**OWCA Conference**

**The Barriers of Multimodal Tutoring: Preparing Tutors for Diverse Approaches to Feedback**

Prepared by Greta Silva Milian, Tara Thompson, and Colton Wansitler - Last Updated 3.31.23

**Outline/Script:**

Welcome - Colton

1. Hello everyone. Thank you so much for being here with us today. We are excited to share our roundtable presentation, **“**The Barriers of Multimodal Tutoring: Preparing Tutors for Diverse Approaches to Feedback,” with all of you. This session will focus on the ways in which we all prepare our tutors to participate in multimodal tutoring while emphasizing diversity. We aim to engage in shared learning and the generation of ideas during this session. Before diving into the presentation, I want to draw your attention to the QR code displayed on the screen. By scanning this code, you will be given access to the script that we have prepared. We have made the intentional decision to read from scripts as this practice is more accessible for our audience members.
2. Here is a brief agenda to help us all align our expectations. First, we will start with the College of Lake County’s Land Acknowledgement and reflection. Next, we will introduce ourselves. After introductions, we will take a few minutes to create a shared agreement for the session. Then we will move into the history of our center. Afterwards, we will discuss the different modalities that our tutors currently operate in. Then we will discuss the ways in which we prepare our students to work with our institution’s diverse population (The College of Lake County is an HSI). Finally, we will present questions to the group to encourage idea generation and shared learning.
3. Land Acknowledgement from CLC and the Andrea Riley-Mukavetz practice
4. We respectfully acknowledge that the College of Lake County is on the ancestral homelands of the Kickapoo, Peoria, Potawatomi, and other Native Peoples. We recognize the longstanding significance of these lands for Indigenous Peoples past, present, and future. Historical awareness of Indigenous exclusion and erasure is critically important to preventing further atrocities. The College of Lake County pledges to acknowledge the grave injustices of the past and pledges to create awareness and advance education that invites truth.
5. Following the practice of Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, we invite you to dwell in the histories of the lands of your local institutions, the places you are from, and writing centers' roles in these on-going legacies of white settler colonialism.

Introductions – All

1. Colton
2. Hello everyone, my name is Colton Wansitler, my pronouns are he/him/his, and I have been working as the Writing Center Coordinator at the College of Lake County since May 2022. I came to this position after working for the Writing Center at Michigan State University, where I was the Assistant Director, and the Lansing Community College, where I was a Professional Tutor. At both of my former institutions, I led the team that developed and encouraged the campus to embrace their asynchronous programs
3. Tara
4. My name is Tara Thompson, my pronouns are she/her/hers, and I was hired at the College of Lake County as a peer tutor in 2017. Since then, I have progressed through a myriad of roles and now speak to you as the Lead Writing Tutor for our center.
5. Greta
6. Hello everyone, my name is Greta Silva-Milian my pronouns are she/her. I have been working at the College of Lake County writing center since 2016. I started as a peer writing tutor and have in recent years been promoted to lead tutor for the Lakeshore campus in Waukegan, Illinois.

History -

1. Greta
2. Throughout our time working for the center, many changes have occurred within our philosophies and practice. We started with only in-person sessions and handwritten session agenda sheets focused on writing and reading concerns. From there, we (along with most of the world) transitioned into a solely online writing center when the pandemic began in 2020. Though we had a limited online writing center in place since the spring of 2015, the pandemic compelled us to narrow down our processes for asynchronous feedback and live-chat Google doc sessions, as well as add an option for Zoom tutoring. Our aim was to ensure that students had access to the writing center regardless of location and scheduling conflicts, a belief reflected in our unofficial motto throughout those years of remote work: “we meet students where they’re at.” As we continued to seek growth for our center, we started a focus on anti-racism and equity to better educate ourselves on the injustices experienced by marginalized groups in America.
3. Now, let's flash forward to 2022, the pandemic “ended" and we all transitioned back to in-person tutoring on campus. This was wonderful, except we now had to navigate how procedures written for a virtual format translate to in-person sessions. At this time, our center was focused on building rapport with students who at this point were unfamiliar with the physical writing center space. Now that we have all readjusted a bit to in-person tutoring, we seek to create a mission statement focused on social justice and radicalism for our center. Our coordinator Colton will now tell you more about the changes that have been implemented and what our three-year plan looks like.
4. Colton – brief overview of the last year/reorganization
5. I’m a fairly new administrator at the College of Lake County, joining the team in May of 2022. At this time, the writing center was in the midst of major changes, specifically a restructuring of the tutoring center. At the College of Lake County, the writing center (and the math center and science center) is situated inside the Tutoring Center. My hire was the first of many that would be taking place as part of the reorganization. As is true of any reorganization, things got messy, and then messier, before they started to make sense and work for the mission of the college and center.
6. During the reorganization, some positions were eliminated while others were created. They decided to eliminate the full-time positions that were housed at our satellite campuses and then to split another position into two separate positions at the main campus. Then they decided that they wanted to implement a group of Lead Tutors (seven total positions) to create growth within the center for our tutors. These positions were made possible by reclassifying existing positions (three) and then creating four others. Confused yet? I know I was.
7. Needless to say, things were hectic and quite stressful during my first few months at the college. As a new employee, I spent my first few months serving on a total of four hiring committees, hired our new peer tutor cohort (we aimed for 15 but our plans were thwarted by a budget crisis from student employment), and creating the 22-23 training series for the writing tutors all while trying my best to create new relationships and connections with my tutors. As you can imagine, the tutors have been affected by this ambiguous and evolving work environment over the past year, just as much as I have.

What do we do? -

1. Session Logistics (Greta)
2. Two appointments per day per class can be scheduled by a student 7-14 days in advance for either a 30- or 60-minute appointment. A student can schedule a 90-minute appointment which consists of a 60-minute slot followed by a 30-minute slot. However, sessions must not exceed 90 minutes (about 1 and a half hours) per day per class. We encourage students to take a break between appointments to ensure tutoring is effective. Our guidelines state that sessions will wrap up at the 55-minute mark for 60-minute appointments and the 25-minute mark for 30-minute appointments. This allows our tutors time to complete their session notes and take a break before their next appointment.
3. Modalities (Tara)
4. Currently, we offer four modalities (or types of tutoring) at our center: in-person at any of our three campus locations, online-synchronous via Zoom or live-chat in Google Docs, and asynchronous written feedback via email.
5. Embedded Tutoring/Orientations/Workshops (Colton)
6. Apart from our tutoring sessions, we have three additional ways in which we support our college campus. First, we offer a robust embedded tutoring program for the English Department. This program focuses on our ENG 100 courses, which is designed to accompany our ENG 121 course. Our embedded tutors will go into selected classrooms anywhere from twice a week to once every other week, depending on the resources available and the request of the instructor.
7. Second, we offer writing center orientations to all courses across all three campuses. These orientations are shorter in length, generally lasting 10-15 minutes. We invite instructors to request an orientation via a Microsoft Form, from there I will pair tutors and distribute these orientations based on schedules. These orientations may occur in many different spaces, such as in-person in the writing center, in-person in the classroom, or via Zoom. Additionally, we have started to supply our asynchronous courses with a video presentation of the orientation. The goals of these orientations are to help the students become more familiar with our services, locations, and how to engage with us.
8. Finally, during the Fall ‘22 semester, the Tutoring Center decided to launch a series of workshops available to the college campus. As the Writing Center Coordinator, I thought that it was important to develop three workshops that would be universally beneficial. We plan to do a soft launch during the Summer ‘23 semester and then a full launch in the Fall ‘23. The three topics that I decided to focus on at first are: Integrating Sources, Peer Revie, and Plagiarism. These workshops will also embrace multimodalities to help our center be more accessible to the students of CLC.

How do we prepare our students for those modalities? -

1. English 260 (Colton)
2. Every tutor that works in our center is required to take our ENG 260 – Introduction to Writing Center Theory and Practice. We acknowledge the financial barrier that this may place on students, which is why we offer all our student employees a stipend that covers the total cost of this course. In this course, which our Writing Center Faculty Coordinator teaches, we ask students to engage with various authors, concepts, theories, and modalities so that we are best preparing our tutors to work with CLC’s diverse population. At the end of this course, we ask that all tutors create their individual tutor philosophy and present them in whatever way they would like. At the end of the Fall ‘22 semester, I was able to witness our 22-23 peer cohort present their philosophies through multimodalities. We had one student present art works, another gave a dramatic reading, and yet another compose a few poems to encapsulate the way they viewed writing center pedagogies. While we know this course is not perfect, I do feel that the embrace of multimodalities helps our students become familiar with our modes of tutoring, which helps to ease the transition from the course to their work in the center.
3. Tutor Orientation (Greta)
4. This Fall semester we welcomed a new group of peer tutors to the center and hosted a kickoff for the entire tutoring center. The peer tutors got to meet and discuss with their mentor pairing during the kickoff and ask them any questions. Next, we all participated in team building activities. We discussed the role of a tutor in a session which included building rapport, so we had the tutors get into pairs and act out different scenarios for our activity. These scenarios were made to give the tutors practice on handling situations that might be tricky. For example, we had a scenario about students having a question we can't answer or referring them to another resource within the college. From there, Colton spoke to the writing tutors about changes within the center and sessions for the upcoming semester.
5. Mentorship (work in progress) (Tara)
6. Historically, our mentorship program has been very touch and go. For example, when I was hired in the Fall of 2017, there was no official mentorship program. However, as we transitioned back to in-person tutoring in the Fall of 2021, we began a mentor program in which newly hired peer tutors were paired with experienced tutors on the same shift. However, aside from this pairing, there was no formal instruction regarding how mentorship works.
7. Now, one of our professional tutors, Megan, has assumed the role of Mentorship Program Consultant, and is actively working toward building a more robust program that we will (hopefully) implement in the Fall of this year. Megan explained to me that the plan going forward is to front load interactions between mentors-mentees in the Fall (when new peer tutors start). Peer tutors will observe a session with their mentor, and mentors will eventually observe a session with their mentee. Spring semester mentor-mentee pairings will be the same, but meetings will be less frequent and give new tutors space to hone their craft.
8. Professional Development
9. Tutoring Center (Colton)
10. When considering our professional development structure, it is important to understand our institutional structure. Mainly, The Tutoring Center is situated in the department of Student Success. Within the Tutoring Center, there is the Math Center, Science Center, and the Writing Center. Since my joining in May of 2022, there have been many attempts to assimilate the pedagogies of the individual centers to be more “consistent” for students. However, many of these attempts have been met with push back from myself, my colleagues, and our tutors. One of these attempts has been the creation of a Tutoring Center Professional Development Series that was implemented during the Fall’22 semester.
11. These sessions are intended to be applicable to a wider audience of tutors. However, in attempting to be applicable for tutors in the center, we are failing in meeting our tutors needs for subject specific professional development. Simply put, the Tutoring Center is not doing a successful job in considering the diversity of our staff and thus building appropriate professional development sessions to further support them. One area that I do feel that the Tutoring Center is doing well is in the modalities in which these sessions are offered.
12. Writing Center (Tara)
13. This past Fall, we set out to become a radical writing center. The scholarship laying the foundation of this work is Laura Greenfield’s *Radical Writing Center Praxis: A Paradigm for Ethical Political Engagement*. Our professional development training is hosted once a month and pairs one chapter of Greenfield’s work with an in-person activity. Folks who cannot attend are provided a make-up sheet that encourages them to engage with the same ideas covered during the in-person session.
14. Some of the activities we have done thus far ask tutors to engage in active discussions that incorporate the text. We acknowledge that it can be hard for tutors to put theory into practice. This is why we facilitate large group discussions that help us ensure everyone can voice their questions or concerns.

Where we are struggling – Tara

1. One place where we are struggling is in ensuring each of our tutors feels sufficiently prepared to assist students in every modality. Many of our tutors have said that they feel ill-prepared for live-chat and written feedback sessions, though we have provided training and written instructions. Some comments from tutors have detailed that there is not enough training or exposure to these modalities and that it feels too much like a teacher grading work (sentiments that are echoed within writing center scholarship, such as Beth Hewett’s *The Online Writing Conference)*.
2. Moreover, when it comes to mentorship, figuring out what programming could benefit tutors most remains a challenge. We know that we want mentorship to be a two-way street to minimize power imbalances between new and returning tutors, but we haven’t outlined procedures to promote that.
3. Finally, regarding our professional development sessions, some of our tutors have described that they find it difficult to understand what radicalism looks like in the center. Though we have often stated that we were building upon theory before turning to application, there still exists worry about applying this to our tutoring practices.

Questions for participants/Discussion -

1. What modes of feedback does your institution offer to students (video conferences, asynchronous conferences, etc.)?
2. How does your institution prepare tutors to provide multimodal feedback?
3. In what ways is your institution struggling to prepare tutors for multimodal feedback?
4. What can your institution do to better prepare tutors for multimodal feedback?