

Writing Center Administrator Guidance in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Progression of a Position Statement

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Introduction

In 2020, institutions of higher education worldwide began grappling with the spread of the coronavirus. Little was known about transmission of the virus at first, and countries moved to lockdowns and travel restrictions. For Writing Center Administrators (WCAs) in the United States, early- to mid-March marked the beginning of widespread uncertainty over how in-person writing center programming could or should continue. Those early months were spent transitioning programs online and adapting to a “new normal” as many campuses moved to remote learning options through the end of the semester and into the summer. By April it was known that the coronavirus spread through the air via droplets and aerosols. Mask mandates and stay-at-home orders were implemented across the country to curb transmissions. Around that time, universities seeking strong fall enrollments began to indicate at least some level of in-person programming for the fall semester. Unsure of how to proceed when a vaccine was still not available, WCAs began looking to each other for guidance on addressing their concerns with upper administration on their campuses. It is here our story of collaboration begins. We were among the WCAs seeking guidance and assurance about how to proceed with programming while prioritizing the safety of students, faculty, and staff. Below we share stories of our own institutional and personal contexts in spring and summer of 2020 and the impetus for our collaboration on a position statement.

Impetus for Collaboration: Our Stories of Summer 2020

Marilee

I direct the writing center at a large, urban campus in the Midwest. The Center includes two physical locations and offers synchronous online appointments. Since my hire as the first tenure-track director of the Center in 2015, there have been many departures and changes to the assistant director role, meaning that I have often worked beyond my single course-reallocation each semester to maintain writing center operations as a new assistant director is onboarded. The current assistant director took on the role as an MA student on a half-time assistantship and was hired full-time in August 2019 as a visiting lecturer for one year, potentially renewable up to three years. The pandemic hit just as my writing center was starting to stabilize after years of unevenness in the assistant director role.

In February 2020, the Center underwent external program review, and we received the review report just days after the lockdown orders in March. The report indicated that administrative stability should

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be the writing center's top priority. This is the response I had hoped for, and I was optimistic it could provide a path toward hiring our assistant director in a non-visiting role and help us move toward more sustainable writing center operations. In late April, I was told that due to reduced resources, there was no funding for the assistant director's part-time summer appointment. This news felt particularly demoralizing given both the review team's insistence that administrative stability was imperative for our Center's sustainability and our quick (and I think impressive) efforts to pivot to fully online programming in mid-March. The decision not to fund the assistant director's summer appointment would hamper our necessarily collaborative efforts to prepare for adjustments to our daily operations to accommodate writing consultants and student writers during the ongoing pandemic as well as leave the assistant director without pay during a global health crisis.

In addition, opening the Center for the summer without the assistant director would double my own labor without additional compensation, during a time of large-scale disruption. If the writing support and real-time connection to other students provided by the writing center wasn't seen as valuable enough to adequately resource in a pandemic, would it ever be seen as valuable? Campus leaders were very worried about finances and were not able to attend to the support of the writing center. At one point I was asked to "just open a little bit," a request that angered me. How does one open a writing center a little bit? There's a base-level of administrative work and supervision required no matter how many hours the writing center offers each week, and I knew that the ongoing response to the pandemic and preparing for fall would be overshadowed by the need to offer consultants on-the-ground support if we were to open. I chose not to open, which was met with frustration. I, too, was frustrated.

Campus leaders called emergency meetings, held over Zoom, every couple of weeks throughout the summer. At each meeting, I felt increasing uncertainty and anxiety. My already under-resourced writing center was expected to open for in-person programming in the fall, and given what was known about the coronavirus, I worried this was the wrong decision for promoting public health and pedagogically sound writing center programming. I checked in with other WCAs to see what they were planning to do. I asked if and how they were addressing pushback from upper administration on their campuses. I waited, impatiently, for the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) to share some guidance but none came. In June, I reached out to members of IWCA leadership. I asked them if other IWCA members had come to them with concerns about returning to in-person programming in the fall and if it would be possible to get a working group together (or if I could join one) to create a position statement with recommendations for WCAs during the pandemic. They responded quickly with interest but indicated that position statements must go through a three-step process and a vote by the full IWCA membership, which might be at odds with the time-sensitive nature of my concerns.

A few days later I reached out to WCAs via the Directors of Writing Centers Facebook group. Soon after that I met with Lisa and began brainstorming what we called "WCA Guidance in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic." In July, Lisa and I shared our early draft via the Directors of Writing Centers Facebook group and the WCenter listserv and asked for other WCAs to suggest revisions and provide feedback. At that time Jenelle and Duane joined the effort, and we gathered almost sixty signatures. I hoped that even if WCAs didn't sign the document, they could find the guidance useful in negotiations with their own campus stakeholders about how to safely provide writing center services.

Duane

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic hit our writing center and our campus community hard. Not only did we see a downturn in sessions hosted, but our writing center and institution as a whole endured a significant budget cut heading into 2020. Specific to our writing center, we lost our full-time administrative assistant and our part-time assistant director—leaving me as the lone full-time administrator, with only the support of a part-time employee. Furthermore, we were part of a restructuring that had us move from an academic department to a University College setting within a Department of Student Success. Change was happening quickly. When I, along with my co-authors, started drafting the position statement below, my thinking was that writing centers needed to be available to assist students in whatever form we could and do so in the safest way possible. Though my knowledge of online writing center consultations and the possibilities therein was minimal going into the pandemic, I knew that this was the best route to take, and the position statement would help assert this to those at our institutions who needed to hear it. However, because of my institution’s campus population and geographic location, I had a feeling that our writing center operating completely online would not be possible . . . and I was correct. To ensure that we were providing services to any and all of our students, I was told that our writing center had to offer some in-person services. This made me nervous for a variety of reasons—chief among them that I, my part-time employee, and many of my consultants have autoimmune diseases. Safety and health concerns were obviously a worry. So, with a limited administrative staff and fewer consultants than we’ve had before, we launched our service options: limited in-person sessions, synchronous video conferencing, and asynchronous assignment review via our learning-management system, D2L. I wasn’t quite sure where our writing center was headed; however, I knew that it was my responsibility to ensure we were supporting our student population and doing so in the safest way I could.

Lisa

I left a WCA position at the end of 2019 and began 2020 in a faculty role. As the pandemic hit, I moved my courses online within an afternoon. However, I watched with concern as writing center colleagues far and wide were asked to shift entire programs to new platforms and retrain staff within the same timeframe and often without additional resources. Then, within a matter of weeks, many WCAs were being asked to rehaul whole programs again to move back to modified in-person work. Many were being required to return to some form of in-person programming without the funds, time, or staff needed to redesign their programs in the context of a pandemic. With a background in in-person and online writing center work, I found myself sharing writing center materials and generating lists of considerations and scholarship, particularly about online tutoring. This led to collaborating with colleagues on this position statement about the importance and viability of online writing center work, especially during a global pandemic. In the fall of 2020, I returned to writing center administration at a different institution, and I renewed my efforts to increase stakeholders’ understanding of online writing center work as essential to our field.

Jenelle

I began working for a fully online university in 2019, less than a year before the pandemic started. I had worked in writing centers for eight years and was now working to support online student research as a coordinator for the institutional review board (IRB). At my current institution, most students are returning adults in doctoral programs, all students take classes online (with no in-person requirements), and the majority of faculty and staff work from home, including myself. While my institution is already

always online, the pandemic still affected the day-to-day lives of our students. Many of them worked full-time, in-person jobs with a risk of exposure, had kids now learning at home, were teachers themselves moving things online in a hurry, were medical professionals treating people with COVID-19, or lost family members to COVID-19. Our students' anxiety skyrocketed, and they had less bandwidth for navigating the IRB process—a requirement of their doctoral programs. Prior to that, the IRB had had a rough relationship with students and had not provided much support or transparency for the IRB approval process. I worked with our new IRB director to drastically change our day-to-day operations and increase opportunities for students to directly interact with IRB members. In May 2020, I used my writing center background to create an “education arm” for the IRB and started leading synchronous group writing sessions for the IRB application, which drastically reduced the amount of time that students spent in the IRB process.

Outside of my job, I tried to use my expertise to support other writing center professionals who were moving online. At that time, I was a co-founder and co-coordinator of the Online Writing Centers Association (OWCA), an informal group that supported online writing center work. In March 2020, the community created a free mentoring program for those moving online and began maintaining a list of free online events being offered by other professionals and organizations. Marilee and Lisa reached out to me and asked if the OWCA would like to be involved in writing a position statement. I was excited to join them in this effort and bring more awareness to the benefits of online writing support during and after the pandemic.

From Story to Statement: Creating a Forward-Looking Framework

Throughout spring and summer 2020, we were each coping with the impact of the pandemic on our writing centers and the larger writing center community in different ways. With our varying backgrounds and needs, we came together around the shared understanding that online consulting is a pedagogically sound approach and that offering in-person programming in the midst of a global pandemic—during which a mysterious disease spread through respiratory droplets and aerosols and was devastating communities across the globe—was not responsible or necessary. Our guidance offers advice that is not just relevant to safety during a public health crisis but also offers information about how online consulting is more accessible to many writers.

With the context of our stories above, we now present the original guidance statement from July 2020, which is organized into sections on (1) physical, mental, and emotional health and safety, (2) pedagogy and consistency of programming, and (3) access and equity. We see these as three main focal points for writing centers to attend to during and beyond the pandemic. Our advice, while originally written for point-of-need application during a global health crisis, is relevant to the future of writing centers as a discipline. Following the original statement, we return to individual snapshots, sharing stories of how we've worked through institutional and disciplinary concerns throughout more than a year of pandemic life. Finally, we end with suggestions for continued application of the ideas in our statement.

Below is our July 2020 statement in its original form.

WCA Guidance in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, July 2020

At this time of global pandemic, many writing centers are under great pressure to offer on-campus, in-person tutoring sessions and services. As writing center professionals, we propose that any writing

center programming offered be authorized at the discretion of individual writing center administrators (WCAs) who can draw from their disciplinary experience and expertise to make the best decisions for their particular context. Guided by existing [scholarship](#) (Online Writing Centers Association) and established practice, we recommend online tutoring as a primary platform for tutoring to ensure learning environments and interactions that are safe and healthy, pedagogically sound and consistent, and accessible and equitable.

PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

The [CDC \(2020\) recommends](#) that institutions of higher education should “provide student support services virtually, as feasible” (see section on “Telework and Virtual Meetings”). We agree. No faculty, staff, or student should be asked to risk their health and the health of their families by working and/or learning on campus when there is a viable remote/online option.

Considerations

- Given what is known about the transmission of COVID-19, in-person writing center tutoring, typically consisting of indoor conversation-based interactions in close quarters for 30-50+ minutes, may be dangerous for writers and writing center employees. Online tutoring is a pedagogically sound approach (Online Writing Centers Association) already supported by many writing centers and would mitigate the possibility of transmission.
- Enforcing mask wearing and social distancing may not be possible, despite guidelines and policies, placing writing center staff providing in-person services at higher risk physically than those working online.
- Enforcing guidelines for in-person programming may lead to conflicts and put staff and students at greater risk physically, mentally, and emotionally.
- Writing center employees are typically undergraduate and graduate students and contingent faculty and staff who do not receive employee medical benefits and may not be able to afford adequate health insurance. Consequently, writing center staff may have to choose between quitting a job that may be their only source of income and potentially contracting a virus and not being able to afford or access proper medical care.
- Opening campuses for in-person programming brings up additional safety concerns for [Black, LGBTQ+, People of Color, and Persons with Disabilities](#) (Zita Nunes, 2020). Among these concerns is that Black and Latinx people are [far more likely to die from COVID-19](#) (Tiffany N. Ford, Sarah Reber, and Richard V. Reeves, 2020) than White people across all age categories. Moving to in-person support will disproportionately impact the health of folks with marginalized identity positions.
- Many writing centers shifted from in-person to online programming during the first several months of the pandemic in spring 2020, which significantly increased the physical, mental, and emotional workload of writing center workers. Such increased and demanding labor is unsustainable and would be repeated if WCAs and their staff are required to reconfigure and continually adjust in-person programming during the pandemic, which is likely if guidelines and the health of employees are in flux.

- Since many writing center employees are students, the stress of working in-person in a high-risk environment may affect their academic performance and mental, emotional, and physical health.
- Requiring student employees and/or contingent workers to physically return to campus, particularly if their school work or other employment is remote, demonstrates an unacceptable disregard for the health and safety of writing center staff.
- For those with preexisting physical or mental health conditions, the stress of increased and shifting in-person work demands may contribute to further deterioration of health.
- Writing centers are often already under resourced and the need to purchase additional safety equipment (e.g. plexiglass, cleaning products) and coordinate safety efforts with other units will require more resources at a time when university systems are projecting financial losses. Even if financial resources are available, purchasing and installing these items in a timely fashion may not be feasible.
- Online tutoring complies with [the CDC's "Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education"](#) (2020)

PEDAGOGY AND CONSISTENCY OF PROGRAMMING

During this time of pandemic, alignment with writing center pedagogy and consistency of programming and practice is more likely possible online.

Considerations

- Recommended social distancing and the wearing of masks reduce the pedagogical efficacy of writing center work by limiting the physical sharing of texts, impeding both verbal and nonverbal communication, and decreasing opportunities for collaboration and establishing rapport. Online tutoring, in its various forms, allows for the sharing of documents, various forms of verbal and nonverbal communication, and opportunities for collaboration and rapport building while also effectively complying with COVID-19 health guidelines.
- Preparing writing center staff to offer in-person writing center programming with new social distancing and mask measures will require additional training and possibly ongoing training as physical conditions and governmental and institutional recommendations change.
- WCAs and others within institutional frameworks are being given different directives on a daily and/or weekly basis, thereby making it nearly impossible to plan for safe, responsible operations in our centers and likely leading to confusion, conflict, and lack of compliance and consistency with policies and procedures.

ACCESS AND EQUITY

Concerns about access and equity have been used to justify providing in-person programming, but such a move will likely decrease access and equity. Offering in-person sessions in the name of access implies that such services are safe, which they are not. Offering in-person programming will needlessly endanger student employees and student writers.

Considerations

- In order to comply with social distancing and cleaning guidelines, fewer people will be able to access physical writing center spaces at the same time, and tutoring sessions may need to be shortened to accommodate physical setup and cleanup between sessions. These measures may decrease access to writing center services in general.
- Access to technology may be provided for the purpose of accessing writing support without offering in-person programming. For instance, universities may designate space with computers and/or wireless access for students to use while working for a writing center or getting support from a writing center.
- Online tutoring often increases accessibility by altering demands on time and shared physical space and providing a wider range of possibilities for communication and collaboration. A focus on in-person tutoring may decrease access for working students, caregivers, or students who make use of adaptive technologies.
- Students who are hard of hearing or d/Deaf may not be able to hear their consultant from 6 ft away or read their lips underneath a mask. Arranging sign language interpreters, note takers, or other providers to be physically present may be decreased due to COVID concerns.
- In-person sessions demand high levels of linguistic capital, and online sessions, particularly those with recorded feedback, allow writers/learners to return to feedback in ways that enhance communication.
- English as an Additional Language (EAL) writers may also find in-person writing center programming less accessible since nonverbal communication will be altered by masks and distancing and sharing texts may be more difficult. Online video, shared screens, and written and audiovisual communication will remain available and increase accessibility of writing center services.
- Online tutoring may also be more pedagogically appropriate for students with social anxiety or those writing about sensitive or personal topics.

CONCLUSION

To provide safe, pedagogically sound, disciplinarily informed, accessible, and equitable writing center programming for writers and employees during a global pandemic, online programming should be the primary platform for delivery.

RELEVANT STATEMENTS AND RESOURCES

In addition, we support the following statements, which speak to the safety, access, and equity concerns that we share.

Accessible Campus Action Alliance. (2020, July 10). *Beyond “High-Risk”: Statement on Disability and Campus Re-openings*. <https://bit.ly/accesscampusalliance>

Bell, L. E. (2020, July 20). Rethinking What to Preserve as Writing Centers Move Online. *Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders*. <https://www.wlnjournal.org/blog/2020/07/rethinking-what-to-preserve-as-writing-centers-move-online/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html>

Conference on College Composition and Communication and Council of Writing Program Administrators. (2020, June). *Joint Statement in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*. <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/cccc-and-cwpa-joint-statement-in-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic>

García de Müeller, G., Cortes, A., Gonzales, L., Hanson, A., Jackson, C., Kahn, S., Lopez, B E., & Simmons, B. (2020). Combating white supremacy in a pandemic: Antiracist, anticapitalist, and socially just policy recommendations in response to COVID-19. *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics, Deliberations*. <http://journalofmultimodalrhetorics.com/combating-white-supremacy-in-a-pandemic-antiracist-anticapitalist-and-socially-just-policy-recommendations-in-response-to-covid-19>

Gaiimo, G. (2020). Laboring in a time of crisis: The entanglement of wellness and work in writing centers. *Praxis*, 17.3, <http://www.praxisuwc.com/173-gaiimo>.

Online Writing Centers Association. (2020). *Vision*. <http://onlinewritingcenters.org/about/vision>

Statement of Academic Faculty of Georgia Tech on the COVID-19 Crisis and Fall 2020 Semester. (2020, July 2). <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdjyLGfLIncWtm8fntduj3mMhZhhGtF2khGYHNJdZIXu1xBhg/viewform>

Our original statement ends here.

What We've Learned: Subsequent Research

While the position statement was originally developed and distributed during summer 2020, scholarship since that time further supports it. Writing center narratives note that online writing center work allows programs to maintain established writing center purpose and pedagogy, while offering an online tutoring format that “has benefits for many learners” (Brubaker, 2020). Other practitioners note that despite a learning curve for tutors, offering synchronous and asynchronous tutoring has provided increased access to writing center services for many students (Widen & Prebel, 2020). Taking a larger view, the CDC (2020) has issued multiple updates since the summer of 2020, including *Guidance for Businesses and Employers* to “Use technology to promote social distancing (e.g., telework and virtual meetings),” “Close/limit use of shared spaces,” and “Deliver services remotely (e.g., phone, video, or web).” The CDC’s most recent *Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education* (2020) recommends providing “student support services virtually, as feasible” and ensuring “appropriate accommodations, modifications, and assistance are provided for education to remain accessible for students with disabilities or those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID.” This is notable since students with disabilities are one of the groups most impacted by the pandemic.

In fact, scholarship published in 2020 offers reminders of how online tutoring can provide increased access for vulnerable or underserved students. Writing center scholars have addressed how asynchronous online screencast tutoring may better serve students with disabilities (Fleming, 2020) and

how failing to consider online tutoring as part of writing center services reinforces ableism (Dembsey, 2020). Other research shows how educators value context-specific online writing center services over commercial online tutoring providers and how preferences for online over in-person tutoring is often driven by students' socioeconomic status, particularly for working-class students (Wetzel & Lieske, 2020). Research has also revealed how the pandemic has disproportionately affected women as the primary caregivers in most households (Karageorge, 2020) as well as first-generation students (Laidler, 2020) and people of color (CDC, 2021; Laidler, 2020; Harper, 2020; Tai et al., 2021), all of whom are more likely to benefit from online options. In fact, polling data from December 2020 indicates that an overwhelming majority of students hope online learning options extend beyond the pandemic, with caregivers, Black, and Latinx students signaling the most reluctance to return to in-person classroom learning (Burke, 2021). Scholars are now advising that online learning options that are responsive to the needs of students remain key to our educational systems and suggesting that while brought on by the pandemic, these shifts to online offerings have been needed for some time (Barsotti, 2020).

However, online learning and employment, including online tutoring, do not come without challenges. Technology and stable internet access continue to impact those from low-income backgrounds who are disproportionately caregivers (Burke, 2021) and students of color (Harper, 2020). Additionally, online work is taxing, particularly synchronous online work, dubbed "Zoom fatigue" by scholars (Bailenson, 2021; Nadler, 2020) who are already identifying its adverse effects on online writing center tutors (Nadler, 2020). Additionally, the advent of increased online work and the blurring of home and work boundaries for many employees has led the CDC (2020) to recommend people clearly define the end of work hours when working at home as a way to preserve physical and mental health (Employees: How to Cope with Job Stress). Clearly, although the WCA Guidance in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Position Statement was developed within the context of an ongoing pandemic, the research and effective modifications resulting from this context should shape revisions to our understanding, scholarship, and practice of writing center work.

Where We Are Now: Our Stories in Spring 2021

Marilee

Throughout the pandemic, I've realized more fully that what I'm working through is burnout, "a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity" (Mayo Clinic). After years of trying to make my writing center more stable without the institutional resources I need, while pre-tenure and parenting young children, I am having a hard time keeping positive momentum for my work. The pandemic made a difficult situation worse, and when my institution wasn't able to provide me with support or guidance, I sought out my professional organizations. When they weren't able to meet my needs, I found ways to get involved and move the conversation.

The summer of 2020 was notable not only for widespread illness, death, and uncertainty pertaining to the pandemic, but also for ongoing racism and xenophobia from positions of power within the US. In addition to initiating the statement on guidance for WCAs in response to COVID-19, I co-authored an open letter to IWCA asking "for the development of a strategic imperative that not only includes appreciable actions towards making our field more inclusive and just but also offers decisive leadership in the face of mounting crises" (Smith et al., 2020). The letter opened conversations with IWCA leadership that has led to the creation of an inclusion and social justice task force, which is working

toward structural change within the organization to make it more inclusive and equitable. In my role as president of the East Central Writing Centers Association (ECWCA), I've worked with the board to revise our structure to offer more programming that creates spaces for connection including hosting town halls, offering monthly WCA coffee hours, and starting a semester-long book club focused on Wooten et al.'s *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration*. Through these initiatives, I seek to create meaningful and sustainable support mechanisms for the broader writing center community and myself in order to navigate difficult times in ways that involve human connection and solidarity.

While, ultimately, campus leadership listened to my concerns and did not require my Center to provide in-person programming in fall 2020, it has continued to be a lean time, and the future of the Center is uncertain. Funding for the Center has been of concern for several years due to an ongoing fiscal crisis at the college level, which has been worsened by the pandemic. We will be open for in-person programming in fall 2021, and I am nervously navigating the complexities necessary to carry the important things I've learned during the pandemic into future practices, not wanting a simple return to the "before times" but to acknowledge and carry forward practices that have made my Center more accessible and equitable. I do not know what the future holds for me or my Center, but I am working to establish boundaries that can be useful to the larger discipline, help me promote the needs of my Center, and allow me to care for myself to protect against further burnout.

Duane

While the pandemic era has certainly been interesting for our writing center and institution, I think the biggest takeaway is that our center has been available to everyone who has sought out our services. We haven't had to turn anyone away and have been able to work with students from all disciplines, undergraduate and graduate students alike, and have seen incredible results. Our overall student satisfaction, based on post-session surveying, is in the mid-to-high ninetieth percentile. We're also making meaningful connections with faculty we've never worked with before. Ultimately, our center learned that we can, in fact, offer multiple modes of assistance and do so successfully. Did I want to learn to do this during a pandemic? Absolutely not. We were moving in this direction prior to COVID-19 and had plans in place; the pandemic just got us there faster. Did I want to offer in-person services during such a complicated time? Honestly, I really didn't and still have reservations about currently operating in this mode. However, I learned that I could do so and work diligently to keep myself, my staff, and the students as safe as possible. In addition to the successes in the WC, I found meaningful and purposeful work in my role as the Georgia state representative of the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA), helping fellow WCAs in my state connect with one another during these challenging times. I also managed to publish and continue pursuing my own interests in the field. Do know, however, that I'm not asserting every writing center and administrator should look for successes and innovation during this time of strife. Every writing center is different and contexts are different. My experience with our writing center has, interestingly enough, been one that will take us in a new and exciting direction post COVID-19. Online services are most definitely here to stay, and my consultants and I are looking forward to purposely assisting students in all the ways we can as we move forward. I also look forward to continuing to grow as a professional, making sure that I can best serve my campus community & fellow WCAs.

Lisa

Starting a new WCA position mid pandemic meant I did not have to explain why online tutoring is essential writing center work. While my current center has offered limited online tutoring for almost two decades, now almost all of our main writing center, English Language Learner (ELL) tutoring, graduate writing services, and course-embedded tutoring are online for synchronous sessions and workshops. We have also begun bringing asynchronous offerings online to make our services more inclusive and equitable. Though the limited number of in-person appointments we currently offer typically get filled, the demand for online tutoring is greater than ever before. As we step into a post-pandemic era, it is unlikely that student demand for online services will dissipate, and pressure from upper administration to return in-person next semester has already begun. So the question is now how to scale an existing in-person program to include robust online programming when resources and staff are maxed out and burned out. As an engaged member of IWCA and Online Writing Centers Association (OWCA) and as president of the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association (RMWCA), a region that encompasses eight states in the Intermountain West, I know my story is a privileged one. Many colleagues are facing similar challenges with hefty budget cuts, smaller staffs, and doubled workloads. WCA work is often invisible and taxing labor, and few outside our field fully understand the weight of WCA work during the pandemic and social unrest of 2020. This past year, as individual, regional, and global writing center communities, we have collaborated and commiserated as a means of survival, but moving forward, we need to find ways to move WCA work from survivable to sustainable.

Jenelle

My department has continued to expand online writing support for the IRB application, including recruiting faculty to help lead more group writing sessions at various times and adding asynchronous services for students with busy schedules. Similar to Lisa, I recognize that my story is also a privileged one. I did not have to argue for the merits of online learning since my online institution already implements it every day. For those in brick-and-mortar institutions, getting support for online services can be much more difficult and require extra time for writing proposals and making arguments, as I've had to do at my previous institutions.

Unfortunately, arguments against online writing support also permeate writing center literature, which has made it only more difficult for writing center professionals to make these arguments in brick-and-mortar institutions. I have long been frustrated by the lack of support for online writing center work, which was one of the reasons I co-founded the Online Writing Centers Community in 2018. My co-founders and I had long-term plans for growing the community, but by mid-2020, I was convinced we should respond to the kairotic moment and become a professional association as soon as possible. During summer 2020, I researched how to start a nonprofit corporation, drafted articles of incorporation, and drafted initial bylaws. In August 2020, we submitted our nonprofit paperwork and became the Online Writing Centers Association (OWCA). After voting in our bylaws, voting in our first Officers, and creating a system for tracking members, we officially announced the OWCA to the writing center community in October 2020 and received our 501(c)(3) tax exempt status in January 2021. I serve as Founding President of the OWCA at the time of this article. My hope is that the OWCA will provide public resources and virtual networking opportunities for writing center professionals during and after the pandemic, model how to prioritize disability and accessibility in virtual spaces and create our own position statements within our first few years.

Future Directions: Recommendations, Reflections, and Applications

Through our stories, the statement, and subsequent research, we've shared our experiences and guidance. We now offer up a few suggestions for continued reflection on and application of the guidance we've shared:

- Consider your institutional context and how your writing center serves writers—especially moving out of pandemic mode. What have been your experiences and how did you respond? What could be gleaned from those experiences—both positive and negative?
- Plan for and possibly negotiate center operations moving forward, considering our suggestions as fellow WCAs, guidelines from professional organizations, and ongoing research and resource development.
- Let this document serve as a reminder that online writing center services are legitimate and essential to our work and how we serve our writers. Writers exist in a variety of contexts, so we must work toward purposefully serving them to the best of our abilities beyond our current pandemic settings.
- Use this document as evidence that writing center work and our field are visible and essential to the overall framework of academic institutional contexts. In order for retention, progression, and graduation to occur, academic support units/services must exist, and be available to writers across our campuses.
- Participate in professional writing center organizations to prioritize the development and circulation of resources, such as position statements, that WCAs can use to make the disciplinary work of writing centers visible to stakeholders. Writing center professionals similarly exist in a variety of contexts and so virtual networking opportunities are vital for increasing participation and perspectives in the writing center community.
- Contribute to research-driven scholarship focused on access and equity in writing centers, such as online consulting, disability justice, and linguistic justice. Scholarship leads to innovations in writing center pedagogy and programming and informs the development of position statements like ours.

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