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AN ANALYSIS OF

THREE COLLEGE WRITING CENTERS

by

Mary Anne Parker-Hancock

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2001

An Analysis of
Three College Writing Centers

by Mary Anne Parker-Hancock

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Mary Anne Parker-Hancock
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Since the genesis of post-secondary academic writing centers in the early 1970s, proponents of supplementary instruction in writing have faced numerous challenges. Along with budgetary constraints, evolving staffing, and fluctuations in writing center theory, changes in their diverse clientele have been among the most daunting. An administrator must be ever vigilant about adapting these interactive issues to the current institutional climate. The purpose of this thesis is to help a new administrator manage these and other central issues at most centers through an in-depth study in three widely different local ones at SUNY College at Geneseo, the University of Rochester, and Monroe Community College. While change within a writing center is inevitable, this thesis is a map created to guide a new administrator toward success.

Muriel Harris notes the importance of understanding the past and present for determining the possibilities for the future:

> The idea of a generic writing center makes us uneasy, because it is a truism of this field that writing centers tend to differ from one another because they have evolved within different kinds of institutions and different writing programs and therefore serve different needs. But by surfacing our traditions, we can formulate some general truths about similarities among different writing centers; and by looking for recent trends, we can consider whether we are headed in new directions. ("What's Up" 15)

In addition to this understanding are other challenges faced by colleges. In <u>Achieving</u> <u>Quality and Diversity</u>, Richard Richardson and Elizabeth Skinner assert that in the challenge to promote accessibility and provide quality education, colleges face three variables—student characteristics, learning experience design, and the expectations of performance standards—and that the alteration of any one of these variables necessarily affects the other two (253):

We will see that writing center practice varies widely among three Rochester-area centers—at SUNY College at Geneseo, the University of Rochester, and Monroe Community College—because of the challenges and demographics unique to their institutions. (For an overview of each, see Appendix.) From observing the variables faced by higher education programs in general in regard to diversity and quality, and from examining the history of writing centers both nationally and locally, we can extract a similar set of variables that will be faced, on a smaller scale, by college writing centers in the future. Harris further notes that "we can formulate some general truths about similarities among different writing centers; and by looking for recent trends, we can consider whether we are headed in new directions ("What's Up" 15). In considering the factors presented here, a new writing center administrator may accurately design models that take into account the unique needs of his or her own institution. In so doing, he or she may plan for successful service to student populations in the years ahead.

Methodology

The academic writing centers of three highly different Rochester-area institutions of higher education have seen shifts in the ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds of their students over a decade. SUNY Geneseo, the first of the three colleges presented in this paper, gives a picture of a state-funded, four-year comprehensive college. The University of Rochester offers the perspective of a writing center within the context of a nationally recognized private research institution. The third, Monroe Community College, rounds out this study by providing a model of a publicly funded two-year college. These three types of institutions were selected as the basis of this study because they represent a large majority of post-secondary support sites.

How have these institutions' academic writing centers changed in focus and programs to meet the needs of their changing student populations? These cases are presented as part of broader national trends, in keeping with my goal, to quote Richardson and Skinner: "to perform analytic generalization [. . .] to develop and generalize theory; and not to create statistical generalization" (46). I have no interest in evaluating one institution against another. Their needs differ, and each one uses its resources to address unique challenges. In short, the Rochester-area colleges are models for the past, present, and future of writing centers nationally. By examining these models, we may approach other such programs with greater insight into the roles that they play in higher education.

I received internal data from each institution, made on-site visits to each writing center, and consulted with their staff. The data were collected from both primary and secondary sources, including anecdotal personal interviews. These studies of writing centers were conducted between 1997 and 2000 at the main campus of each institution.

At SUNY Geneseo I interviewed Walter Freed and Rachel Hall, both of the English Department. At the University of Rochester, I interviewed Jennifer Kline, Manager of the Writing Center, and Vickie Roth, Assistant Dean of Learning Services. At Monroe Community College, I interviewed Patricia Kennedy, Director of Student Support Services; Donna Dettman, former Director of the Writing Center; and Jean McDonough, current Director of the Writing Center.

The order in which the institutions are presented also has significance. SUNY Geneseo represents a medium sized comprehensive college that serves a population of around 5,600 students. The designer of a writing center in an institution of this size would examine issues of budgeting and diversity of clientele in a different light from, say, the University of Rochester, at 7,400 students, which not only serves many of the undergraduate and graduate students attending the University, but also the Medical School, Eastman School of Music, and the Simon School of Business. In addition, Writing Center staff members consult with faculty and staff in their writing needs. Because of this, the University of Rochester must address issues that go beyond those of remediation. Another complex set of challenges faces the Writing Center at Monroe Community College. At 14,000 students, MCC serves the most diverse population of the three institutions examined here, typical of large two-year programs in urban centers.

My intention is to provide a new administrator of writing centers with three models of writing centers that might be found at institutions of similar size and scope as the ones presented here. In addition to the material presented in the body of this work, an appendix provides a comprehensive chart comparing various aspects of the three centers. My study updates and localizes case studies done by McKeague and Reis (1993)

and Kinkead and Harris (1993), whose emphasis was on the sharing of information with other current administrators; my focus, in contrast, is on issues that someone new to the profession can expect to encounter. I do not expect that the information presented in each section will be useful to every new administrator, but in order to provide a spectrum of writing centers that represents a cross-section of such centers in higher education institutions in the United States, a thorough examination of all three is necessary.

Stephen North writes, "I want a situation in which the writing center's mission matches its resources and, to whatever extent possible, its image" ("Revisiting" 17). Ultimately, as my study of the three institutions confirms, the best plan for a successful writing center lies in an administrator's perception of the resources and image of his or her own institution.

Chapter 2
A History of Writing Centers
Since 1950

In order to examine the ways that writing centers have changed over the past decades, it is important to look at the historical developments of writing centers. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzeberg note the early influence of writing centers on colleges. Returning World War II veterans caused the first major shift in college populations, which accounts for why almost half of the schools had centers by 1950 (87). That year, according to Robert Moore, 24 out of 55 surveyed colleges operated writing centers, and 11 more were planning them (388).

This post-war shift introduced the present concept of the writing center. By the 1960s, the increasing age of the student population, coupled with a newly sparked interest in education by those who traditionally did not attend college, caused accelerated growth across the nation. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 boosted enrollment by making higher education available to more people, and by 1964, millions of government dollars were funding programs and grants for college-level math, science, literature, and language studies (Berlin "Writing" 207). Thus began the push for services that would accommodate those who had been traditionally excluded from the mainstream of the college population.

With the dramatic increase in the number of writing centers, writing instructors began thinking about the center's role in their institutions. The new policy of open enrollment in the 1970s brought to the surface the urgent need for pedagogical assistance in writing beyond what was provided in the traditional classroom (Carino, "Early" 104). City University of New York typifies the experience of colleges across the nation during

this period. Mina Shaughnessy notes that between 1969—one year before it adopted open enrollment—and 1975, CUNY's enrollment jumped from 174,000 to 266,000. Not only were the numbers higher, but the diversity of the students was "wider [. . .] than any college had probably ever admitted or thought of admitting to its campus" (2). This watershed heralded the massive expansion of basic writing programs. Just as no textbooks existed to teach the newly emerging basic writing class, there also existed no means to guide college writers and no resource beyond the overwhelmed composition teacher to assist "students weighted by the disadvantages of poor training yet expected to 'catch up' with the front-runners in a semester or two of low-intensity instruction" (3).

The writing center of the 1970s, then, emerged as a reasonable response to the concerns of this new generation of college students, but some claim that the response was not created from a well-planned anticipation of student needs: "[. . .] a disappointing majority of these laboratories were originally funded not in the bright light of enthusiasm, but under a dark cloud of desperation, the laboratory standing as the last hope in the battle against illiteracy" (Nash 3).

Five years after CUNY opened its doors to historically excluded students, Shaughnessy noted that "the teachers who [. . .] questioned the educability of these students now know of their capabilities and have themselves undergone many shifts in attitude and methodology since their first encounters with the new students" (4). This supported the idea that such students were not ineducable; rather, with supplemental training and skill building—often provided by writing centers—these students could, and did, succeed in college.

Process-oriented composition, conceived in the 1950s, became more widely used after the appearance of Janet Emig's Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders (1971). In contrast to the conservative, mechanics-based method of writing, this approach better suited the needs of students who were, in Shaughnessy's eyes, "strangers in academia, unacquainted with the rules and rituals of college life, unprepared for the sorts of tasks their teachers were about to assign them" (3). Both the composition instructors and writing lab staff in open enrollment institutions found themselves caught between the conservative approach and the newly popular idea of process composition. John Dixon's Growth Through English (1967) can be seen as one of the first efforts to integrate process-oriented methods with writing centers.

Conservative, product-based remediation moved gradually into a late-1970s acceptance of the process approach, which focused more on the writer than on the written material. The pedagogical connections between composition programs and writing centers helped in this adjustment of curricula to new enrollment trends. James Murphy explains:

> Writing centers seemed to be an important medium for addressing both the formal and the cognitive aspects of writing instruction by providing students access to training in the fundamentals of written expression as well as tutoring in the heuristics involved in conceptualizing the writing process as a whole. In addition, the emphasis writing centers placed upon tutorial conferences reinforced the uniqueness of the student as a learner whose intelligence, talents, and writing processes could not effectively be addressed by the unitary practices of the conservative model. (26)

Writing centers, although tied to composition programs, often had to forge their own paths, moving theory into practices that best met the needs of their students. This was possible in large part because these centers were often staffed by the only people on campus who regularly considered the philosophy of writing—faculty and graduate students from departments of English.

As the 1970s ended, the writing center community sought ways to establish itself professionally. In 1979, the estimated number of writing centers was over 400 (Hobson, "Where Theory" 5). During the 1980s, as writing specialists "found themselves" as theorists and administrators, new publications appeared, such as Writing Center Journal, Writing Lab Newsletter, College Composition and Communication, and Journal of Basic Writing. Also at this time, minimalism, a branch of rhetorical expressivism, emerged. The process of self-discovery through prompts was the new guiding force behind tutoring sessions. Later in the decade, this was expanded to a theory of social construction, a cooperative societal dialogue that leads to answers, solutions, and knowledge, as put forth by Janet Emig. Although expressivism and social construction were the two major philosophies upon which writing centers based their practices, there were many influences. By 1981, the estimated number of writing centers had passed a thousand, and a mere ten years later, nearly 90 percent of all post-secondary institutions in the United States had writing centers (Hobson, "Where Theory" 5). Indeed, throughout the 1980s, when writing centers operated in almost every school, writing specialists explored many approaches to assisting the writers who needed their services, including introducing computers as tools for writing. In "Moving Computers into the Writing Center," Jane

Nelson and Cynthia Wambeam suggest how tutors can help ease the discomfort some students feel with computers:

> As institutions transform themselves through computer technologies, writing centers should become campus leaders in the development and use of computers for writing. In taking this leadership role, writing centers need to form reciprocal partnerships that require trust, commitment, and open communication. Through successful collaborative projects like computer assisted classrooms and online writing labs (OWLs), writing centers begin to shape the crossover to computer aided instruction. (175)

Another important facet of writing center history is the way centers have chosen to identify themselves. Addressing writing center development over the years, Jim Addison and Henry Wilson conclude that titles consistently change from "writing clinic/workshop" to "writing laboratory" to "writing center," based, of course, on the philosophies that guide changing roles and missions within the academic community.

Theory and Practice

This thesis is primarily concerned with the ways that writing centers serve college communities. A new administrator should keep in mind that these communities serve an increasingly diverse student population. Although the number of minority students attending post-secondary institutions has increased steadily since the 1970s, Richardson and Skinner claim that minority students still face high odds of ever attending college, and of those who do, most have a greater risk for failure given their social and academic expectations:

African-American, Hispanic, and American Indian youth have reading and

writing skills substantially below those of Anglo children, and are far

more likely to drop out of school, especially in the inner cities. Those who

do graduate are significantly more likely to attend college after intervening

military or work experience. Because proportionately fewer plan, while

attending high school, to go to college, they are less likely to take

appropriate courses. Because more minorities attend college as adults, the

proportions with family and job responsibilities are higher. (15)

Like Richardson and Skinner, Alice Horning asserts that college programs must

provide for a unique minority of students, because they are "different from the traditional

college students: they may be older, differently abled, coping with drug or alcohol

problems, and [...] probably facing mounting financial pressure" (3). Indeed, such

students represent a significant percentage of the students served by the three centers I

researched.

Nearly a decade ago, Ray Wallace and Jeanne Simpson identified what has

become the pressing problem of the present: unexpected institutional shifts and limited

funding for writing centers. One of those institutional shifts came from new types of

students emerging in the 1970s and 1980s: those learning English as a second language

and those challenged with physical and/or learning disabilities. Another shift came with

the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which opened the doors of colleges to many

who might otherwise have found higher education inaccessible. Wallace and Simpson

predicted that the resulting need for additional funding to accommodate these students

would be among the challenges facing writing centers during the final part of this century:

> dramatic shifts in the populations to be served, changes in the missions of colleges and universities and the resulting alterations in curricula, and revisions of our methods for assessing our work. In the meantime, we will all continue to compete for funding under increasing pressures. (xiii)

Because of this new picture of higher education over the past decade, those in the writing center profession have rethought their goals and methods. Following are three representative findings. In 1984, Stephen North put forth his views of writing center purpose and practice in a landmark essay titled "The Idea of a Writing Center." In 1994, his considerably amended views appear in "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center.'" North acknowledged that his earlier piece, while serving a purpose directed "at those not involved with writing centers," had, over time, the unwanted effect of portraying—to new tutors and administrators previously unfamiliar with the daily life of the writing center— an idealistic and perhaps unrealistic view of the writing center and those it serves. In "Revisiting," North re-examines the nature of relationships between the tutor and the writer, the tutor and the teacher, and the tutor and the institution that houses the writing center. (This revised view is referenced throughout this thesis.)

Patricia McKeague and Elizabeth Reis use case studies of thirteen community college writing centers in "Serving Student Needs Through Writing Centers." They surveyed fifteen colleges about their writing center designs and practices and then assessed the data's "implications for practice" at other colleges. Among their recommendations is that the writing center not be viewed as "a remedial center for

students with poor basic skills" (204). This shows a shift in focus from the writing center as a place for remediation to a place in which "any student from any course can come for assistance with any part of the writing process [. . .]" (204). As with North's essay, the McKeague/Reis essay will be heavily referenced.

Likewise, Joyce Kinkead and Jeannette Harris address this topic in <u>Writing Centers in Context: Twelve Case Studies</u> (1993). They examine twelve writing centers in the United States by outlining each one's history, facilities, daily operations, populations served, services offered, staffing, and future outlook. This book provides a comprehensive look at ongoing themes and newly raised issues in writing center theory and practice. Their work focuses on the history and current design of these writing centers. My thesis suggests ways that a new writing center administrator might use such information to set up a program in his or her own institution.

Writing centers also became linked after the 1980s with other academic support services. At SUNY Brockport, for instance, mathematics, learning skills, and tutoring for a range of undergraduate courses were joined with writing to make a one-stop academic skills support center. This movement had a major impact on access and distribution of resources, administrative clout, and campus visibility.

Thus, the only constant in writing centers since the 1950s is that an increasing number of students need supplemental academic support. In addition to the concerns of daily operations, program descriptions, professional concerns, and a more diverse clientele, today's writing center confronts the inevitable budgetary constraints. Making the center visible and accessible to all students and persuading administrators to allocate necessary funds are all issues that will continue to be daily challenges for writing center

directors. This administrator needs to nimbly anticipate and prepare for a new set of

challenges that are as certain to arise as they have over the past fifty years.

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Chapter 3
The Writing Learning Center at
the State University of New York
College at Geneseo

History

The State University of New York is 64 campuses enrolling about 400,000 students. It is "the nation's largest single most diverse, multi-campus higher education system" (SUNY Geneseo). One of the thirteen comprehensive colleges in SUNY is the College at Geneseo. It was established by the New York State Legislature in 1867 as the Geneseo Normal and Training School, and in 1942 the college began conferring baccalaureate degrees. In 1948, Geneseo became an original campus in the new SUNY system, offering a wide range of degree programs. Teacher education was then, as it is still, a strong component of the college's programs.

The first on-campus center for assisting students with writing appeared in the 1960s. The facility was centrally located, and the program was more formal than it is now in terms of instructor referrals. At the same time, academic learning centers in all areas of the curriculum sprang up to assist students who needed assistance with coursework. The Writing Learning Center was created from the same impetus that heralded the beginnings of those learning centers specializing in other academic areas. However, it did not arise out of the same sense of desperation of those that many writing centers responding to open enrollment faced. In fact, Geneseo's Center had been in formation for some time, and plans for it kept pace with those of other colleges.

In 1980, SUNY at Geneseo established a new core curriculum that offered natural science, math, social sciences, humanities, and fine arts courses. This restructuring of the

core curriculum was undertaken when a noticeable decline in student performance prompted administrators to re-examine the college's academic standards and requirements. One result was a new emphasis on basic skills, including writing skills, and consequently the Writing Learning Center soon found its services more in demand. The Center found its goals best met under the auspices of the English Department, which still oversees it today. The English Department pays for the tutors' salaries and the acquisition and maintenance of computers and supplies.

This merging of the Writing Learning Center with the Department of English is part of the overall mission of Geneseo's Center. Some writing center administrators, however, might find this affiliation to be problematic; they may fear others' assumptions that a program funded and staffed by English faculty aims to provide tutoring mainly to students in the composition program rather than in all academic areas. A new director in a writing center that is structured in this way may find that this is, indeed, the case. Conversely, he or she may also find that the English Department wants to work with students from all areas of writing, and that this open atmosphere needs to be promoted on campus.

The structure of Geneseo's Writing Learning Center allows the English Department to take responsibility for the majority of composition instruction on campus. Traditionally, English departments of most institutions have assumed such responsibility. English faculty may object to what they see as an ignoring of writing issues by faculty in other disciplines. Faculty—from English and other departments alike—often claim that writing concerns are best handled by those whose backgrounds are in English. Many

institutions address this by having Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) faculty who are mentored or trained by someone from English.

While a college like Geneseo faces some challenges in having the English Department in control of writing center activities, it is free of the issues that are tied to colleges whose writing centers are not directly connected to English departments. English departments tend to want to have a voice in any writing center activities that are not under their immediate control. This usually necessitates having a general education supervisor or dean advised by those who have heavy investments in general education. These advisors may be faculty members from, for example, English and Mathematics, or departmental coordinators who take primary responsibility for required composition and math courses. Geneseo's English Department effectively maintains that responsibility itself by the structure it has chosen for its own Writing Learning Center.

Gradual changes in the Writing Learning Center were in response to the increasing needs of a changing student body, according to Walter Freed, the Center's former Interim Director. When the College eliminated a previously required introductory composition course, less prepared students struggled with writing assignments in lower-level classes. Many came from backgrounds that had not sufficiently prepared them for college-level writing, and the Writing Learning Center filled this gap, functioning as a place where students could receive supplemental instruction. As more students became aware of its services, more visited regularly.

Current Design and Practice

Geneseo's Writing Learning Center, located in the English Department, is managed by a faculty mentor from the Department of English, who hires, supervises, and evaluates tutors, writes reports, and maintains the budget. The department's secretary takes appointments. A noteworthy feature of the Center is its employment of undergraduate student tutors. Students who maintain a grade point average of 3.5 are eligible to apply for the positions, and the average number employed there is 17. Although the Center is housed in the English Department, peer tutors need not be English majors. Tutors attend pre-semester workshops on tutoring techniques, keep journals that respond to assigned readings of Peter Elbow and Mina Shaughnessy, and report on each tutoring session. One session of each student tutoring session per semester is recorded on video or audio for tutor performance evaluations by the faculty mentor for the purposes of training and rehiring.

The center is open for tutoring about 15 hours per week for walk-in tutoring, and 12 hours for appointments up to 30 minutes (Freed). Tutoring appointments are held in an open area, with computers and small conference tables. Early on, the Center began to integrate several computers into its tutorial program. Students use word processing and prescriptive computer programs that assist in basic grammatical function. Many tutoring sessions are held in front of a computer, depending on the student's comfort with composing via keyboard rather than with pen and paper. (The Appendix shows these data in tabulator form.)

Regardless of the physical method of composing, Writing Learning Center tutors work with their peers to develop writing from any point in the process; a written draft is

suggested but not required. Students request assistance with a variety of writing assignments, from lab reports that need more detailed processes to research papers that need clearer organization, although essays for composition classes are the most common. This writing center appears to focus less on remediation than on consultation on a wide range of higher-level writing tasks. Indeed, as McKeague and Reis suggest, writing centers should go beyond the role of remediation and offer assistance with, for example, research projects that "help students learn how to use research sources effectively and how to document these findings accurately in the various disciplines" (205). This emphasis on integrating writing instruction into the entire curriculum is one that a new administrator may expect to encounter.

Tutors work with students from a wide range of educational backgrounds, including underrepresented students.. Some are high-level writers who want peer input; others are basic writers who are overwhelmed by the amount and complexity of their writing assignments. Those few Geneseo students with ESOL concerns have access to a separate learning center. Tutoring basic writers even without ESOL concerns, however, "is a challenge at first for any tutor, but especially for a peer tutor," says Freed. Tutors are aware that the work they do for underrepresented students has the potential to remove significant obstacles from the college experience. This linking of the writing center to the philosophical aspects of education is widely recognized. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzeberg mention the relevance of writing centers to overcoming the obstacles presented to education by cultural diversity in The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing (12). Others credit the writing center with the power to assist the entire university in dealing with difficult transitions in pedagogy and social dogma.

Students discover Geneseo's Writing Learning Center in a number of ways. Most find their own way to the center; some are referred by instructors concerned about their students' apparent struggles with written expression. A referral does not mean a collaboration with faculty, however. The Center's staff does not confer with faculty about an individual student's progress. Confidentiality is an issue put forth in a document published by the Center: "Here at the Writing Learning Center, we believe your choice to seek tutoring is a private one. Our staff respects your confidentiality" (SUNY Geneseo).

Like many other colleges, Geneseo has over time defined a purpose for its writing center. Those who add to the substantial body of scholarship on writing centers in general are unable to arrive at one comprehensive statement of the function and scope of this complex field. Muriel Harris illuminates these traditions by depicting several images that students and faculty have about writing centers, one being that they exist only to assist students who are in writing classes and another that tutors perform editing or proofreading services ("What's Up" 18). Geneseo has had to overcome these same limited visions as well, and their fliers and brochures attempt to dispel them. In one brochure that appears on its web site, student responsibility is stressed: "WLC tutors will not proofread a paper for you. We will not write your assignments. We will give you examples of how to proceed; the point is to help you find your own personalized solution" (SUNY Geneseo).

Students can rate their satisfaction with the center on evaluation forms, which are used to measure the center's effectiveness. Since the English Department itself administers the Center, the administrative role usually assigned to a director is assumed

by a faculty mentor. This role includes another evaluative tool: assessing the performance of individual tutors through the videotaped sessions.

Expectations

The national movement toward the implementation of writing centers is marked by traditions that make characterizing them difficult. Because its connection with the Department of English is widely known in the college, Geneseo's Writing Learning Center may find its identity questioned more than those of writing centers that exist independently of any academic department. Names of centers and their affiliations with academic areas on campus do influence the perception of students and faculty. Since the center is associated with English, the question arises about the responsibility of other units on campus for writing instruction. Peter Carino shows an ongoing debate over the perception of the writing center by pointing to its social and linguistic dimensions: "Any attempts to define centers, it seems to me, should recognize them as both a culture unto themselves and as an activity in relation to larger cultures: the program, the profession of English studies, the university, and the culture in general" (Carino, "What" 37).

Another view in the debate over the identity of the writing center concerns an appropriate name and sponsorship. From "Writing Lab" to "Skills Center," what we call it—and into which department we place it—represents the roles we see it playing in the development of student writing. This has been a major concern since the conception of writing centers; as long ago as 1950, Robert Moore pointed to a trend toward making writing centers responsible for alleviating the pressure from sub-standard student performance. Today's writing center administrators are more concerned with how the

name affects the view of the center; Moore was concerned with giving the center credibility by associating it with a classroom setting. By its name, Geneseo's Writing Learning Center effectively adds an aspect of tutoring that exists outside of the traditional model of "English."

The Writing Learning Center at SUNY Geneseo is representative of an academically superior public comprehensive college. Most of its high parameter students may need occasional writing assistance, but by and large, it can operate effectively out of an academic department with a limited number of low-cost undergraduate tutors under the part-time supervision of a faculty member.

Chapter 4
The Writing Center at
the University of Rochester

History

The University of Rochester was established as a Baptist college in 1850, and it has grown tremendously in scope and size to come to be a leading Research I university. Over 3,700 full-time undergraduate students attend the University's College of Arts and Letters, the home of the Writing Center.

Learning Assistance Services is the parent department of the Writing Center. Before 1988, LAS was a "catch-all" for students who needed help with any sort of academic difficulty. As was the case with many other institutions, all forms of assistance to students were categorized as "learning assistance," and few distinctions were made among the specific services required.

Even before the 1990 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, says Vicki Roth, Assistant Dean for Learning Assistance Services, the university saw "the need to broaden and clarify the roles of the LAS programs." LAS reflected the national trend of diversifying student populations: Roth estimates that between 1980 and 1990, the number of self-reported learning-disabled students rose by 205; students requesting alternative accommodations for physical disabilities increased by 15 percent; and students needing assistance in English as a second language rose by 30 percent. She notes that after the ADA, closer attention was given to specific categories of students, and that the department then decided to create a separate center for students who needed help specifically in writing skills.

Current Design and Practice

The College Writing Center is located in spacious quarters on the basement level of a prominent River Campus academic building. Located in the CLARC Tunnel of the Rush-Rhees Library, the Writing Center is large enough to accommodate ten tables, five of them with computers; the setup is designed to allow for less formal tutoring sessions, student-to-student interaction, and group presentations. Along one wall are two offices; one is occupied by the Center's Manager and holds all of the administrative files, and the other is used by tutors for more structured, private tutoring sessions. The latter has a conference table and a computer for either pen-and-paper tutoring or computer-based tutoring. (See Appendix.)

The setup of this writing center, according to research by Patricia McKeague and Elizabeth Reis, is typical of many American universities. They noted that no special area need be constructed to accommodate a writing center; in fact, it can be "located any place where there is room for tables, chairs, some resource material, and—if one's budget allows—computers equipped with easy-to-learn word processing software" (205).

The Writing Center's annual budget is controlled by LAS, with some funding contributed by the Office for Minority Student Affairs (OMSA) and some by the Higher Education Opportunities Program (HEOP). This budget covers the salaries of five to eight part-time employees, outreach programs, promotion, and learning software. The two dozen computers used in the center are owned by the university's Computer Services Department.

Many resources are readily available to those who use the Writing Center. Individuals can drop in to use online tutorial programs, and for those who do extensive

writing there, style guide books are available. The Center also offers a supply of handouts on various publication styles.

The roles of this center are complex. In general at any university, English faculty with backgrounds in literature, not writing, do not want to teach composition; on the other hand, they don't want to give up control of the instruction of writing. One compromise is to staff learning centers with English graduate students, thus using the selection and supervision of tutors as an opportunity to maintain some control over how writing is taught outside of the classroom. While the LAS employs regular full-time staff, the CWC hires about eight tutors and a manager from a pool of Ph.D. students, most often English degree candidates, who have tutoring or teaching experience. Worth noting is the Writing Center's website reference to its tutors as "graduate-student consultants" (University), though during my visit and in this Center's other literature the word "tutor" is commonly used. Tutors work a maximum of twenty hours per week. Those who are responsible for hiring them have a critical goal "to maintain continuity," says Writing Center Manager Jennifer Kline, a University of Rochester Ph.D. candidate. Klein found that during her tenure, tutors "have had a delicate line to walk" in response to one particular issue: an increasing proportion of ESL students requesting tutoring services. Kline has observed that ESL students "work best in a collaborative environment" that can be difficult to maintain if the staff turns over too frequently:

> Different populations have different needs. I've been here for five years—
> the first three as a tutor and the past two as the center's manager. The kind
> of reciprocity inherent in collaborative writing necessitates an atmosphere
> of trust, of familiarity [. . .].

Indeed, the university's College Writing Center employs a setup that encourages the "familiarity" Kline speaks of: only one tutor works at a time, and students meet with him or her for a thirty- to sixty-minute, pre-appointed session. Kline says that limiting tutors' availability to appointments, rather than allowing times for walk-in sessions, helps to promote the Center's philosophy of consultation and collaboration rather than "a quick fix." If a panicked student rushes in with an assignment for a ten-page paper that is due at 3:00 p.m. that day, for example, Kline says that she gives the student materials about the Center and stresses the importance of coming in advance of a deadline to get the full benefit of tutoring. Students are encouraged to make more than one appointment each week for a maximum of ninety minutes per week, and if tutors feel that more time is warranted, special approval may be granted by the Director of LAS. The methods used by the CWC's tutors do vary, but the general philosophy is one of collaborating through discussing and analyzing, and the longer meeting times accommodate this.

Kline notes that the drawback of longer tutoring sessions is that students sometimes expect the tutor to re-teach the class. In the St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors, Christina Murphy, Joe Law, and Steve Sherwood support this principle of moving away from a role of "instructor" in favor of "guide":

> [. . .] the impact of writing centers upon the way writing is taught has
> been both revolutionary and lasting. The collaborative, interactive model
> of writing center tutorials based upon individualized instruction has called
> into question much of the traditional theory and practice of classroom
> instruction. Consequently, the paradigm shift initiated by this model has
> moved writing instruction away from knowledge transfer to knowledge

construction, with students operating as active participants in their own

learning. (Murphy, Law, and Sherwood vii)

The guiding principle is one of helping students find ways to construct their own

understanding of writing:

According to Kline, a significant percentage of the Writing Center's clients come

from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, which means that few of them need assistance

with basic writing skills. After that, she says, the data diversify according to ethnic

background. One variant in tutoring sessions here centers around a student's familiarity

with the English language. If an ESOL student is having difficulty with prepositions and

articles, for instance, tutoring may be grammar and training on ESOL software. In

addition, the Center often offers workshops for ESOL students that address common

grammatical concerns. This combination of group and individual learning methods is

another reason that writing centers are difficult to categorize (Harris, "What's Up" 19).

This group feature can cause conflict with the writing classroom instructor. While some

practitioners feel that the use of tutors in the writing center categorizes it as radically

different from the writing classroom, others focus on the use of collaborative learning

techniques as a similarity to regular instruction. This ability to use both tutors and

collaboration is a testament to the strength of the field. Carino argues that the attitude of

respect and confidence toward students is a more important aspect of the writing lab than

remediation ("Early" 109). Tutoring practices at the Writing Center reflect an

understanding that this respect is especially necessary when working with ESOL

students.

While each tutor at the Center has a unique approach, Kline thinks that a shared philosophy of tutoring—one of collaboration and student empowerment—is what drives the Center: "If we don't empower students, then we take on all of the responsibility for their writing. [. . .] Our objective is to respect their ideas and instill a sense of confidence so that they can collaborate with others who are not experts, and still feel confident" (1). Kline notes that the regular staff meetings at which tutors discuss their work helps the staff to use the same tutoring techniques. This is an important characteristic of University of Rochester's College Writing Center.

The wide range of clients served by the Writing Center presents a unique challenge. The student body, for one thing, spans the 18-year-old freshman in a first composition class to the graduate student finishing up a dissertation. The Center also goes beyond being a service for just students; it is not unusual, says Kline, for a faculty member to drop by to seek objective reading of an article or new syllabus. This may be one reason that the University of Rochester's Center seems to be confident that its role extends far beyond mere remediation. The center sees itself serving a broad audience; it offers assistance not only to students, but to faculty, as well:

> We will also help faculty design and edit assignment prompts [and] exam
> questions, and assist in the design of writing workshops. Faculty are
> welcome to call the center and arrange to bring their classes down for a
> tour of the facilities, or they may reserve the computer lab for workshops
> and other activities. (University)

Potential clients learn about the Writing Center from its advertisements in student and faculty publications. It also maintains a presence on the University's web site and

receives some publicity through its affiliation with the Department of Learning

Assistance Services, which provides its funding. The Writing Center also has several

early intervention programs outside its walls designed to familiarize students with its

tutorial services well enough in advance of that first paper. One such program is the

Early Connection Opportunity (ECO), an intensive skill-building program for

underprepared freshmen that is offered the summer before the first year. The Writing

Center also offers workshops on various aspects of the writing process through the

academic year, including those on basic skills. The one-credit "Methods of Inquiry" class

evolved out of a need for some students to have access to extra academic support; again,

CWC staff offer seminars on such topics as starting research papers and using the library.

Through these outreach programs, more students come to the center, especially those

from ethnic minority groups. Kline notes that increased numbers of ESOL and minority

students have "pushed the Writing Center into a position of greater visibility" on campus

because of its involvement and perceived vital role.

Because it runs a multi-faceted program, the College Writing Center evaluates the

effectiveness of its services through a system of checks and balances. Its efforts are

coordinated with the College Writing Program, which administers writing placement

exams and the required freshman writing course. Staff in this program track student

progress in writing courses and recommend students with less developed writing skills

for the College's "more intensive first-year writing course" (Rochester).

Expectations

Both Vickie Roth and Jennifer Kline anticipate changes within the College Writing Center's programs and structure in response to an increasingly diverse university population. Students have indicated a desire for a full-service online writing lab (OWL), for instance. Whether that will happen or not, Kline says, will depend in part upon how much of the benefits of personal interaction the staff feels can be sacrificed while staying true to a spirit of collaboration. A concern she has is that more students will opt for online consultations, with fewer actually coming to the Center. If this were to happen, she says, the CWC might take on more of a "fix-it shop" identity.

The typical University of Rochester student is a high-level academic achiever. For this reason, the services offered by the College Writing Center necessarily focus on higher level writing problems with basic writing needs playing a minor role. Unlike basic writers at two-year or some public colleges, basic writers at this university do not usually come from educationally deficient backgrounds. Some of the students seeking help with writing skills here are learning English as a second language; others are native English speakers who need to catch up with standard written expression of the language. Most of the writing tutored here is at a fairly advanced level already, and tutors work with students to address higher order concerns. Whatever the needs of clients, the goal of writing assistance at the College Writing Center is the same: to heighten students' abilities to think critically and express their thoughts well.

Chapter 5
The Writing Center at
Monroe Community College

History

In order to understand the changing role of MCC's Writing Center, it is important to examine the history of this institution. Established in 1961 as one of 30 community colleges within the State University of New York, MCC is funded with tuition, state aid, Monroe County aid, and private monies. As the institution has matured both in program offerings and in size—from 720 students in 1962 to more than 30,000 in 2000—so have its ten academic learning centers. Like many college centers, MCC responded to challenges brought on by open enrollment through providing limited tutoring opportunities. Beyond its Brighton campus, MCC has two additional facilities: the Applied Technology Center, also in Brighton; and the Damon City Campus in Rochester. For the purpose of this study, I have examined only the writing center located at the main campus in Brighton.

In MCC's early years, administrators gave little thought to the idea of establishing a formal forum to help students with college-level-writing. The typical student was eighteen, white, middle-class, a high school graduate, and single. They were, in Shaughnessy's words, "the students for whom college courses and tests had been designed and about whom studies had been made [. . .] the students who met the traditional requirements for college work, who appeared from their tests and their school performance to be competent readers and writers with enough background in the subjects they would be studying in college to be able to begin at the traditional starting points" (2).

Few formal records were kept during these early years, but anecdotal comments reveal that such services as peer tutoring were informal. The college assumed the center's role to be "supplementary, rather than remedial," according to Donna Dettman, former Director of the center. In short, this early center was little more than a loosely organized group of student volunteers.

After the Vietnam War and the open enrollment movement that was a part of the social ferment, writing centers on many college campuses, MCC included, shifted in focus. Open enrollment changed the demographic makeup of campuses: between 1973 and 1977, urban campus populations exploded to include not only the typical 18-year-old first-year students, but also the 25+ age group of veterans, women, displaced workers, students of diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds, and students with disabilities. Soon testing for English placement became more widespread, and in 1976, to accommodate the need for competency in basic academic skills, MCC opened its Developmental Studies Department. Following national trends, the college began to look seriously at forming a more sophisticated network of tutoring services. Between the 1970s and 1996, the college's single writing center was under the auspices of the English Department though it experienced changes in focus, location, and clientele.

The alliance between the departments was often frustrating, with the English Department faculty and Writing Center staff at odds over the nature and goals of tutoring writing. In 1984, North showed that this conflict was already widespread across America: "The non-English faculty, the students, the administrators—they may not understand what a writing center is or does, but they have no investment in their ignorance, and can often be educated. But in English Departments, this second layer of

ignorance, this false sense of knowing, makes it doubly hard to get a message through" ("Idea" 433). Indeed, at MCC then, the often conflicting demands of tutoring for English courses and developmental writing courses exacerbated the conflicts of theory and practice in MCC's Writing Center. North's "false sense of knowing" refers to an English Department member's assumption that anything writing-related must always fall under the domain of his or her department. Underlying that assumption is another: that writing is somehow more inherently linked to the discipline of English than it is to other disciplines. This Writing Center connection with the Developmental Studies Department (renamed the Transitional Studies Department in 1996) would strengthen in the years ahead, to meet pressing needs for a more focused interaction between developmental courses and centers for learning. Because institutions define "developmental" courses of study in many different ways, it is worthwhile to understand how MCC views the role of such courses in its Transitional Studies Department:

> Students receive advisement, orientation, instruction, and support geared
> for their success in college. Through this assistance, underprepared
> students build skills in reading, writing, math, study skills, and college
> orientation. They also build their confidence in their academic success
> (Monroe).

As more writing center scholarship began to emerge in the 1980s—a defining characteristic of the profession's growth in that decade—scholars called for more widespread research on the nature of tutoring writing. MCC's Writing Center staff— including many from among the English Department faculty—were especially interested in examining this practice.

Muriel Harris reflects in "Re: Writing" that much of the tension in the 1980s between writing centers and English departments centered around the new student population. English department faculty, she claims, "wanted these students' writing to be 'good'—or at the very least, 'acceptable.' Often that attitude forced on a tutor the role of editor, when the whole writing center movement was pushing back with the idea of fixing the writer, and not his writing" (1). At the same time that MCC's center was outgrowing its confines within the English Department, others involved in such programs reported similar experiences. Kim Silveira Bowers, for example, outlines the growth of the writing center of the University of the Pacific in California in "The Evolution of a Writing Center." This and many similar articles included in the Works Cited illustrate that writing centers nationwide were experiencing the same patterns found at MCC.

In 1986, the makeup of the Writing Center paralleled that of other community colleges at the time. The center was still housed in the English Department and staffed by faculty members. Students either signed up for 30- to 60-minute consultations with tutors or met with them for 15 to 20 minutes on a walk-in basis. Students could be referred for tutoring by professors, although "no formal referral process was ever designed," according to Writing Center Director Jean McDonough. Some saw this as a weak link in the cooperative chain of events that led a student through a course that required writing. In keeping with national practices, directors required no post-tutoring evaluation or a response to the professor from whose class the student had come. Essentially, undocumented services were provided without any institutional expectations.

Lacking such formal follow-up, MCC's Writing Center was serving students "in a random way" (McDonough). Harris notes that the staff at Ohio State's Writing Center,

for example, justified this informal method in the mid-1980s, reasoning that a student who owns his or her writing and is not pressed into receiving remediation is more likely to become a stronger writer than one who visits the center for course-mandated tutoring sessions, even when those sessions are regular ("Re: Writing").

In the two academic years beginning in 1990, more funding became available for the MCC Writing Center. Its staffing now included professional tutors, who relieved the English Department faculty of their "volunteer" hours. The steadily increasing enrollment of ESOL and Transitional Studies students at MCC had resulted in more demands for tutoring in basic writing skills. In response, the decision was made to relocate the Writing Center from its somewhat isolated site in the English Department to an area near other support services.

In 1996, the Department of Academic Support took responsibility for segments of the student population in need of tutoring in all academic areas. Just as its physical location had changed, so had its scope: a new campus wing provided more spacious quarters, and academic tutoring services in the Interdisciplinary Programs Learning Center were now provided for ESOL students and those enrolled in the Transitional Studies Program. The distinction between the Interdisciplinary Programs Learning Center and the Writing Center, however, was based more on regularity of tutoring than on program enrollment. A student could apply for one hour per week of free one-to-one tutoring in specific subject areas, including writing, in the Interdisciplinary Programs Learning Center, and he or she could also drop in at the Writing Center at any time for fifteen-minute consultations on papers in progress. This naturally increased the pool of students who could potentially use the Writing Center, so more hourly wage professional

tutors were hired, with salaries based on completion of the minimum educational requirement of a bachelor's degree in English or similar program.

In addition to serving increased numbers of students with basic academic needs, MCC began to accommodate more students with physical and learning disabilities in the years following the passage of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. To meet the needs of this population, the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD) hired its own part-time professional and peer tutors. The Writing Center, the Interdisciplinary Programs Learning Center, and the OSSD, though distinct in purpose and populations, served together under the direction of the Division of Academic Support Services.

Patricia Kennedy, Director of Academic Support Services, notes that the burgeoning growth in the Transitional Studies Department was anticipated. All along, MCC had echoed the national trend of increased enrollment of students typically excluded in high school from the college preparatory track. An increase in the number of first-generation college students, along with those on public assistance, students older than 25, members of minority ethnic groups, holders of GEDs, and people with physical or learning disabilities "necessitated an increase in the types of specialized supplementary instruction we had typically offered," Kennedy states. "Pulling resources from a general writing center and dividing our support services into branches dedicated to different needs of learners seemed logical."

Other colleges felt the same way. Harris notes that the 1990s have shown a marked increase in attention to the needs of students from a range of cultural and ethnic

groups ("What's Up" 17). In "Individualized Instruction in Writing Centers," she suggests an appropriate role of the tutor in relation to these special populations:

> Once we begin to recognize differences at work, we have to address the question of how and to what degree we ought to acquaint students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds with the norms expected in the academic society they have entered. Helping them see whether and how they fit in with or differ from American academic communication patterns is, I believe, part of a tutor's responsibility. (108)

The college's decision to establish several learning centers that met different disciplinary needs of students served as a model for change in the MCC Writing Center, as well. Currently there are ten such centers: the Accounting and Economics Learning Center; the Electronic Learning Center; the Engineering Science and Physics Learning Center; the Health Information Technology Lab; the Human Performance Lab; the Interdisciplinary Programs Learning Resource Center; the Mathematics Learning Center; the Natural Science Educational Learning Center; the Nursing Learning Center; and the Psychology Learning Center.

For the Center's staff, dividing tutoring duties between the Writing Center and the Interdisciplinary Programs Learning Center was worrisome at first. A turf issue loomed. If the Writing Center tutors were no longer needed to help students enrolled in developmental writing courses, they argued, then who would need their remediation services? At the same time, the removal of the tutoring responsibilities for special populations also freed the staff to explore new philosophies about and avenues for tutoring writing. The concern remained that few non-remedial students would find their

way to the Writing Center's new location. The threat of reduced clientele always brings with it the threat of a reduced budget, so center promotion and justification of programs became a primary goal.

The concern was not unique to MCC. In "Playing the Budget Game: The Story of Two Writing Centers," Sallyann Fitzgerald examines the writing center at the University of Missouri–St. Louis, which remained under the auspices of an academic department, and the writing center at Chabot College (Hayward, CA), which operated as a campus-wide, independently managed writing center. She concludes that the tutoring center tied to one department does not experience the success of the independent center. Like Fitzgerald, Steve Sherwood contends that English departments already experience a sense of competition within the academic community, often having to justify their own existences for continued funding ("How" 5). Writing centers that are linked to departments, he asserts, are likely to fail; moreover, those individual failures have the potential to cause the demise of the writing center profession as a whole.

Once MCC moved the Writing Center from under the umbrella of the English Department and identified its target audience, promoting it to that audience became the primary goal. Central to that goal was self-identification, a joint understanding of the Center's role and mission between the administration and staff. The transition to a new campus administration—and target population—leading to the need for resolution of identity remains a common denominator of MCC and similar community colleges, the fastest growing and changing campuses in America.

Thomas Hemmeter commented on colleges' undertaking of this task in 1990:

In our efforts at self-definition, then, we are not so much inventing ourselves as reinventing ourselves, and we should not so easily cede the label "traditional" to classroom instruction. Perhaps it is time for us to think of the classroom as existing to get students back to the writing center, the traditional site of language instruction. (44)

Current Design and Practice

From the time of its relocation until 1997, the Writing Center's physical space comprised an area of about 40 by 30 feet. In 1997, however, the Office for Services for Students with Disabilities was moved into a portion of that space. The Writing Center Director's position was eliminated, and the private office was subsequently occupied by the Director of Services for Students with Disabilities. In addition, a 10 by 15 foot area along one wall of the open area was sectioned off with dividers to function as a testing area for students needing alternate testing locations.

As it would at any college that experiences a space crunch, this shared space presents a logistical challenge. The Writing Center still retains several small tables for writing conferences and two or three longer tables for independent student work. It offers a small number of personal computers and a central printer for student use. The area has a busy atmosphere, with a receptionist directing students either to waiting tutors or to the student receptionist for the Office for Students with Disabilities.

By their names alone, we can see a difference between the roles of the current Writing Center—the place where students go to receive help with various levels of writing assignments—and the Interdisciplinary Learning Laboratory, which serves

students enrolled in Transitional Studies and ESOL courses. (See Appendix.) Developing programs that address these students' unique learning needs is one objective of the Interdisciplinary Programs Learning Center, according to Patricia Kennedy. Part of the identity resolution was to decide which students would be best served in the Writing Center and which ones should be referred to the Interdisciplinary Programs Learning Center.

The latter was better equipped to help students with the often overwhelming problems typical of basic writers, ESOL students, and those with physical or learning disabilities. This lab now houses twenty-five PCs for general student use, software that assists with writing at the sentence level for basic writers, and English language-learning software for ESOL students. Both peer and professional tutors are available for half-hour to one-hour appointments in a variety of subject areas; and four part-time professional tutors work with students who have writing problems "too complex to be addressed in the Writing Center" (McDonough). The Writing Center promotes itself in the student newspaper, through a variety of English and literature classes, and with fliers and brochures. Many instructors incorporate a course requirement of one or more visits to the Writing Center, and some send with their students an evaluation form for tutors to complete (to be returned to the instructor) in response to the students' apparent needs and to the tutoring sessions in general. This feedback feature significantly changed the relationship between the faculty and the Writing Center. At bottom, its staff have moved to greater acceptance and professional footing with the faculty.

Director Jean McDonough reflects on the way a philosophy of tutoring settled into being: "We've seen ourselves as collaborators for quite some time. The idea of

writing as a solitary activity simply doesn't work when you have a student in front of you, clutching a paper riddled with error and having no idea about how to 'fix' it."

Before the administration of the Academic Services Division decided to set up separate tutoring facilities for academically needy students, tutors quickly learned that they lacked sufficient time to help with problems beyond those of the "typical" student: organization, paragraph unity, run-on sentences, sentence fragments; and comma placement. One tutor reflects on her early experiences as a tutor in an open-enrollment college:

> When I came to work here, I was surprised—no, dismayed—by this overwhelming vision of error in the students' papers. I knew there had to be more than just proofreading and correcting–our goal was to interact with the students and their writing, not just point out the errors—but where to begin? I had no idea how to help them in just twenty minutes. (Kress)

Many at-risk students see a community college as the last chance for a positive change, an opportunity for self-empowerment. The sensitivity to this position is evident in a strong support system. In "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," Andrea Lunsford, a foremost supporter of collaborative writing in writing centers, sees the interaction between tutor and student as a route to empowerment of students who have typically been denied the experience of higher education. This segment of college students is less comfortable with standard forms of written expression, and making room for them in academia has been the primary concern of those who work in developmental education and writing center professions. Finding a way to serve this population as well

as those who do not need such extensive help is one challenge faced by MCC's Writing Center.

Stephen North presented an idealized view of students seeking help with writing in "The Idea of a Writing Center." These students, he said, "come looking for us because, more often than not, they are genuinely, deeply engaged with their material, anxious to wrestle it into the best form they can: they are really motivated to write" (443). This view does not necessarily match those of tutors who work regularly with a population unfamiliar with and intimidated by the rigors of written assignments. North, in his subsequent look at writing centers, acknowledged that students may be motivated, "but not in the uncomplicated way this [previous] passage would suggest" ("Revisiting" 10). He notes many factors that motivate students to seek assistance, among them the desire to finish a work, the hope for a good grade, and the quest for mechanical correctness. An administrator may assume that any of these factors drives a student to seek assistance, whether that student is comfortable with written discourse or not.

The Writing Center at MCC has embraced a tutoring philosophy that is akin to Lunsford's definition of the "Burkean Parlor Center."—an atmosphere that relies heavily on collaborative work ("Collaboration" 43). As always, however, practical matters must take the lead: time and budgets are limited. Until 1997, MCC students could reserve a regular half-hour to one-hour appointment with tutors. When the Writing Center's budget decreased, resulting in less funding for contact hours, advance appointments were eliminated, and drop-in consultations of 20 minutes are now the norm. The challenge now, says McDonough, is "finding creative ways to collaborate on a paper with a student in such a limited time frame." In order to accommodate that, the Writing Center now

requires students seeking tutoring to bring typed or word-processed drafts of their papers, not handwritten papers, notes, or outlines. McDonough believes that this policy places more responsibility on the student, who has already invested himself or herself to the point of typing a draft of the paper. At that point, she claims, the student is more willing to see the tutor's role as one of collaborator, rather than editor.

Measuring effectiveness is key to a writing center's success. McKeague and Reis suggest that one implication for a successful writing center is to make room for student feedback about the center's effectiveness: "To be sure that students' needs are being met, an evaluation instrument should be developed and administered to a representative sample of students each semester. The results should then be used to modify policies and procedures that are ineffective" (205). MCC's Writing Center measures its effectiveness through evaluation forms and a suggestion box placed just outside the Center.

Expectations

In the years since the writing center profession began to forge its own identity, the independence of writing centers from English departments has become the norm. This is the case at MCC, too; today, faculty from many departments, including English, work collaboratively with Writing Center staff to promote the services of the Center.

MCC's Writing Center has evolved to provide programs designed to support, encourage, and advance the learning of persons not traditionally included in the higher education community. Harris addresses this people-oriented tradition and its relevancy to the identity of writing centers. The writing center movement, she says, has prided itself

on favoring human interaction over mechanical technique. The administrators and staff of writing centers insist that every individual approaches writing from a unique perspective that must be recognized in any attempt to promote writing (Harris, "What's Up" 18). The Writing Center at Monroe Community College is founded on just such an approach and continues to promote it. Among the three centers that have been examined, MCC's has changed the most in scope and mission. This is understandable given the explosive increase of students with the greatest divergence in needed services, especially over this past decade.

Chapter 6
Considerations

After examining these three schools, I have identified vital areas that the new administrator of a writing center should consider upon starting a writing center or taking over an existing one.

Muriel Harris, in considering the practical problems faced by those embarking on the design of writing center programs, advocates an approach of flexibility and creativity in her 1991 article "Solutions and Trade-Offs in Writing Center Administration." She lays out a ten-point plan that might be encountered in a writing center, based on the premise that staff abandon the idea that there exists only one "good" way to run a writing center and encouraging collaboration by all in decision making. The views presented by Harris and other critics are that regardless of the institution, recurring issues must be addressed by anyone who intends to design and run a writing center. The key issues below distill my reading and observation of the three sites in the study.

1. Management. Whether the new administrator has been promoted internally or hired from outside the organization, launching his or her vision of a writing center takes creativity. Taking over an existing program with the intent of making changes also requires a highly developed sense of diplomacy when working with those who control funding or who had administered the area. Before all else, the new administrator should have a clear understanding of the administrative structure—to whom he or she reports and whom he or she supervises.

Initial administrative experiences are crucial to success because they set up expectations of the program not only for the center's staff, but for the students, faculty,

and administration. These early months will demand such managerial skills as negotiation and flexibility and a clear establishment of credibility. Starting by gathering information about its mission, goals, and priorities will provide valuable insight into the role of the writing center in an often complex hierarchy. For example, the budget may be controlled by one department, but the mission of the center and its clientele may encompass the whole institution. Understanding this history can help the administrator negotiate for funding and move toward necessary changes in staffing or program.

Administrative visibility, too, should be maintained. Early on, the campus community needs to recognize this new administrator (whether through committee work, writing center publications, or one-to-one contact) as an authority in the field. Regularly meeting with supervisors and with key individuals from other departments will help to establish mutually beneficial working relationships. The new administrator should also be familiar with other tutoring resources available on campus.

As part of the overall managerial responsibilities, the new administrator will be expected to provide direction for the writing center. This includes managing the staff in designing the curriculum, preparing and presenting workshops, and consulting with the center's staff and faculty. Tutor selection, orientation, and evaluation will require managerial expertise. Taking a longer view, he or she should encourage professional growth, such as continuing education, research, publication opportunities, and participation in workshops.

The new administrator of a writing center may find that resources may be a dismaying distance away from his or her vision. Kinkead and Harris mind us that over time, the writing center program "will assume new forms, use new technologies, take on

new responsibilities, develop new theories, and explore new directions for the future"
(xix). Because the delivery of services is the primary responsibility of the director, he or
she must tend to this from the start.

2. Identity. This issue of identity is broader than the name of the place, even if
this is the first question that is asked. A new administrator needs to keep in mind that the
name of the writing place impacts internal and external perceptions of the institution. For
instance, writing clinic and writing laboratory connote quite different services in the
literature and in the writing center community at large, as Robert Moore illustrates:

> The writing clinic works with the individual student. The writing
> laboratory, on the other hand, is far more likely to work with the
> individual as a member of a group, usually a group with varying problems.
> It is more economical than the clinic in that one instructor in a given hour
> can work with ten or twenty students. (6)

For some institutions, consistency in nomenclature among academic learning
areas is a top priority. MCC does this by naming all of its Brighton Campus academic
resource areas with "center," such as the Mathematics Learning Center and the Writing
Center.

Professional identity is another aspect of this issue. Writing centers increased in
visibility and credibility as shown by more scholarly writings, conferences, and writing
centers. An administrator should establish and maintain professional connections with
others in the field by participating in writing center organizations such as Conference on
College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and the SUNY Council on Writing
and by keeping pace with and contributing to current scholarly literature in the field.

3. Staffing. Along with its identity, the staffing of a writing center influences the way it is perceived on campus and beyond. Each of the three centers I examined filled a coordinating position with different types of professionals. SUNY Geneseo's Writing Learning Center's director is a faculty mentor released part time from the English Department. The University of Rochester's College Writing Center has a graduate student as its manager. Monroe Community College's Writing Center has a full-time director. Regardless of the position, it appears that each center has one individual responsible for hiring tutors and other staff, determining writing center hours, maintaining the budget, equipment and supplies, and charting its philosophical course.

The new administrator will likely find that tutors are at the core of the daily operations of the writing center. In her book on tutoring, Elizabeth McAllister looks at their responsibilities by defining the four primary roles. One is the tutor-centered session, which features a highly skilled, confident tutor. Another is the process-centered tutor, which applies a tutor's skills toward a writing process. The third is situation-centered tutoring, which emphasizes review of basic writing skills. The fourth is centered on the student receiving tutoring; this kind of session is dependent on the areas defined by the student himself or herself (29). An administrator will certainly find that tutors assume many different roles over time, so it is not surprising that discussions such as McAllister's address the question of whether the "tutor" identity fits all situations. Lex Runciman reminds us that in its original meaning, "tutor" described a person who served as a teacher, not as someone who supplemented a student's outside learning (30). He asserts that many current writing center tutors consult and assist, so that the name we use should be adjusted accordingly. While "tutor" may be the most recognizable name for

the person working with another person and his or her writing, the new administrator will want to examine the impression that title puts forth to judge whether it portrays the desired image.

The new administrator must assess both the center's needs and the availability and distribution of resources for the employment of tutors. If the program wants professional tutors, what degree level and/or background are expected? Will part-time tutors or full-timers—receiving full-time benefits—be preferable? If tutors come from a pool of qualified undergraduate or graduate students, what implications will that choice have on how the writing center is perceived? If fulltime English faculty are tutors, what authority does the administrator have over them?

As we have seen from the three schools examined in this paper, student tutors can be drawn from a variety of sources. Peer tutors, such as those at SUNY Geneseo, may be recruited from English, although they usually come from any academic area. A GPA standard may be set, and prospective peer tutors may fill out application forms that provide background information and writing samples. During the interview process, the interviewer can ask the prospective tutor to conduct a mock tutoring session.

In addition to choices in staffing, the administrator must be sure that all staff members are working toward the same end and yet allow for individual tutoring styles. Will he or she expect uniform style for all tutors, or will there be room for varying ideas about how to approach writing consultancy? The wise administrator recognizes these four aspects of the tutoring session and allows for individual differences. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood assert that tutoring and writing instruction have a symbiotic relationship (2). They set forth four tenets of tutoring: a.) various styles of tutoring must

be respected within the writing center; b.) tutor and student must collaborate; c.) they must have a high level of interpersonal communication; and d.) it must be individualized and adapted to students' needs (1). The administrator should strive to create an atmosphere that welcomes tutors' input and maintains high standards for consulting with writers. Tutors can start the semester on a positive note by attending a session or two of preparatory work with fellow tutors.

English graduate students are widely used as tutors, as at the University of Rochester. Such an assistantship will be around fifteen hours a week, including a one-hour staff meeting. Depending on the size of the institution and the availability of funds, the pool of graduate students could be expanded. An administrator should not assume, however, that good graduate-level writing leads to good tutoring. The best students—undergraduates and graduates—focus on the holistic view of writing and interact and collaborate with students.

Some writing centers rely solely on professional tutors; for example, MCC. Beyond holding a bachelor's degree, each professional should have a solid background in writing and the ability to tutor effectively. Master's degrees may be preferred, though that might shrink the pool significantly. Since few tutors work full time and most centers close for long breaks between semesters, finding qualified tutors willing to work sporadically—and with a tutoring schedule that changes from semester to semester—may be a challenge.

Writing centers typically provide training seminars for new and returning tutors. These sessions cover a variety of topics such as evaluation and consultation, and present several activities such as role playing and discussion with seasoned tutors. The new

administrator may want to invite representatives from various campus departments to provide information at these seminars. Regardless of how the administrator provides orientations or guidance for tutors, he or she should be sure to clearly explain the philosophy, goals, and operations of the writing center.

4. Funding. :Central to institutional support for a campus writing center is the endless battle for steady, significant financial backing. Campus administrators need to provide sufficient funding.to the writing center to sustain its services. The writing center administrator may have to choose between functioning as a well-funded service program within.the English department or functioning independently on meager funds. The administrator should also be aware of "territorial" issues; moving a writing center program from one administrative line to another is often a slow and painful process, and strong feelings of ownership may be asserted. Forging alliances with more than one department may be possible, however. At the University of Rochester, for example, Learning Assistance Services finances the College Writing Center, but the Center also has close academic affiliations with the College Writing Program, which provides funds and in-kind support. This affiliation serves to broaden the College Writing Center's scope from a point of service to a center for the exchange of ideas (University, "Writing at the College").

5. Physical space. If the writing center administrator is able to determine where the center will be located, major considerations are an ADA accessible, central area on campus with ample tutoring space. Interior furniture should accommodate wheelchairs and facilitate movement. To provide confidentiality and privacy, conference areas should be large enough to allow for normal levels of conversation without distracting others.

Someone setting up a new writing center should accommodate users' needs for individual work space, collaborative work space, computer space, and, if possible, writing resources in a separate area set aside to encourage students to work independently.

Administrators should consider the need for satellite locations, or at least for programs or presentations outside of the usual work week. MCC, for example, houses a second writing center at its smaller Damon City Campus in Rochester. At the University of Rochester, workshops are held at several locations around campus. Geneseo, with its relatively small size and largely residential student body, does not require such functions or satellite facilities.

6. Daily functions. Because most writing centers serve multiple purposes, identifying typical daily functions is difficult. A new administrator should plan to offer daily open-access time for individual students who make appointments, drop in for tutoring, or stop by to use tutorial software or to work independently. Time and space should be available for closed-access time; for example, for classes of basic writing students to work with tutors or use the center's software. Writing center use normally rises and falls during the semester. The early days will often be quiet, with traffic increasing as instructors bring students in for tours or refer them for tutoring after diagnostic compositions are administered in writing classes. If tutors take appointments, these may fill up rapidly as the semester continues, and drop-in times should be made available to accommodate other students needing assistance. Because of this, the administrator should hire tutors who are flexible about their work hours; the slow pace at the beginning of the semester may necessitate fewer hours or fewer tutors than the faster pace toward the middle and end of the semester. Administrators may find that having

students work with the same tutor each time, if possible, helps to ensure return visits and maintain a sense of continuity.

On a typical day, the administrator can expect tutors to work with freshmen who are referred from composition classes, or who drop in on their own to seek assistance with papers for other classes. Upperclassmen may make appointments or come by to work on drafts of papers for classes in any area of the curriculum. Some may have notes, outlines, or just ideas. Writing center staff may want to consider the implications of working with students at so many stages of the writing process and with such a variety of assignments. Some writing centers, such as MCC's, apply limits to the kinds of assignments their tutors will work on with a student. MCC's Writing Center staff ask students to bring in typed, not handwritten, drafts; those students needing assistance with written homework assignments may be referred to the Interdisciplinary Programs Learning Resource Center across the hall. Some of the students seeking help with papers will be capable writers who need objective readers; others will be less skilled writers who need more extensive tutoring in basic writing concepts.

7. Types of services. The administrator will most likely consider individual tutoring to be the backbone of his or her center's services, with the tutor and client working together to explore the writer's rhetorical problems. A writing center administrator should participate in this tutoring process, at least initially, to experience the challenges of basic tutoring. The administrator should closely watch the center's patterns of use: whether students come to the writing center voluntarily or by an instructor's referral, the students' lack of motivation may lead them to short-circuit the writing process. For instance, they may want the tutor to "correct" a draft. The wise

administrator needs to teach tutors a wide range of tutoring theories to be most effective, but also the administrator must carry out the writing philosophy of the center.

In most writing centers, administrators offer more than tutoring is just one of the services offered; the availability of other services and their level of use will depend on the goals the administrator has for the entire program. Many centers offer services beyond tutoring, such as the intensive-review course. Some institutions offer no- or one-credit courses in grammatical structures, composition skills, and similar areas. In addition to those offerings, an administrator may want to host occasional writing-related activities such as poetry readings or workshops on grammar or other writing concerns to promote the center as a gathering place for everyone.

The writing center may also serve as extensions of campus computer labs, allowing members of the campus community to either schedule appointments or drop in to use networked computers. This technology can be an integral part of the entire writing center program. In one scenario, a student may use a hard copy of a paper to consult with a writing tutor, make revisions to the saved copy on a disk, and if time allows, consult again with the tutor over the newly printed and revised work. In another example, SUNY Geneseo's Writing Center, with its integrated computer lab, creates an ideal setting for students and tutors to consult over a piece of writing in front of a computer screen rather than on hard copy. A new administrator can make decisions about such services over time, after extensive review of the needs of the campus and available resources.

8. Clientele. Though the "typical" writing center client probably does not exist, writing centers should be launched with a plan to address the learning needs of targeted clientele. This almost always includes students in basic and regular composition courses

and their instructors. After students become acquainted with the writing center through class, many will become repeat customers, seeking assistance for writing assignments in their remaining college years.

Instructors can also refer their students via a form that details the areas that need attention. Such a referral, however, could be seen as a punitive measure for "bad writers." Some instructors, aware of this perception, offer grade incentives for writing center visits, and the administrator might consider discussing this option with faculty. The hope is that after some initial required visits for tutoring, students will go to the writing center on their own initiative and find it a place in which their ideas are energized.

ESOL students provide a special challenge to a new administrator. Many non-native speakers of English—those who have spoken it for years as well as those just becoming familiar with the English language—experience high levels of anxiety in trying to produce error-free writing. Tutors working with ESOL students may need to be taught how to manage the tension between using a more holistic approach to writing and addressing the surface errors on these papers. Often these students want a "quick fix" of grammar and punctuation, rather than wanting to seek out writing assistance on a long-term, holistic level. An administrator needs to understand the demographics of ethnic and non-traditional students at the home institution. To facilitate an atmosphere of cultural awareness and sensitivity, the administrator can offer workshops on issues pertaining to diversity and assist new tutors in the best ways to work with clients from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds.

An administrator would also do well to consider the broadening scope of the writing center over the years and look for ways to allow his or her own center to work with writers at all levels after the primary clients are served. Asking questions of veteran writing center staff and faculty members helps: Does the center have the resources to consult with clients who are not students, and does it want to include them in its scope? Do faculty and staff members feel comfortable asking for objective readings of their writing projects? After consulting with colleagues, the administrator may want to consider promoting an open-door policy that welcomes not only students, but all members of the academic community. This may mean implementing programs that address the needs of non-student clientele—perhaps workshops for grammar brush-ups or for grant-writing skills.

9. Publicity. For many writing centers, a particularly heavy challenge lies in being certain that they are perceived positively in their academic communities. The writing center administrator may be perceived as filling a void on campus and have grateful customers waiting on the center's doorstep; conversely, the administrator may face the daunting task of convincing the community that the writing center's services are not punishment. Several avenues to market the center can challenge false impressions or introduce the writing center to the broad range of students attending the home institution. The diversity of the institution should be reflected in those who visit its writing center. Service should be provided not only to basic writers—those in developmental writing classes—but to those in writing-intensive, honors, and other classes that require higher-level writing. Students will return semester after semester, needing to polish specialized writing skills.

The primary method of publicizing the center's services may be through the distribution of written material: brochures included in orientation packets to freshmen and transfers; fliers placed on bulletin boards, student lounges, and in faculty mailboxes; and advertisements in the student newspaper. A new administrator should use other methods as well, such as offering tours for classes, producing a small videotape for drop-in viewing, and asking instructors to set aside some time for the director to introduce the writing center's services to individual classes. Each of the centers I visited uses at least two of these methods for promotion.

10. Evaluation of success. During the first year, as the new administrator attends to the particulars of the writing center program and its affiliations, he or she should keep detailed records of activities and clientele. This can be done by keeping track of all facets of the operation. Sign-in sheets determine who is using the center—students, faculty, and staff—and for what purposes. It is important to track the number of students whose learning needs make the center eligible for state and federal funding. Aside from this, any record of visitors helps to show how the center is perceived on campus by showing who is using it. This information, when compiled into regular reports, is critical to the evaluation of current programs and the formation of new ones. The center should provide a survey after each tutoring session; those receiving tutoring can provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of individual tutors and the writing center as a whole. In examining problem areas, in ongoing staff meetings, for instance, the administrator, along with other staff, can generate several possible solutions.

By examining notes, records, and surveys every semester, an administrator can thoroughly evaluate the writing center's overall success and its contribution to the

institution. The evaluation would also assess changes in the level and types of activities, leading, if necessary, to adjustments in materials and methods as appropriate to the center's goals and objectives.

Working with the institution's retention administrators, the head of the writing center, for instance, can evaluate whether high-risk students are motivated to stay in school through the writing center's efforts. This motivation, along with grades, can be measured by making comparisons between those students who regularly visit the writing center and those who do not.

Final Thoughts

By nature, the writing center is flexible in form and function. One point that administrators seem to agree upon is that there is no single way to determine its role in higher education. Proponents from one side argue that the writing center should not seek to be either the writing authority or the intellectual center of the institution it serves. Says Stephen North, "I do not believe it is finally a good thing for a writing center to be seen as taking upon its shoulders the whole institution's (real or imagined) sins of illiteracy [. . .]" ("Revisiting" 17). On the other hand, Alice Gillam and others say, at its core the writing center must seek such a central position, so that it can be a place of energized learning and understanding for the academic comInunity. Furthermore, in "Collaborative Learning Theory and Peer Tutoring Practice," Gillam asserts that a single theory of writing center practice is detrimental to the success of the profession as a whole. Writing centers, she claims, actually move backward from that, using actual practices of their daily activities to create a theory that works for them (39). That is because writing

centers respond to the unique benefits and challenges of the academic environments in which they reside. In their 1991 article "The Evolution of a Writing Center: 1972-1990," William Yahner and William Murdick claim that "writing centers are subjected to the same social and political forces that affect all educational issues and decisions" (26). They advise their fellow writing center administrators to be active and involved in the campus community, to "recognize our vulnerability, our penetrability, and [to] prepare to live politically if we are to continue to grow as progressive resources" in the academic circle (26).

North, too, examines writing centers' need to grow and change in focus and practice. Indeed, "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center,'" his second look at the tenets he set forth for writing center administrators, shows that the nature of writing center is always changing: "The general idea, perhaps, can still be said to hold. I believe—I want to say that I know—that an hour of talk about writing at the right time between the right people can be more valuable than a semester of mandatory class meetings when that timing isn't right" ("Revisiting" 16).

These ongoing and complex changes in our society are mirrored in the writing center diction. Before a new administrator can establish what sort of writing center structure or tutoring methods might best serve the populations of his or her institution, he or she must recognize that there can be no basic design that will fit anywhere and accommodate every person. The most plausible way to create a model is to review what works—and what does not work—at other colleges and universities with similar characteristics in their respective student bodies. To do this, the writing center administrator must read the past of writing centers with insight—understanding factors

that prompted change and growth—and the present with a keen interest in the

development of a community of writers. Meanwhile, the extensive changes that have

occurred over the past sixty years lead to a single principle for a successful writing center:

be ready to meet the unforeseen challenges.

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Appendix
Writing Centers at Three Institutions of Higher Education

	SUNY College at Geneseo	University of Rochester	Monroe Community College
Physical Space			
Facilities and Capacity	Office space within the Department of English	Open area with separate Manager's office and separate private tutoring office	Shared open space with Office of Services for Students with Disabilities
Tutoring Areas	Tables with PCs	Large private office; tables for conferencing	Tables for conferencing; longer tables for independent work
Technology			
Computers/Printers	Ten PCs, printers	5 PCs, printers	6 PCs, 2 printers
Operations			
Hours	Drop-ins: M-Thurs 8-11, Sun 3-6; Appointments M-Thurs 1-5	Mon 8-5, 6-9; Tues-Fri 8-5; Sun 4-7	Mon-Thurs 9-7; Fri 9-4
Appointment Types	Drop-in appointments and scheduled appointments	Drop-in appointments (up to 30 minutes) and scheduled appointments (up to one hour)	Drop-in appointments (up to 20 minutes)
Intake Forms	Yes	Yes	Yes (to determine funding)
Post-Tutoring Evaluations	None	Yes	Yes; also comment box

Appendix
Writing Centers at Three Institutions of Higher Education

	SUNY College at Geneseo	University of Rochester	Monroe Community College
Identity			
Number of students	5,600	7,400	14,000
Employees	Faculty mentor, secretary (shared with English Dept.), 10 undergraduate peer tutors	Graduate student manager, 5-10 graduate student tutors	Director, secretary, 5-10 professional part time tutors
Administrative Line	Department of English	Academic Services and Support	Student Support Services
Degree of Inservice Training for Tutors	Regular group meetings with faculty advisor; assigned readings	General information session; regular staff meetings	General information session; regular staff meetings
Clientele			
Audience	Undergraduate students from all academic areas	Mainly River Campus graduate and undergraduate students, faculty, and staff	Commuter students at Brighton and Damon Campuses, all academic areas.
Campus Awareness			
Publicity	Class announcements; web site;student newspaper; fliers	Class announcements and presentation; web site; student publications; fliers; brochure	Class presentations by staff; student newspaper; fliers