preliminary philosophy toward teaching, learning, and administration in writing centers.
- Create an inquiry project that engages relevant research and poses potential research questions
- Foster a scholarly pipeline related to a critical need for your academic identity.

Materials

Required:
- Harry Denny, Robert Mundy, Liliana Naydan, Richard Sévère, and Anna Sicari. *Out in the Center*. Logan, UT, 2018.
- Jo Mackiewicz and Rebecca Day Babcock. *Theories and Methods of Writing Center Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2020.

Projects

1. *Discussion posts (due weekly by 7:00 p.m. (Indiana time), Mondays and Wednesdays, when we're meeting the following day)*
   As you read, share your thoughts about the individual articles and the books as we progress through them. Use this space to turn your reading from passive consumption to active engagement. Consider what key terms and central issues are arising. These are important voices in the larger conversation, so imagine what they're saying entering into your own professional life as a teacher or tutor, and how you might speak into them based on what you're learning. Throughout, consider what it might mean to join this discourse community of writing center professionals. What ideologies, assumptions, practices, tensions do these pieces share? The journal will be mostly private (and we'll experiment

with what's doable, useful on Brightspace), but I'd like to use what you're saying as fodder for class discussion each week.

2. *Writing Center Director Administration Sourcebook/Eportfolio (mid-term check-in due February 25, final version due March 31)*
Too often folks make it out of graduate school not equipped to deal with/never having been exposed to the real, everyday issues that most writing center directors must contend with as administrators and managers. Sure, you get well trained in theory, pedagogy, and research (critical, interpretive, or empirical). Yet one of the most common sets of questions that people get from institutions when they're being hired is: How would you contend with. . .? Or, what would guide you when making decisions about. . .? For this project, however you want to imagine an authentic audience, I'd like to see you grapple with common issues around WCD and WPA work for an institution where you'd like to work:
    a. You're given a budget of $100,000, and can pay tutors $12/hour. How would you make that work for an academic year? Including summers? What other variables might complicate your budgetary planning?
    b. What's your plan for assessing the work of your writing center? What principle might guide you? What external (beyond the writing center) variables guide your thinking and planning?
    c. What philosophy of management will guide your supervision of your staff? How might managing undergraduates be different than graduate students? How might students be different from professional staff? How do you manage a staff within an academic unit versus a staff in a student support unit? What guides your evaluation of staff (what counts as success, what red-flags might require work)? How do you negotiate all that?
    d. What's your short-term plan for staff development or education (a semester or year) versus a long-term plan (what kind of WC/WL would you like to build)?
    e. How does any of this work feed your research and teaching agendas, or how might your research and teaching dovetail with your everyday labor?
We'll talk as the semester gets going on how you can creatively present your ideas in ways that make most sense for you. For some of you, this labor might become an e-portfolio or blog where you think through and present your thinking on these ideas, or for others, it might make more sense to research and develop actual statements that you can include in application materials or as handouts on interviews (take a look at the rhet/comp jobs wiki for the sorts of statements people get asked to produce, or the MLA/ADE Job-list).

3. *Semester-long Research: Collaborative Research Project, or Professional Development Project (Mid-term check-in due March 3; Final version due April 30th, on Brightspace [not email])*
    a. The editors at *Writing Center Journal* have given me two insights about graduate student writers: 1) they groan every time they get an "article" submission which really reads as a term paper from an academic course (or a re-hashed version of one), and 2) they'd publish, with all due diligence, a collaborative/multiauthored article that addressed an interesting, powerful, political research question, ideally in an empirical vein and that signaled an awareness of the field and the *WCJ* readership. I would love all of you (or a significant subgroup) to coalesce and take the WCJ editors up on their challenge and take up a research question that has legs and power and that embodies collaborative research.
    b. Think about your own needs as a graduate student entering the profession. What's your greatest need at this point? A conference presentation at C's? A teaching portfolio? A single-author article? A curriculum for your own tutoring training? For this project, decide and act upon any one or combination of these to advance your needs or goals. Remember, a decent C's proposal is a genre of it own, and is almost always best done in collaboration with colleagues around the country, if not on campus.

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Grading & Grades

Generally speaking, my graduate course grades run on an A-to-C continuum. A-level work generally represents sophistication and facility with course material and its presentation, while C-level work signifies seriously problematic intellectual labor. Such grades across courses can be extremely problematic. For this semester, each element of this course will receive a grade based on this sophistication-to-flawed model. Mediocre or unengaged contributions for the online and discussion portions of the course will receive, at best, B-level grades.

Breakdown
- Journaling – 30%
- Sourcebook/Eportfolio – 30%
- Semester-long Collaborative/Professional Development – 40 %

Policies

1. *Attendance, Participation & Conduct*
   As a graduate seminar, consistent attendance and promptness along with willingness to contribute to the class are obviously critical to the success of this course. No one person ought to dominate conversation, and everyone must be willing to engage in a thoughtful, courteous, and critical discussion. From time to time, people will make comments that strike you wrong on a whole host of fronts. Our obligation as teachers and academics is to respond to these moments with collegiality and professionalism. If you take objection to anything anyone says or does, it's your obligation to create a space and opportunity for learning to happen; likewise, you ought to couch thoughts in ways that foster conversation instead of inhibiting it. While many of us may mark our identities and beliefs through our talk and bodies, assumptions should never be made, and membership in this discourse community should be respectful of all diversity, regardless of the form it takes. Given the tight meeting times for this course, one absence will be allowed, though missing class does not absolve you of responsibility for any work that is due.
2. *Academic Honesty*
   All students must follow university guidelines with respect to issues of academic integrity, honesty and plagiarism. Failure to present work that is consistent with these policies can result in failure (of an assignment or the course) or ultimately, expulsion.
3. *Disabilities*
   If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact the appropriate university office for assistance. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.
4. *Incompletes*
   My general policy is not to grant incompletes unless the student produces a letter in which they impose their own production deadline and expectations. Bear in mind that university policy converts incomplete grades, usually by the second week of the subsequent semester to an "F" grade.

Schedule

Date	Reading	Assignment & Activities
Week 1 (January 14 & 16)	• Sarah Leggitt, Kerri Jordan, and Steve Price. "Mapping Knowledge-Making in Writing Center Research: A Taxonomy of Methodologies." *Writing Center Journal* 33.2 (2011). • Lori Salem, "Decisions… Decisions… Who chooses to Use the Writing Center." *Writing Center Journal*. 37.1/2 (2016). • Dana Driscoll & Sherry Wynn Perdue, "Theory, Lore, and More: An Analysis of RAD Research in *The Writing Center Journal, 1980-2009." Writing Center Journal* 32.1 (2012). • Harry Denny, Lori Salem, and John Nordloff. "'Tell me exactly what it was that I was doing that so bad': Understanding the Needs and Expectations of Working-Class Students in Writing Centers." *Writing Center Journal* 37.1 (2018).	• Brightspace response • Overview of syllabus and course
Week 2 (January 21 & 23)	• Introduction to *Everyday Writing Center* • Elizabeth Boquet and Neal Lerner. "Reconsiderations: After 'The Idea of the Writing Center." • Elizabeth Boquet. "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers." • Anne Ellen Geller. "Tick-Tock, Next: Finding Epochal Time in the Writing Center." *Writing Center Journal* 25.1 (2005).	• Brightspace response
Week 3 (January 28 & 30)	• Anne Ellen Geller & Harry Denny, "Of Ladybugs, Low Status, and Loving the Job: Writing Center Professionals Navigating Their Career." *Writing Center Journal* 33.1 (2013). • Bradley Hughes, Paula Gillespie, & Harvey Kail. "What They Take with Them: Findings from the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project." *Writing Center Journal,* 30.2 (2010). • Roberta Kjesrud, "Lessons from Data: Avoiding Lore Bias in Research Paradigms." *Writing Center Journal* 34.2 (2015).	• Brightspace response
Week 4 (February 4 & 6)	• *Theories and Methods*, Theories, Chapters 1-5	• Brightspace response
Week 5 (February 11 & 13)	• *Theories and Methods,* Theories, Chapters 6-10	• Brightspace response
Week 6 (February 18 & 20)	• *Theories and Methods,* Methods, Chapters 11-15	• Brightspace response

Week 7 (February 25 & 27)	• *Theories and Methods,* Methods, Chapters 16-20	• Brightspace response • Sourcebook check-in on Bb
Week 8 (March 3 & 5)	• *Out in the Center*, Race section	• Brightspace response • Semester-long check-in on Bb
Week 9 (March 10 & 12)	• *Out in the Center*, Multilingual and gender sections	• Brightspace response
March 16 – No Class/Spring Break		
Week 10 (March 24 & 26)	• *Out in the Center*, Multilingual and gender sections	• Brightspace response
Week 11 (March 31 & April 2)	• *Out in the Center*, Religion and class sections	• Brightspace response Sourcebook assignment due/link(s) posted under assignments on Bb
Week 12 (April 7 & 9)	• *Out in the Center*, disability section	• Brightspace response
Week 13 (April 14 & 16)	• Juan Guerra. Selections from *Language, Culture, Identity, and Citizenship in College Classrooms and Communities*.	• Brightspace response
Week 14 (April 21 & 23)	• Dan Melzer, "Writing Assignments Across the Curriculum." *CCC.*	• Brightspace response
Week 15 (April 28 & 30)	• Workshop final projects	
Week 16 (Finals, May 4-8)	• Final project due, May 5, 1:30 pm, (Indiana time)	