

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Primary Materials and Historical Narratives: A Case Study of the Ball State Writing Center

STUDENT: Matthew Balk

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As writing center scholarship has continued to expand both in focus and scope, more writing centers have begun to examine their local histories, and in doing so are starting to ask questions about their origins. However, there still remains a distinct lack of longitudinal research in writing center scholarship, specifically, studies that analyze the complex historical narratives that are created by individual writing centers. This project has explored the primary materials created over a period of four decades at the Ball State Writing Center, located in Muncie, Indiana. The primary goal of this project was to analyze the materials developed by writing center directors and staff to see what they could reveal about technology usage, professionalization, branding, and historical narratives in writing center studies. Additionally, I was also focused on organizing the archived materials in the Ball State Writing Center in a more formal manner, complete with digital finding aid, in order to aid future researchers who might be interested in these materials.

By using archival research methods, I examined the primary materials that have been archived in the Ball State Writing Center, including, but not limited to, annual reports, student evaluation forms, videotapes, photos, and tutor training manuals. I have also conducted several interviews with former directors and tutors of the Ball State Writing

Center in order to triangulate some of my findings from the writing center archives.

The findings of this project have determined that the influence of external forces on a writing center (in this case, the Ball State Writing Program) have had a major impact on the direction and work conducted by tutors and directors, especially in regards to the professionalization and branding of the writing center. This study also explores how different technologies were incorporated by the center, and how adopting these tools significantly impacted the direction of the tutoring work the center conducted with Ball State University students.

There is much that is left to be studied about writing center historical narratives, particularly in regards to professionalization, technology, and branding. Archival research will continue to play a large role in writing center scholarship as more directors start to think critically about how the documents and materials they use on a daily basis have evolved over time.