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A Current Model for High School Writing Centers

A Thesis Presented

by

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Abstract of the Thesis

A Current Model for High School Writing Centers

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Academics across the country seem to agree that there is value in the existence of Writing Centers at the University level, but very few exist at the secondary level. Recent test scores demonstrate that more adequate writing instruction needs to be provided to High School students, and this thesis asserts that a Writing Center can answer this call to action. Through an analysis of the founding of a Writing Center in a High School on Long Island, New York, the author displays the strengths as well as shortcomings of inserting a Writing Center into such an environment. She provides a current model through which High Schools can adopt their own Writing Centers, and links the model to current scholarship. Lastly, the thesis explores the effectiveness of Writing Centers in encouraging higher order thinking as well as in answering the call of the Common Core Standards.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	Page 1
Chapter 2: Establishing an Ethos for the Writing Center	Page 2
Chapter 3: Tutor Requirements and Training	Page 9
Chapter 4: Technical Components of the Writing Center	Page 23
Chapter 5: And They're Off! (to a rocky start)	Page 27
Chapter 6: Continuously Developing Their Practice	Page 31
Chapter 7: A Glorious End to a Difficult Year	Page 36
Chapter 8: The End and the Future	Page 39
Works Cited	Page 41

List of Figures

Informational Flyer	Page vi
Informational Worksheet	Page vii
Informational Meeting Addendum	Page viii
Tutoring Session: Student Information Sheet	Page ix
Venn Diagram	Page x
Graphic Organizer	Page xi
Congratulatory Letter	Page xii
Writing Center Schedule	Page xiii
Sign-in/out Sheet	Page xiv
Tutoring Session Pass	Page xv
Rendition of "12 Days of Christmas"	Page xv
Writing Center Voucher	Page xv
Thesis Statement Workshop Flyer	Page xvi

*Do you like writing?
Do you often help your friends with their papers?
Do you need to bolster your community service hours for college applications?*

IF YOU ANSWERED 'YES' TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, YOU SHOULD JOIN THE WRITING CENTER!

Here are the answers to a few questions that you might have:

What is a writing center?

A Writing Center is a place where students can seek help for all types of writing. Since you are currently enrolled in an upper-level English class, you have shown that you understand what it takes to be a proficient writer. Therefore, as a Writing Center tutor, you will be able to pass on your knowledge to your peers as they fulfill their own academic journeys.

What kind of service hours?

Once you become a Writing Center tutor, you will accumulate what are called Academic Community Service Hours. What that means is that you will be providing a service that is more academic in nature. This kind of service will look good on college applications, where those reading your applications are more academically driven and will appreciate the fact that the work you put in was educational.

What is the time commitment?

At most, you will be asked to dedicate two class periods a week. Depending on how many tutors we accumulate, this time allotment might go down to one class period a week. You will also be asked to attend one writing workshop a month. Therefore, you will be asked to commit to a maximum of 7 hours per month. Again, this approximation might change, but I will keep you informed as we progress.

How do I join?

We will be holding an informational meeting on Monday, November 29th, in room A340. Please feel free to join and bring a friend! We will be serving an array of tasty snacks and discussing what makes up a Writing Center! We will also be engaging in a bit of creative writing, so make sure to bring a pen and paper! If you are not able to attend, but are still interested in joining, please stop by room A340 during the day and see me, Ms. Towers.

Hope to see you all there!

Appendix 1: This informational flyer was distributed to each honors/A.P. teacher in the building a few weeks before our first informational meeting. They were asked to distribute them to their students in an effort to draw prospective tutors, and they were also asked to remind students of the date as it approached.

Writing Center Informational Worksheet

Name: _____

Active email address: _____

Cell phone number: _____

English teacher: _____

Why do you want to join the Writing Center? _____

You may be asked to be available for two, 40-minute tutoring sessions per week. Please list the **times as well as the days of the week** that are most convenient for you:

After school: _____

During the school day: _____

What is your favorite genre of writing and why? _____

In which subject area do you feel most comfortable in terms of writing ability? _____

Requirements: In order to secure a position as a tutor, we will need you to complete the following requirements:

1. Participate in at least one of the following workshops:
The Tutoring Process: 12/2 (Thursday), *12/3* (Friday) or *12/8* (Wednesday)
2. Provide two writing samples, one creative and one academic, to be submitted at the workshop above.
3. One subsequent professional development session per month
4. One observation by Ms. Towers every other month

Tutoring sessions will begin on 12/13

Appendix 2: This form was passed out to tutors at the beginning of our informational meeting. They were asked to fill it out and submit the top portion. I then used these sheets for organizational and requirement tracking purposes.

Writing Center Informational Meeting Addendum

1. Do Now: Informational worksheet
2. Introduction
 - A. Who am I, where I have been, and what am I trying to do?
 - B. What is the Writing Center?
 1. The Job
 2. What the job isn't
 3. Protocol- general tutoring session
3. Advertisement
 - A. Explain and give 5 minutes
 - B. Groups- 10 minutes
 1. Read advertisement out loud
 2. Group decides on the best
 - C. Class decides on best and discusses what makes it good
 1. Takes audience into account
 2. Tutors became proficient at pleasing their audience- teachers
 3. Your job is to help them do the same to help them succeed
4. Future Itinerary
 - A. Requirements (informational worksheet)- tear off bottom portion
 1. Diana- MFA students SBU Southampton- Audience 12/2
 2. Writing Samples- 12/3
 3. Mock tutoring session- 12/8
 - B. Information about professional development
 1. Stony Brook/ Suffolk WC- tutoring observations
 2. Writing Workshops with MFA students
 3. Tutoring Strategy Workshops
 4. Writing Groups
 5. Revelations crossover
5. Questions/Concerns/Ideas

Appendix 3: I used this outline to help me organize my ideas for our first informational meeting.

Tutoring Session: Student Information Sheet

Name: _____

Guidance Counselor: _____

Disclaimers:

1. The tutor is not responsible for the grade you receive on your paper. He or she is simply here to be your audience and to offer advice on the paper's development.
2. The tutor is not an editor. He or she is not required to offer grammatical critique. If you would like help specifically on the mechanical aspects of your writing, please contact Ms. Towers, the Writing Center Director.
3. If the tutor is nervous about your safety or the safety of others at any time during the session, he or she may choose to end the session and will be responsible to report his or her concerns to your guidance counselor for safety purposes.

Assignment Information:

Class:

Teacher:

Due date:

Assignment:

At what stage are you at in terms of developing your piece?

- | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Brainstorming | 3. Revising | 5. Presentation |
| 2. Drafting | 4. Proofreading | |

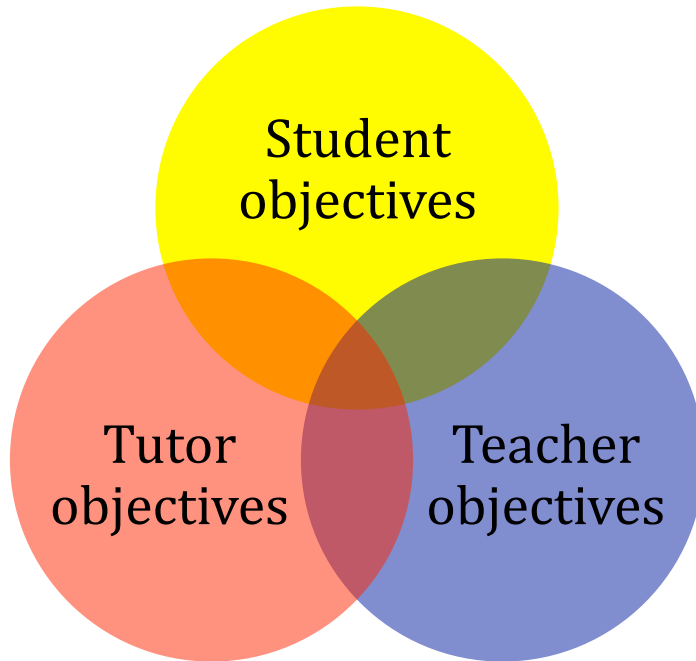
What do you want to get out of this session?

Student signature: _____ Date: _____

Tutor signature: _____ Date: _____

Session Note: _____

Appendix 4: It was required that the tutor and tutee fill out this Student Information Sheet together at the beginning of the session so that I could track the session, set up ground rules for the session, and so that I could monitor the effectiveness of our Writing Center.



Appendix 5: This Venn Diagram highlights the struggle that tutors face when discussing an assignment with a tutee. During the final mandatory workshop, I explained to my prospective tutors that they would need to find the middle ground to satisfy all three sets of objectives present during a session, and that their decision would naturally fall in the center of the three.



Appendix 6: I presented this graphic organizer to my tutors during our final mandatory workshop, and advised they apply it when discussing the organization of ideas with their tutees. I explained that it would provide a visual means by which they can discuss the need to include supporting details (the legs) in order to support the thesis (the tabletop). I encouraged them to use the organizer, as well as their own variations, when needed during a session.

Dear Tutor,

Congratulations! You have officially been accepted as a Writing Center tutor! Please look through the information below detailing tutor responsibilities:

What you need to do: Look for your name on the schedule (back). During your scheduled time, you will:

1. Go to the library and check the Appointment Binder at the information desk.
2. If you have an appointment, write the student's name on a Student Information Worksheet (in the Appointment Binder) and wait for your student at the Writing Center table (to the left of the computers- look for the sign on the table).
3. When the student shows up, proceed with the session.
4. End the session 5 minutes before the end of the period, write a note on the back of the Student Information Worksheet, and leave it in the Appointment Binder.

Basic Session Outline:

1. Review the Student Information Worksheet with your student.
2. Read the paper aloud.
3. Prioritize (balance the assignment requirements, student request, and your own instinct to determine your direction) and proceed.
4. Write a note on the Student Information Worksheet.

No Shows: If you have a scheduled appointment and the student does not show up after 20 minutes, check "No Show" on the Student Information Worksheet and leave it in the Appointment Binder.

No Appointment: We will be accepting Walk-in appointments. Therefore, if you do not have a scheduled appointment, please remain in the library in case a student shows up. You may do homework or read a book while waiting, but feel free to leave if a student does not come in after 20 minutes.

Absences: Illness is inevitable. All I ask is that you inform me via email.

We will tackle any other problems as they come up but we need your help. Please communicate any concerns or problems so that I can make necessary adjustments. Good luck and have fun!

Sincerely,
Ms. Towers

Appendix 7: This letter included the school's letterhead and was sent out to each new tutor via their English teachers. The schedule was also included on the back so that tutors were made aware of their scheduled timeslot.

Writing Center Schedule: TUTORS ONLY
ACCEPT ONE STUDENT PER SESSION

X= No tutor available
 Available tutors = names are italicized

	Monday (12/12)B day	Tuesday (12/13)A day	Wednesday (12/14)B day	Thursday (12/15)A day	Friday(12/16) B day
Period 1	<i>Tutor 1</i>	<i>Tutor 2</i>	<i>Tutor 3</i> <i>Tutor 4</i>	<i>Tutor 5</i>	<i>Tutor 6</i>
Period 2	<i>Tutor 7</i>	X	<i>Tutor 8</i>	X	<i>Tutor 9</i>
Period 3	X	X	X	<i>Tutor 10</i>	X
Period 4	X	<i>Tutor 11</i>	X	X	X
Period 5	X	X	<i>Tutor 12</i>	X	X
Period 6	X	X	X	<i>Tutor 13</i>	X
Period 7	X	X	X	X	X
Period 8	X	X	<i>Tutor 14</i>	X	X
Period 9	<i>Tutor 15</i> <i>Tutor 16</i> <i>Tutor 17</i>	<i>Tutor 18</i> <i>Tutor 19</i> <i>Tutor 20</i>	<i>Tutor 21</i> <i>Tutor 22</i> <i>Tutor 23</i> <i>Tutor 24</i> <i>Tutor 25</i>	<i>Tutor 26</i> <i>Tutor 27</i> <i>Tutor 28</i> <i>Tutor 29</i>	<i>Tutor 30</i> <i>Tutor 31</i> <i>Tutor 32</i> <i>Tutor 33</i> <i>Tutor 34</i>

Appendix 8: The Schedule

The Writing Center: Tutoring Session Pass

Name: _____ Date of Session: _____

Period of Session: ____ Librarian's Signature: _____

Missing (please check one): Study Hall _____ Lunch _____

Appendix 10: This pass was printed up on bright yellow paper and remained with the librarians so that they could issue out passes for tutees to use the Writing Center during regularly scheduled class periods.

"On the twelfth day of Christmas my tutor gave to me:
One on one attention,
Friendly suggestions,
An 'A' on my paper,
And a fantastic winter break!"

Appendix 11: Working with the choral teacher, a few select students sang this rendition of the "12 Days of Christmas" over the loudspeaker to help bolster our marketability.

Writing Center Voucher

This is to verify that this student
received tutoring on _____.

Phase worked on (circle one):
Prewriting Drafting Revising

Signed: *K. Towers*

Appendix 12: This voucher was printed up on bright pink card stock. Once a tutor completed a session with a student, he or she would fill out the voucher and advise the student to staple it to the final paper.

The Writing Center: Thesis Statement Workshop

Who? Professor Videbaek, a faculty member from the Stony Brook University English department, will be joining us to lead the workshop.

What? The workshop will be focused on thesis statements. In order to generate topics, you will be asked to read the accompanying *very short* stories: “Samuel” by Grace Paley and “Popular Mechanics” by Raymond Carver. Professor Videbaek asks that you contemplate following questions while reading. These are her exact words:

1. “Ask [the students], as they read, to think of anything that rocks them/their world/their ideas of life.”
2. “Once that percolates...ask them what they want to do about it.”

When? The workshop will be held this Thursday after school.

Where? We will meet in room A340. Please be prompt.

How? You shall find out (and so shall I)! Snacks, as per usual will be included!

Why? Thesis statements are perpetually daunting to all students, those in high school and college alike. Therefore, Professor Videbaek will help to demystify this essential aspect of writing to help improve your writing as well as your ability to adequately guide your peers.

Appendix 13: I distributed this flyer to my tutors in preparation for our visit from Professor Videbaek.

Chapter 1

Writing Centers are an integral part of college life. They exist on most campuses across the country and for a good reason, it seems. This year, the state of student writing has been more closely scrutinized than in previous years. In part, this increased attention is due to President Obama's Race to the Top initiative as well as the emergence of the new common core standards, but it is also connected with recent studies of student achievement. This past September, the College Board released a report of SAT scores that revealed a nationwide deficit in the reading and writing skills of graduates in the class of 2012. In response to their analysis, Jay Matthews in his Washington Post article "Time to Retire the SAT" maintained that the results "illuminate what a terrible job we are doing in teaching reading and writing." Of the students whose scores were included in the study, only 43% were projected to be college ready (*The SAT Report on College and Career Readiness*). This report has caused much controversy not only because it excludes those students who opted out of the exam, but also because many believe standardized tests are not an accurate gage of student literacy skills. In spite of the continuing debate on the reliability of the College Board's report, many of these students whose futures and abilities have been so publicly questioned are now sitting in college classrooms. The complaints from college English professors, whose freshmen composition courses now contain these students, can already be heard as they bemoan a perceived lack of knowledge and skill displayed by their students.

As a method of remediation, these college professors will likely send their students to the Writing Center. It is in this place where work will get done. Students from all backgrounds and skill-levels will receive individualized instruction from their peers who have been there before, who have slaved over papers for hours on end, similarly baffled by professor comments. Their experiences with academia will lend to effective instruction, as tutors in writing centers use

empathy as a vehicle for writing remediation. In addition to the natural comradery that will result from these sessions, the tutors will also act as a bridge between the students whose needs they serve and the world of academia. Rafoth, Wells, and Fels in their article "The Promise of Change with One-to-One Instruction" point out that "peer tutors are tutors and peers at the same time...[and they learn] to lean sometimes toward peer and sometimes toward tutor" (12). They assert that it is a tutor's ability to adapt to one role or the other that allows him or her to effectively guide a peer towards adapting the language of academia, which is a crucial step towards ensuring a student's future college success.

For years, Writing Centers have served the needs of many college students and will continue to do so as colleges today grapple with this current literacy crisis, so why don't they exist at the high school level? If the majority of complaints come from professors of freshmen composition courses, doesn't it logically follow that more attention to writing is needed at the high school level? The new common core curriculum has emphasized the need for a more fine-tuned focus on writing at the high school level. One purpose for this call to action is to increase college readiness in students across the country, thus making Americans more competitive in the world market. In an effort to answer this call, I developed a Writing Center in a public high school in Suffolk County, New York. The following highlights how I went about developing the center, and explores its effectiveness as well as shortcomings. It also explores how a Writing Center answers recent writing initiatives, and how my work was informed by current scholarship.

Chapter 2

As an undergraduate student at Stony Brook University, I had worked for quite a few years as a Writing Center tutor. It was an environment in which I thrived. I loved everything about my work: the people I worked with, the students I helped, and the myriad of fascinating subjects I encountered. Although I viewed teaching, my subject area, as a challenging and worthwhile pursuit, I knew that the Writing Center would be something I missed upon entering the career world.

As I became exposed to more and more schools on my journey to becoming a teacher, I became increasingly puzzled by the lack of a Writing Center presence in most secondary institutions. Offering a suggestion as to why this is the case, Palacio and Dvorak point out that high school teachers "are often presented with new programs or ideas that are supposed to change everything for the better" and that it is hard for them to take these programs seriously because they are soon "replaced by the next new thing the following year" (21). Kevin Jeter also provides a possible explanation, suggesting that sometimes students are overwhelmed with a myriad of programs that are ineffective because they do not offer a "place where *any* student could seek assistance" (40). In other words, teachers feel there is no need to start a Writing Center because students could seek help at the Math Center, the Science Center, the History Center, etc. However, Jeter points out that these programs are ineffective because they provide students with a confusing array of options (40). Recognizing that a Writing Center could bridge all subjects for all students, I made it my objective to introduce the Writing Center to the High School world.

The idea to begin a Writing Center came about spontaneously during an interview. When asked what I would bring to the school in terms of academics, I blurted out "I want to start a Writing Center," as if it were a subconscious urge. I explained to my interviewers that a Writing

Center could provide individualized instruction to students that would be entirely free of cost. I explained that it was a self-sufficient system, where students who had learned to perfect their craft through the instruction of teachers in the building would have the opportunity to give back, to re-circulate their knowledge to their peers. I also explained that tutors were often more effective than teachers in articulating assignment objectives and motivating students to engage with the writing process. Palacio and Dvorak came to recognize this same tendency in the Writing Center they began in Monsignor Edward Pace High School in Miami, Florida. In their article "Change I can See: A High School English Teacher's Perspective of the Writing Center's Impact on Bilingual, Hispanic Students," they cite an example from a teacher who noted that despite extensive efforts to explain her suggestions for revision to her students, the tutors were better able to help the students understand her suggestions (23). Palacio and Dvorak point out that "the students had already listened to these suggestions before, but the tutors helped them really *hear* them" (23). As Kerri Mulqueen, founder of a Brooklyn parochial school Writing Center, so accurately puts it, "my peer tutors have been able to succeed where I have sometimes failed" (37). Upon describing this dynamic, where teachers impart knowledge that is transferred into a more accessible student language by the tutor him or herself, my interviewers vocalized their excitement with the concept and I was hired for the job.

I took a few months to get settled into a routine and adjust to the atmosphere of the new building, but my vow to begin a Writing Center continuously echoed in the back of my mind. Some of my reasons for wanting to pursue the idea were commendable and some, admittedly, were not. First of all, I wanted to live up to the promise I made to my administrators that I would bring added value to the school; I wanted it to be known that I was not one to make empty promises. Furthermore, I wanted to put myself in a position where I would become an

irreplaceable asset. The 2007 economic recession had made jobs, particularly teaching jobs, extremely difficult to acquire. As a full year leave replacement teacher, there was no assurance that I would have a job come that subsequent September, and I knew that I had to stand out in order to be considered for a stable, tenure-track position.

Less altruistic ambitions aside, I was also aware of the extent to which a Writing Center could help my colleagues. At the time, I was entering the second semester of my M.A. program at Stony Brook University, where I was enrolled in the Composition Studies Certificate program. Immersed in the language of the study of rhetoric, I recognized the value that a Writing Center could bring to a high school, especially with the newly emerging Common Core Standards. Now fully initiated, these standards require more rigorous writing practices in the classroom. Having had prior experience teaching Academic Intervention Classes, I was aware of how difficult it was to differentiate learning enough to help each student rise to the goals set out by these initiatives. Carver and Bailey highlight the struggle that teachers face when trying to appeal to a range of learning modalities in their 2010 *Science Scope* article: "our students enter the classroom with different skills, experiences, and interests, and yet somehow we must teach the same curriculum to everyone" (12). Cynthia Dean further notes that "teachers assign; students write; teachers assess. Moving beyond this mode...is often hampered by the structure of coverage-laden curriculum" (51). Having encountered these struggles with my own classes, I believed that a writing center could provide teachers with an invaluable resource that might enable them to better reach struggling students.

In spite of knowing that starting a Writing Center would not be easy, that I would not get paid for my work, and that it would not ensure employment for the future, I decided in November of 2010 that the goal was worth pursuing. However, it was more than just a goal. I

became determined to develop not only a Writing Center, but also a community where students who loved writing could meet others who felt the same way, where they could apply their boundless energy and enthusiasm to the joint effort of helping others, their peers, to realize their own potential and meet the goals set out for them by an increasingly difficult curriculum. However, most importantly, I decided to start a Writing Center because I knew that it would be worthwhile in the end, no matter the outcome.

After making my decision, and never once looking back, I knew that the first crucial step in developing the Writing Center would be to win the support of the English department chairperson as well as the administrative staff. While this step might seem unnecessary, having evoked enthusiasm at the mention of a Writing Center in my interview, I was new to the building and only a second year teacher. Knowing that I could potentially encounter resistance from students who had never heard my name or staff who might have scoffed at my perceived lack of experience, I needed the ethos of those higher up in the chain of command to act as a buffer and to enhance my credibility. In order to curtail any of these potential difficulties, I met with my chairperson a few days after making my decision to discuss the goal once more. I recall asking if he could attend some of our meetings and if I could use his name on letters to parents and on advertisements. He assured me that I had his full support, and went so far as to say that he would be honored to be associated with the Writing Center. He told me that I could use his name to combat any resistance, though he doubted this would occur, and advised that I speak with the principal once more to make sure I had administrative approval. I followed his advice, and met with the principal, whose final go ahead allowed for me to begin thinking about how I would acquire qualified tutors.

Knowing that I had to employ the help of qualified students who would help to validate a budding reputation, I began to establish criteria by which students could become tutors. I decided to utilize the parameters already established by the school, and chose to invite 11th and 12th grade students who were enrolled in honors and advanced placement English classes. These students would have been recommended to these more advanced classes by a teacher who knew the student's skill level, and who felt that the student displayed an above average fluency in literary comprehension and analysis, and a competency in writing. Furthermore, while it might seem limiting to only accept this group of students, I needed tutors who would be excited to work for an academic Writing Center when it offered very little compensation.

Because I was not able to pay my tutors, I needed to come up with some sort of incentive to ensure their continued dedication and devotion to our purpose. While I knew that appealing to upperclassmen was beneficial for our credibility, my target group presented a problem because they were driven. Many of them were enrolled in difficult classes, and took on challenges that were demanding and time-consuming. Some also had jobs, and could not spare to waste time with an academic club unless it was worth pursuing. Therefore, I coined the term "academic community service." I decided that making a distinction between standard community service and academic community service for the Writing Center would draw the attention of more academically driven students. Similar to service learning, I wanted students to recognize that a Writing Center would not only help bolster their college marketability, but it would also teach them something about writing. Killian McCurrie in his *English Journal* article points out that "teachers need to link the skills, appreciation, and pleasures of reading and writing to the larger community to find its social significance" (80). The peer-tutoring model inherent to Writing Centers would foster the development of such an awareness, and I knew it was simply a matter

of drawing the kinds of students who would crave this knowledge. Through the use of the term "academic community service" in advertisements, I hoped to gather students who were driven and who had a natural propensity towards learning.

I was aware that advertising for tutors was a crucial step, and that it could directly affect the future success of the Writing Center. Therefore, I used any and all resources at my disposal that would get the word out while simultaneously creating a reputation of respectability and credibility. In order to get the honors and A.P. teachers on board, my chairperson allowed me to speak at our department meeting. This allowed me to explain that my goal was ultimately to answer the call for enhanced writing instruction, and that we would only be able to do so if I had good tutors. Therefore, I asked the staff to distribute and review informational flyers that I had developed and compiled for them (Appendix 1) with their A.P. and honors classes. I also asked them to encourage students who they thought might be particularly suited for tutoring, and to send me a list of their names so that I could seek them out individually.

In addition to utilizing the help of my co-workers, I also advertised through the P.A. system and by word of mouth. I became acquainted and friendly with the secretary who was in charge of morning announcements knowing that she would become an asset in spreading the word about the Writing Center. She became extremely helpful in making sure that my advertisements were not just announced in the morning, but also sporadically throughout the day. In the advertisements themselves, I made it a point to always include that students who joined the writing center could include service hours on their college applications that were both academic and instruction-based. I also included in my initial marketing schemes that students would be more competitive if they ever tried to get a job at a college writing center. Lastly, I sent

emails out to teachers in the English department asking them to remind students about the Writing Center and our upcoming meeting, and to direct any questions/concerns to me.

With the help of the chairperson and the honors and A.P. teachers, word got around that writing centers were a worthwhile pursuit, and our first meeting attracted the attendance of approximately 35 students. To allow time for stragglers to file into the room, I began the meeting by first asking the group to fill in information sheets (Appendix 2). These sheets provided me with contact information that would later help me track tutor requirements and organize the schedule. After collecting these sheets, I introduced myself and began to explain the basic premise of a Writing Center and what it functioned to do. I also defined my goals for its establishment at our high school (Appendix 3). With the chairperson present for mutual support, we explained that Writing Centers exist at almost every university across the country, and that our Writing Center could potentially become one of the very few to be found in a New York state high school. In order to further secure involvement, I assured those in attendance that the commitment would not be time-consuming and reiterated the benefits to joining. These included academic community service hours, valuable experience that could lead to future employment, letters of recommendation, and an enhanced understanding of writing through mandatory workshops.

Chapter 3

While honors/A.P. status was an academically credible means by which to collect a group of skilled writers, it was not enough to ensure quality tutoring. Due to the time constraints that exist for teachers, I knew I would not be able to observe every student while they tutored, but I was also aware that I needed a way to ensure that my tutors were proficient in both writing and

tutoring. Therefore, I explained at the initial meeting that prospective tutors were required to submit two writing samples, one academic and one creative, before they were considered for a tutoring position. I would later comb through these essays, rating each student's skill level based on grammatical constructs, cohesion of ideas, and organizational skills. Overall, I found that my prospective tutors' writing skills fell in line with my expectations of honors and A.P. kids with very few exceptions. However, I knew I needed another means through which to ensure I would have quality tutors. Therefore, I developed a workshop model that I would use continuously while working with the Writing Center.

Not only did I want to ensure that my students were fully equipped with the tools they needed to become effective tutors, but I also wanted to protect them from criticism. I never wanted anyone to accuse them of being ill prepared for or unskilled in tutoring; I would have much preferred that the blame be placed on me. Therefore, I required that each tutor attend two out of three available tutoring workshops before being placed on the schedule. I also required that they attend one workshop a month thereafter to continuously inform their practice. This model allowed for me to have input in regards to what information students received about both writing and tutoring, particularly because none of them were in my classes (I taught 9th and 10th graders that year). It also provided me with an opportunity to clarify confusion, answer questions, and create a tutoring community.

For the remainder of our first meeting, I decided to commence an activity that would introduce and cultivate the community environment I was hoping to achieve. Using an authentic assignment to motivate my young prospective tutors, I asked each student to come up with an advertisement for the Writing Center, the best of which would be made into a poster and hung on the school walls. I asked that they include the following key points: that appointments were

available during the day and after school, that they could be made and were held in the library, and that they provided tutees with individual attention. After giving them approximately five minutes to write, I had them get into groups, where they had to read them aloud and vote on the best advertisement. I then read the top three advertisements aloud and we all then voted on the winner. Lastly, we discussed what made the winner the most effective of the three and generated a list of ideas on how the written advertisement could effectively transfer to a visually appealing poster that would draw the attention of their peers.

The introductory activity provided the opportunity for my prospective tutors to engage with an academic genre analysis, but it also it created an atmosphere whereby my tutors were all working together to achieve a shared goal. Using the advertisement as a vehicle, my prospective tutors demonstrated what Deborah Dean refers to in her *Voices from the Middle* article "Going Public: Letters to the World" as a desire for their "voices to be heard, or [their] thoughts to be given substance and weight" (42). By presenting an activity that was authentic, my prospective tutors became motivated to create a piece of writing that would encompass their own individual personalities. Hence, they were able to experiment with developing a sense of voice, which cultivated a "hope that their voices [would] have value in a broader context than just the teacher-audience" (42). Lastly, the activity encouraged a sense of pride and enthusiasm for what we were trying to accomplish. By allowing them to decide on the final advertisement and on how it would be converted into a poster, my prospective tutors became key members in a joint effort to promote the Writing Center. They became a crucial part of a group where their input was valued and their efforts rewarded.

After concluding a first successful introductory Writing Center meeting, I focused my energy on developing the three required introductory workshops. I immediately began to reach

out to some of my contacts from outside of the school to help me prepare my prospective tutors. This was in part due to my own confidence. My background was primarily in literature, and I had only been part of the writing community for a short time. While I knew that I could teach them about many aspects of academic writing, I was also aware that there were others who could do a better job. I am specifically referring to the people who had been instrumental in helping me develop into a proficient writer, both creatively and academically. I also believed that bringing in those from the outside would increase the integrity of the workshops offered and hence, our reputation, especially once it began to translate into actual tutoring.

For the first workshop, I sought out a friend who worked for Southampton's Young Adult Writing Program (YAWP). She had recently received her MFA, and was a published writer. With experience in writing and leading workshops with high school students, I felt she would be best suited to teach my prospective tutors. We discussed the topic of the workshop beforehand, which would focus on the importance of audience. I rationalized that she would be well suited to teach about the topic, having grappled with audience herself as a published writer. Furthermore, I believed that what set my tutors apart was their ability to appeal to their own audience, their teachers. In her 1992 *Research in the Teaching of English* article, "Writing to be Read: Young Writers' Ability to Demonstrate Audience Awareness When Evaluated by their Readers," Laura Frank points out that "competent writers are able to analyze their audience...and take greater advantage of audience information than do basic writers" (277). I wanted my prospective tutors to not only recognize the value of audience, but I also wanted them to develop a metacognitive awareness of their ability to conform to the expectations set out for them. Lastly, I wanted them to appreciate this ability when helping their peers. I discussed these goals with my friend, and

told her that she could structure the workshop however she saw fit as long as she emphasized that it would be the tutor's job to convey the importance of audience to every tutee.

Prior to this time, I was not aware of how much went into bringing a visitor to a school, but I would soon learn. Before even scheduling anything with my friend, I made sure to seek permission for the visit. I was aware that some schools required board approval for visitors; therefore, it was important to understand and abide by proper protocol. Once permission was secured, I confirmed the date with my presenter. I made sure she was confident in what she was doing, emphasized that I could assist or be involved in any way, and offered to make photocopies. Once she was locked in, I put in an announcement with the secretary, asking her to cycle the message for 3 days prior to the meeting. I also had to notify security so that they would allow my visitor to enter the building, and arranged to pick her up at a particular time and place. Wanting to keep track of which prospective tutors were in attendance, I also made up a sign-in sheet, which I would circulate at the beginning of the workshop. Lastly, and most importantly, I bought snacks. These would eventually become a staple of Writing Center meetings, and the snack portion, of course, was included in the announcement.

The first mandatory workshop produced the attendance of more than half of those who were present at the informational meeting. Not knowing if this was a good or a bad sign, I commenced the meeting, pushing all of my worries and concerns aside. As my 20 or so prospective tutors happily munched on cheddar flavored Sunchips, I introduced our guest, and gave them a bit of information on her background. Knowing that this first workshop could set the stage for each subsequent workshop, I tried to set a professional tone, which was simultaneously friendly and warm. Taking my lead, they treated my friend with respect, and gave her their full attention and enthusiasm.

The lesson our presenter came up with was so effective that I would go on to use it in the future to teach audience to my own classes. She first asked my prospective tutors to compose a series of fake text messages reacting to the following hypothetical situation: she told them to pretend that it was one in the morning, and that they were texting a friend in regards to a paper that was due the next day that they had not yet completed. She gave them approximately five minutes to complete this assignment. After they were finished, she then asked them to write a letter to their hypothetical teacher under the same circumstances, explaining what happened and asking for an extension. Once they were done writing, she had them share their pieces, the text messages first and then the letters. While each student read his or her piece, she would jot down a few key words used in the student's response, which she placed in three columns.

Through the application of the Socratic method, our presenter conveyed the importance of audience. Temporarily abandoning the words she had written on the board, she asked the group to explain the difference between the first series of responses and the second. One student pointed out that the first prompt produced more laughs, and another student mentioned that the first set of responses were more informal than the second set. Prompted further by our presenter, someone added that the purpose for each was different, the first geared towards generating empathy and the second towards gaining something. Driving the point home, my friend pointed out that taking audience into account was a big part of what enabled student success in writing. She told them that some students struggle with this aspect of school, and that it was the tutor's job to help a student adhere to the expectations established by his or her teacher. Lastly, to summarize the lesson she used the student-generated words on the board to explain ethos, logos, and pathos, which she emphasized were essential tools for teaching students to appeal to certain audiences.

Extremely happy with the results of the first mandatory meeting, I decided to bring in another visitor for the second. He and I had worked in many of the same academic circles for quite a few years. We first worked together at Suffolk County Community College, where I was a college aide and he a Writing Center tutor. We were then in classes with one another in Stony Brook University, critiquing literature and swapping writing techniques. He was also a recent graduate from Stony Brook's MFA program, and had worked in the YAWP program with my friend from the first workshop. I felt that he would be a good fit with my prospective tutors because he had gained a notable reputation as one of the most valued tutors at Suffolk Community College. Furthermore, I thought his personality and experience leading workshops with teenagers would translate well with my prospective tutors. As with my first visitor, he and I worked together to come up with a topic that would be best suited for him while still offering my future tutors instruction that was both relevant and useful. We decided that his knowledge would best contribute to a workshop focused on the tutoring session: what it entailed, how it could be structured, how to keep a session moving forward, etc. Unfortunately, the workshop did not go as well as we had hoped.

In spite of countless discussions and careful planning, it appeared as if my presenter was never quite able to connect with the approximately 25 students who came to the workshop. I surmise that it was in part due to his miscalculations in regards to his audience. My presenter was skilled in working with a myriad of students in a community college setting, where knowledge and skill level can never be assumed due to the multifaceted nature of student backgrounds. His audience for the workshop, on the other hand, was primarily homogenized. My prospective tutors had nearly the same educational backgrounds, had been in classes with one another for years, and had mostly shared the same teachers. Therefore, I believe that my presenter

approached his audience as he would a student at his Writing Center: he assumed they knew nothing about writing and proceeded to teach them as such.

The disconnect between my presenter and his audience became apparent early on in the workshop. He spoke with a very serious tone and did not allow his personality to come out; he was typically a very friendly and inviting person who always looked to laugh at a well-timed joke. Though I have no doubt he was trying to be respectful of the reputation I was trying to uphold, his fun-loving and approachable demeanor were a big part of why I asked him to work with my prospective tutors. I was nervous that the students would not feel they could ask him questions when his knowledge could offer such valuable insight into the field. As the session went on, this fear became a reality. They did not open up to him, despite my attempt to help through comments or probing questions. A few of them even seemed frustrated, which became apparent when he took fifteen minutes of the forty-minute presentation to explain basic essay structure. While I know that it was not his intention by far, I believe his audience felt he was being condescending. Through the writing samples they were asked to provide and their status as honors/A.P. students, they likely felt they had proven their worth. As if to validate my suspicions, I heard one student say that she already knew how to write an essay as everyone filed out of the room at the end of the session.

Although the second workshop had not gone as well as planned, the experience helped guide my decisions for the future. I learned that it was essential to make my vision for the Writing Center and our workshops clear to anyone who would come to be affiliated with us. My second workshop might have been more successful if I had explained that while I wanted to convey professionalism, I also wanted to foster tutor growth, which called for a kind of candor that I believe I could have gotten out of my second presenter if I had been more transparent. I

also came to understand how important it was to be honest with my presenter as to why he or she was chosen to present in the first place. It might have been beneficial to tell my presenter that I chose him not only for his tutoring knowledge, but also because he had a demeanor that was both engaging and warm. Lastly, I learned that I needed to educate my presenters on their audience, my tutors. I came to understand that I was acting as a bridge between two disparate worlds: high school and higher education. Assumptions were made on both ends in regards to student writing skill, and it became my responsibility to inform them of just how knowledgeable my tutors were.

After learning a few hard lessons with the second workshop, I decided to lead the final mandatory workshop myself. There were many reasons as to why I felt this was appropriate. First, I felt I had to do damage control. I was sure that, since all prospective tutors were required to attend two out of three available workshops, a few who had been at the second workshop would also be in attendance for the third. Therefore, I wanted to recapture the attention of those who might have become slightly disinterested as a result of the second workshop. I also believed that I needed to allow my prospective tutors to get to know me. Despite my fears that I would not be able to adequately teach them, and knowing that I had no prior experience teaching honors and A.P. students, I had to let them know that I was qualified. As the coordinator and founder of the Writing Center, it was my responsibility to be accessible to my tutors. They needed to know that when they asked for advice on writing, I could steer them in the right direction. I also wanted them to see me as someone who was approachable, which would become particularly essential as we came closer to our opening date.

One of my goals for the final workshop was to present an overview for tutoring sessions. While my second presenter provided a general order on how to conduct a session, it was a concept that could not be emphasized enough, especially for high school students who had never

had exposure to a tutoring session. Therefore, I began the meeting by explaining that most sessions follow similar patterns, which I introduced as the five essential components to a session. Asking the group to take notes, I informed them of the first component, which was to gather information from the tutee. This included information about the assignment, the due date, what the student had already accomplished, and what the student wanted to gain out of the tutoring session (Appendix 4). I explained that the first aspect of the session would give the tutor the opportunity to ask questions and to gain an understanding of teacher expectations, especially if the student brought the assignment sheet. It would also allow them to see how much the student understood about the task at hand. For the second component, I emphasized that the paper had to be read aloud. Wanting to allow each tutor to adopt his or her own method, I informed them that it did not matter if the tutor or student read it as long as it was read out loud. When someone asked why, I explained that hearing a paper, as opposed to reading it, allowed the writer to understand how well the ideas flowed. In turn, this would provide opportunities for enhancing the organizational structure later on in the session.

The third component, I explained, was oftentimes the most difficult aspect because it entailed choosing a direction and establishing session objectives or goals. I told my prospective tutors that sometimes there might be more than one problem with a paper, and at others times, no obvious problems at all. Therefore, choosing a direction and identifying goals for the session was a difficult task. In his article "Training Tutors to Talk About Writing," Stephen North articulates this process:

Tutoring in writing is, to state it simply, intervention in the composing process.

Writers come to the writing center sometime during the writing of something looking for help. Often, they don't know what kind of help is available,

practicable, or sensible...A tutor training course, then, develops people who understand tutoring as intervention in the composing process and who can do something about it. (434)

Stephen North emphasizes the importance of helping tutors understand that tutees can come in at any point in the writing process, and that their job is to determine how to proceed no matter the stage. Reassuring my tutors that it was always possible to find something to say, I informed them that while tutoring, I often determined my direction and session objectives while the last few paragraphs were being read aloud. To highlight the struggle, I drew a Venn diagram on the board (Appendix 5). In the first circle, I wrote "teacher objectives for the paper," in the second "student objectives for the session," and in the last "tutor objectives for the session." I explained to the group that their decision on how to progress should fall where the circles overlapped. After this extremely technical explanation, I expressed that through experience and knowledge, they would eventually gain an innate sense of how to prioritize their goals/objectives for the session.

In order to provide my tutors with an authentic experience and to emphasize the conflict tutors encounter when reconciling multiple sets of objectives, I passed out copies of a student's paper from an assignment I had given to my classes the year before. The student's name was blocked out to shield his identity. I also gave them copies of my assignment sheet so that they would understand my objectives as the teacher. Although I did not provide this information to the group, the student whose paper I distributed had a slight learning disability. He was enrolled in one of my Academic Intervention classes the year before as a ninth grader, and often struggled to construct a cohesive argument when completing a writing task. Similar to the instruction strategies Kenneth Lindlbom promotes in his *English Journal* article "Writing for Real," I chose to present this authentic writing situation to allow my tutors to "assess the student[']s writing

based on its success in real terms: Did the writing succeed in its purpose with this audience in this context?" (105). As Lindblom points out, I wanted my tutors, who were peer educators as well as writers, to "experience, and...learn from, a real assessment" (105). I hoped that this would in turn allow them to gain confidence in their own writing as well as be able to critically analyze the successes as well as failures in the authentic writing piece. I first asked the group to look over the assignment, and then told them to follow along as I read the paper aloud. Once I finished reading, a few students expressed surprise at the myriad of problems that were exhibited in the paper. One asked if they would encounter similar essays while tutoring. I responded by telling them that a ninth-grade student wrote the paper only the year before. I also emphasized that these students were those we were aiming to help, and told them that this particular student worked extraordinarily hard, but still consistently struggled to construct an argument.

I next asked my prospective tutors to identify the inherent problems with the paper. One student pointed out that some of the ideas were contradictory to the assignment itself. Another student in the back mentioned that the student's spelling and grammatical constructs needed improvement, and someone else pointed out that there was no thesis statement. I then asked which aspect they thought the tutor should tackle first. I allowed them to discuss the answer as a group, occasionally prompting them to articulate why they chose as they had, but one student was more persistent with his answer than the others. He maintained that the thesis was the priority because it controlled the remainder of the paper. He rationalized that if the thesis were fixed first, the remainder of the paper would follow thereafter. After confirming that I, too, would tackle the thesis first, I asked the group if anyone could think of another reason why his answer seemed to be the best choice. A quiet student in the back raised her hand, and asked if it had to do with the assignment sheet. She pointed out that the teacher (me) specifically asked for

a clear thesis statement. I applauded her response, and pointed out to the class that often the tutor's objectives will match up with the teacher's objectives. I also told them that we had been working extensively on thesis statements when I assigned the paper.

After providing my tutors with an authentic writing situation, I moved the workshop forward to explain the fourth component of the tutoring session. This aspect of a session required the tutor to work with the tutee on the paper itself. I explained that how they would go about working with the student was dependent on many factors, but that students typically struggle most with the organizational aspect of writing papers. I introduced two commonly used tutoring strategies: the graphic organizer and the reverse outline. I explained that a graphic organizer could be used before or after a student had written a paper, and that it was a visual means through which ideas could be better organized. Barbetta and Spears-Bunton point out in their article on students with disabilities that "graphic organizers reveal patterns, interrelationships, and interdependencies and are helpful to many students in...providing structure for thinking, writing, discussing, planning, and reporting" (89). For these reasons, I wanted my students to have access to an alternate means of explaining organization and structure to students to prepare them for all types of learners. I drew a crude kitchen table on the board and explained that the surface could be thought of as the premise or thesis. The legs, I told them, were supporting ideas that would hold up the main idea of the paper (the table surface) if they were sturdy enough (Appendix 6). I then also explained a second method for teaching organization, known as reverse outlining. I told them that this method could be used only after a draft of a paper had already been written. I articulated the goal, to examine the flow of ideas from one paragraph to the next, and told them that it was an outline generated by what had already been written.

Before dispersing more sample essays to have my tutors apply the aforementioned strategies, I explained the fifth component of a tutoring session, the conclusion. I told the group that as part of the conclusion, it was important to send a student off with some sort of directive on how to proceed with the paper. This was to ensure that tutoring continued beyond the session, and to curtail any potential lapse in student progress. On top of providing directives, I also explained that documentation was a crucial part of the conclusion. Writing notes about a session would help for the tutor to reflect on the session, on whether or not what was done was effective in helping the student with the paper (Appendix 4). I also emphasized that documentation would protect the tutor in case the student claimed the tutor did not do his or her job. Finally, with approximately ten minutes remaining, I had the students partner up and passed out various photocopied, student-generated essay samples from different assignments I had given in the last year and a half. I asked them to read the paper aloud and to then discuss the objectives they might establish if they had worked with the student. I also asked them to apply one of the two strategies that had been presented earlier and then discuss its value as a tool for tutoring.

Overall, I was pleased with the effectiveness of the final mandatory workshop. Based on the turnout (approximately 20 students) and responsiveness of the group in attendance, I felt that I managed to regain the interest of those who might have become discouraged after the second workshop. Furthermore, I felt that I was able to impart an incredible amount of necessary and relevant information to properly equip my tutors with the tools they needed to proceed. Compiling the sign-in sheets and essay submissions, I began to assess each prospective tutor. Within a week, I had a list of 32 qualified students whose names I could add to the schedule. I made up certificates for each tutor along with a letter on official school letterhead congratulating them on their acceptance into the Writing Center (Appendix 7). I delivered them to each tutor

through his or her English teacher, and placed a recurrent announcement for one last mandatory meeting before we opened on December 13, 2010. While one of my goals for the meeting was to discuss the daily operations of the Writing Center, I also wanted my tutors to be proud of what we were about to do. Therefore, I called it the "Writing Center Launching Party," with promises of snacks, pizza, and celebration.

Chapter 4

Knowing that the success of any business is largely dependent on the productivity of its daily operations, I was determined to make my Writing Center as efficient as possible. My first objective, therefore, was to find a single location where we could run our operations and yet still be easily accessible to our clientele. Many colleges or universities set aside one area, usually a large room, for Writing Center purposes. Unfortunately, because I was working with minors, I had to be more selective when securing a location. Although a single, quiet area is most ideal for tutoring, I had to ensure the presence of an adult at all times when a tutor was working with a peer. Therefore, I decided that the library was the best possible location. Not only did the library provide daily supervision, but it also gave my tutors access to the Internet, writing handbooks, and librarian expertise if needed. After speaking with the librarians about my goals and objectives and promising that no added responsibility would fall on them, they gave me their blessing to adopt the library as our sole location. In order to further ensure that our clientele could easily find us, we set aside one section of the library specifically for Writing Center purposes. I made up a sign that was colorful enough to attract the attention of tutees and put it on one of our designated tables, and eventually, we hung a very large, laminated poster designed by one of my tutors up on the wall above our section.

The next step in setting up the daily operations pertained to scheduling. Having been a tutor for many years, I was aware that some colleges used electronic scheduling programs, which made it easy for students to make as well as cancel appointments. These programs were also helpful in allowing tutors to check their schedules from home. Unfortunately, they were expensive. Stony Brook University, for example, was using a program from WCONLINE (a product of Twenty Six, LLC), which cost them a minimum of \$700 dollars for yearly renewal. Since our Writing Center did not have funding, we were not able to afford the program, and had no other choice but to use a pen-and-paper system.

Not wanting the schedule to float about as a single piece of paper taped to a wall, I made up a scheduling book, which would eventually become the lifeline of the Writing Center. The librarians allowed the book to take up a permanent spot at the circulation desk, where students could come up and make appointments independently. Initially, the only item in the book was the schedule, which was updated weekly. The layout was relatively simple (Appendix 8). It included five columns, one for each day of the week, with the date and the appropriate "A day" or "B day" specification at the top. Since we offered appointments during the day and after school, there were nine boxes below each date, and within the boxes were the names of the tutors available for the particular time slot. At first, I did not include tutor names on the schedule. Having an acute awareness of the social dynamics that existed in the school, I did not want a tutor to be ignored because he or she was not a part of the popular crowd. However, when prompting one of my own students to use the Writing Center, she mentioned that she was nervous to make an appointment because she didn't want to work with a tutor she did not get along with. Therefore, I decided to use the social aspect to our advantage, and included the tutor's first name and last initial in their scheduled time slot.

As I began to conceptualize the components that would be necessary to efficiently run the Writing Center, I realized that I would need a way to ensure my tutors were showing up to their appointments. As with any business, I knew that failing to live up to promises was one way to gain a bad reputation, and reputation means everything in high school. A large majority of students in this environment do not want to spend more time than necessary doing work, particularly the group we were trying to reach. Therefore, if a reluctant student signed up for a tutor who did not show up, the student would likely never come back because it took a lot to get him or her to sign up in the first place. In order to prevent this scenario from actually occurring, I made a sign-in sheet and included it in the scheduling book (Appendix 9). It included the student's name, the date, and the time in and out. It also asked that the student check off one of the following: scheduled appointment, walk-in appointment, no show, or no tutee. Despite ideally ensuring that tutors would consistently attend their scheduled appointments, the sign-in sheet also allowed me to track community service hours, which was the primary purpose for the involvement of at least half the tutors I had acquired.

Absences, as opposed to tutor no shows, were an inevitable hurdle that I would eventually have to tackle. Although I required that my tutors contact me via email if they were going to be absent, it was impractical to expect them to do so while feeling ill. Therefore, I spoke with one of the Assistant Principals, who allowed me to utilize the school's intranet attendance system, E-school, to track absences. By generating a faux "thirteenth period" class which included a complete working roster of all of my tutors, I was able to see if a tutor was absent for the day. Therefore, I could anticipate when a tutor was going to miss an appointment and inform the librarians of the absence, who would in turn help the tutee reschedule. I rationalized that it was better to tell a tutee that his tutor was absent from school, as opposed to telling him that we

were not sure of a tutor's whereabouts. E-school helped us avoid wasting the tutee's time, because the tutee might otherwise hang around waiting for a tutor who was absent in the first place. Access to the intranet system also allowed me to see a tutor's daily class schedule, which gave me the ability to locate a tutor in the building if he or she was late for a scheduled tutoring session.

There were other smaller components that were also essential in helping the Writing Center run smoothly. For example, I had quite a few students who volunteered to tutor during their lunch periods. In order to allow them to get food and bring it back to the library without being stopped in the hallway, I asked the Assistant Principal to make up laminated, permanent hall passes for tutors who were scheduled during the day. This pass not only provided them with uninterrupted travel time, but it also allowed them to go to the front of the lunch line. Another smaller component pertained to tutee hallway passes. In the high school environment, passes are needed not only for permission to walk in the hallways, but also to legally excuse a student from class. One of the caveats my principal required when initially discussing the writing center was that students should not be allowed to use our services during their regularly scheduled class periods. In order to curtail this potential problem, I made up tutee passes (Appendix 10). These passes remained with the librarians, and were ideally to be filled out once a student scheduled an appointment during the school day. I had hoped they would prevent tutees from trying to cut class mainly because they required students to check off either "study hall" or "lunch" (notice "class" was not an option) and they required the signature of the librarian. However, I found that the passes were rarely used, and ultimately the only way I could get the word out to teachers that students were not to be excused from class for a writing center appointment was through mass

emailing. These emails required principal approval, and hence, they involved a few revisions or clarifications and took a few days before being formally sent out.

Chapter 5

With all of the pieces in place, I decided that we would officially begin to accept tutees on December 13, 2010. Since the date left one week before Christmas break, I assumed we would be flooded with students trying to receive help on papers due before classes let out for two weeks. Furthermore, with our tutor-generated posters decorating the school walls, a mass email sent out to teachers who were frantically trying to collect papers, and a few holiday jingles sang over the announcements promoting the Writing Center, I was sure that we would have a great turnout. Unfortunately, we only had one student use the writing center in that first week, and four more in the three subsequent weeks after opening.

It is hard to pinpoint exactly why we did not have initial success in the Writing Center. It is entirely possible that our advertisements were too gimmicky. For example, one of my tutors asked that I allow a friend of his in the senior class to read a few of our Writing Center announcements over the loudspeaker. He assured me that his friend had a radio voice and had been part of many school productions in the past. Not wanting to squelch his enthusiasm, I allowed his friend to read the announcement, but immediately regretted the decision. For some reason, the student decided to use a faux British accent, and it came across as campy and forced. Wanting to project a more professional reputation, I nicely thanked the student for his help, but told him that we no longer needed such attention-grabbing announcements. The student took it very well, and might have even been relieved because the voice most definitely received some attention. Other announcements that I had created, the faux British accent aside, were similarly

corny. For example, I coordinated efforts with the music teacher to have a few members of the school choir sing a rendition of the "12 Days of Christmas" to promote the Writing Center (Appendix 11). My method of advertising was all for the sake of drawing attention to our cause, and we were successful in some ways. Many of my tutors as well as some of my own students pointed out that people often ignored announcements, but that Writing Center announcements were so catchy that the students actually listened to them. Unfortunately, my method of advertising was not translating into increased numbers of tutees using the Writing Center.

No matter how prospective tutees felt about our advertisements, we were still gaining some kind of a reputation, which was better than being unworthy of notice in the high school environment. Therefore, I knew that our problem was fundamental. I began to hypothesize that while students knew we existed, very few knew what a Writing Center functioned to do. This suspicion was confirmed when I asked my classes if they knew what we did and my question was met with silence. Unbeknownst to me, this same problem has been faced by many teachers who have tried to start Writing Centers in high schools in the past. Cynthia Dean explains in her article "Revising and Rewriting Roles: Exploring the Challenges of Peer Tutors in a High School Writing Center" that prior to bringing a few talented student writers with her to an academic conference, they had no idea that such a center existed. She explains that once they understood the basic premise, they were excited and felt motivated to begin one in their own school in an effort to help their peers become successful writers. Prior to that time, however, they had absolutely no concept of the mutual benefits that could arise from student-led writing instruction, and I believe that my Writing Center faced a similar challenge.

I decided to continue advertising by incorporating puns, relevant holiday traditions, and popular culture references in our announcements, but I also became more determined to raise

awareness throughout the school of the services our Writing Center could provide. I began this process by increasing communications with the teachers in the school. I chose this route because teachers could encourage students to use the Writing Center by offering extra credit to those who sought out our services. Therefore, I sent out a third mass email to teachers in the school letting them know that we were accepting tutees. I explained in the email that our tutors were honors and A.P. students, that they were trained through mandatory workshops, and that they could help their peers with all kinds of writing for all subjects. I included in the email a request that if teachers offered extra credit to their students for using the Writing Center, that they let me know so that I could ensure we had enough tutors available to accommodate an influx of students. I also asked that they send me a copy of their assignment sheet that I could distribute to my tutors ahead of time so that they could reflect on the assignment and anticipate the kinds of questions and concerns they might receive from tutees.

Although slow at first, we eventually began to make steady progress with our numbers. Teachers were encouraging their students to use the Writing Center from varying skill levels, and I was receiving emails from teachers who wanted to understand the process. One question they often had was how to verify if students had actually used the Writing Center. In response, I developed a voucher system where a tutor would fill out a voucher card for the tutee after they were finished with the session (Appendix 12). The system was similar to that used by the Suffolk County Community College Writing Center, with whom we had held continuous collaborations from the start. The voucher card would be stapled to the final paper so the teacher could give credit to the student as a reward for seeking out our services. This system also served to protect the tutor because the voucher card specified which stage of writing the student was at with the assignment when the session took place. Therefore, if a teacher or student claimed that the tutor

had not adequately helped a tutee with grammar mistakes, for example, we could refer to the voucher. If the card specified that the student had come to a session during the prewriting phase, I could explain that grammar is best dealt with during the final editing stage of a paper. It was my stance that tutors should not be responsible for the overall quality of the student's writing, and I emphasized to my tutors that it was the student's choice to embrace or reject the tutor's advice. In order to clearly convey this idea to the tutee, I included a disclaimer on the student information sheet (Appendix 4) stating that the tutor was not responsible for the grade the student received on the paper and that he or she was only there to act as an audience and offer advice. This disclaimer was to be read out loud to the tutee and signed before the session commenced. Although tutoring sessions often present a dilemma regarding who is responsible for the quality of the writing, I did all that I could to place the authority in the tutee's hands, thus ensuring that my tutors would be protected from unnecessary criticism.

Appealing to teachers in the school was an effective means of drawing more tutees to the Writing Center. Andrew Jeter, administrator for the Skokie, Illinois Literacy Center and Palacio and Dvorak have also observed this trend, where support of teachers helps encourage student use of the Writing Center. In their article, Palacio and Dvorak note that "once two freshmen literature teachers decided to make the afterschool visits a part of their class requirements, the pace picked up" (24). Similarly, once I began to respond to teacher inquiries, our numbers began to grow. One teacher in the history department required his 9th grade A.P. students to use the Writing Center for a major research paper assignment. He was happy with the results, and wrote a letter on my behalf validating the value of our work. I believe that by requiring his A.P. students to use the Writing Center, he helped promote our cause. He helped us avoid being labeled as a resource centered solely around Writing remediation, or what Stephen North refers to as the perception

that "the Writing Center's only logical *raison d'etre* must be to handle those...with 'special problems' " (435). He sent a message to his students and fellow teachers that our services were not just there for remediation purposes. He showed his advanced students that they, too, could benefit from working with a more experienced upperclassman, and many of my tutors expressed that they were familiar with the assignment having completed it themselves years ago as 9th graders. We were beginning to create the writing community I was hoping for, where older, more experienced peers could help pave the way for the younger generation to succeed.

Chapter 6

Our numbers became more consistent with each successive week, which was evident by the marked-up schedule as well as by my tutors, who began referring to returning students by first name only. Though we were never perfect and encountered the occasional tutor or student no-show, we were overall stabilizing as a group. At that time, I began to notice that more students were using the Writing Center from different skill levels. I also noticed that students were starting to vary the assignments for which they received tutoring. Quite a few tutees were upperclassmen seeking help with their personal statements and common application college essays, and others came for help preparing for the SAT. No matter our level of success, however, I did not want my tutors to become complacent. Always thinking about their growth as writers as well as tutors, I decided to come up with ways by which I could continue to help my tutors develop their practice.

I became determined to provide my tutors with practice on how to instruct their peers in a safe environment because I was aware of how stressful it could be to lead a tutoring session. In order to provide such an experience, I reached out to my most abundant resource: the teachers in

the building. Knowing that my colleagues would be delighted to have an extra person available to help students with their writing, I arranged to have my tutors participate in classroom sessions. In these sessions, a tutor would join a teacher while he or she taught a writing workshop. In order to prepare the tutor, I made sure to provide a copy of the assignment being worked on and asked that the tutor look over it a few days before participating in the session. I also asked the teacher what he or she expected of the tutor, making sure the teacher knew that tutors were there for support and were not allowed to lead a session.

A large majority of my tutors participated in classroom sessions, and many of them reported that the experience allowed them to observe how a teacher worked with a student on a different level. In other words, my tutors were used to looking to teachers for help, and did not often look to them to understand how to teach others. Working side by side with the teacher provided my students with the opportunity to observe different aspects of writing instruction at play in a workshop setting. Furthermore, the teachers who utilized the classroom sessions we offered reported that the essays that were submitted after these sessions showed marked improvement from essays turned in prior. In addition to helping my tutors gain insight into the teaching of writing, the classroom sessions helped spread the word about the Writing Center. Jennifer Wells noted a similar trend when she started sending tutors into classrooms from her Reading and Writing Center in Mercy Parochial High School. In her article, she explains that classroom sessions made the center "immediately useful to both faculty and students, and looking back, this was the best possible move we could have made to ensure our long-term success" (82). Similar to Wells' findings, I believe that we gained traction due to these classroom sessions, which simultaneously provided an authentic experience whereby my tutors gained exposure to varying methods of writing instruction.

While I felt it was important to provide my tutors with a thorough understanding of the tropes of high school writing, I believed I needed to elevate their thinking to include college-level writing. With Vygotsky's zone of proximal development in mind, I wanted to allow "for what already ha[d] been achieved developmentally but also for what [was] in the course for maturing" (33). Therefore, in an effort to introduce my students to the world of college writing, we began to collaborate with the Writing Center at Suffolk County Community College. The director of the Center, Professor William Burns, came to our school to conduct tutoring workshops on a few occasions with another associate professor from the college, Meridith Leo-Rowett. During our time with them, we did everything from role-playing, to mock tutoring, to discussing aspects of the tutoring session, such as how to proceed when having no idea what to say or how to disarm a defensive student when trying to offer them assistance with his or her paper. We even became comfortable enough with them to visit their Writing Center, where a few of our high school tutors were able to observe college tutoring sessions in action. In his 1982 article, Stephen North promotes session observations as a method for tutor training, asserting his belief that it allows the tutor to prepare for every aspect of tutoring (437). This includes "who sits where, who holds the paper and pencil, what kinds of questions get asked, what sorts of answers given, when to be silent, for how long, etc" (437). As a result of their observations, my tutors revealed a truth in North's assertion, stating that they felt more knowledgeable on how to proceed with tutoring sessions in general. Some also reported feeling more confident in their own writing skills because they found quite a few similarities between their writing and the college-level writing to which they were exposed.

Since my tutors had reported learning so much from their interaction with Suffolk County Community College, I decided to expand their exposure to include writing at the University

level. As a former student and tutor at Stony Brook University, I had a few connections there and reached out to see if they would help in my effort to expand my tutors' minds. Dennis Clarke, the director of the Writing Center, allowed me to bring a few of my students to observe sessions. Afterwards, we were able to speak with the director, the student coordinator, and a few college tutors about what they had experienced. During our discussion, my students commented on the similarities between high school and college writing. They noted that like their younger peers, the college tutees they observed seemed primarily concerned with grammatical correctness. Their comments led to an interesting discussion on the importance, or lack thereof, of grammar in writing critique. My tutors also expressed varying views in terms of the quality of the student writing. A few tutors said that the papers the tutees brought in were disorganized, and lacked sound logic. Others noted that in the sessions they observed, the students' papers presented just the opposite: strong arguments with well thought out supporting evidence. In response, these tutors professed that they would not have known how to proceed were they leading the session, and they expressed trepidation in being able to produce similarly strong writing in their near, college-bound futures.

I initially had mixed feelings regarding my tutors' responses to college-level writing. In one regard, I thought it was beneficial for my tutors to have exposure to the kinds of writing they would soon have to produce. I wanted them to strive for a higher level of intellect, cohesion, and linguistic variety in their writing. However, I did not anticipate that some of my students would feel intimidated by the writing to which they were exposed. Not wanting to stunt their growth as writers or tutors, I asked for the help of my former Stony Brook professor and mentor, Bente Videbaek. As an undergraduate student, I often struggled to organize my ideas into one cohesive thesis statement that I could support with sound evidence. Professor Videbaek had unwavering

faith in my abilities, and with her help I was able to elevate my writing skills to adhere to the expectations set out by my professors. She volunteered to come to our school to conduct a few workshops for my tutors on thesis statements (Appendix 13). To date, I have former tutors tell me that they still use their notes from her workshops to help them develop thesis statements as college-level writers. If nothing else, these reports are a testimony to the effectiveness of joining the high school world with the college world.

Current scholarship suggests that successful high school Writing Centers are those that are affiliated with local colleges and universities. Katherine Palacio was teaching high school English during the day and taking graduate courses at night when she met Kevin Dvorak, the director of the St. Thomas University Writing center (30). Their conversations gave her the idea to start a center in her high school, and their collaboration continues to this day, as students from the university tutor high school students in an effort to "bridge the gap between high school writing and college writing" (20). Keri Mulqueen, who recently became the assistant principal at Nazareth high school, still works closely with St. John's University as she continues to run her Writing Center, bringing her high school tutors to the Queens campus to train with college tutors (30). Their workshops include observations, discussions of tutoring sessions, and "role-playing exercises where college tutors played the part of reluctant or defensive writers, allowing the high school tutors to brainstorm ways of moving sessions forward by bringing writers more directly into the conversation" (30). Exposure to college Writing Centers introduces younger tutors to the language of academia and to the expectations of college-level writing. By building a bridge between high school and college, tutors not only acquire knowledge that will make them more effective tutors, but that will also help inform their thinking as they enter into their own journeys as college students.

Through collaborations with local colleges and universities, high school Writing centers are presented with the unique opportunity to shape college ready writers, answering the writing initiatives set out by the new Common Core Standards. As a result of college and high school interactions, young tutors gain insight into the learning process, engage with writing at a higher level, and learn to adopt the language of academia. These results align with those presented by the common core standards, which assert that "to be college- and career- ready writers, students must take task, purpose, and audience into careful consideration, choosing words, information, structures, and formats deliberately" (National Governors Association Center 54). By comparing common tropes of high school and college writing through session observations, high school tutors are forced to grapple with the concept of audience and the expectations set out for different writing tasks at varying levels. Before even entering college, they are aware of these expectations and are prepared to adapt for the sake of college success. Furthermore, examining college-level papers and interacting with college tutors and professors exposes high school tutors to more sophisticated linguistic options, which they internalize and adopt not only in their own writing, but also in tutoring sessions when they are guiding a peer towards meeting the standards set out for them. They become knowledgeable and responsible practitioners in the art of writing, making decisions during the composing process that are both informed and deliberate. They are inspired to take providence in their own writing process, which prepares them to succeed at the college-level and beyond.

Chapter 7

With the economic recession in full swing, our Writing Center came across hard times in the 2011-2012 school year. Not being able to secure one of the very few permanent positions

available that year and needing to support a household, I was forced to look for positions outside of the district where I had founded our Writing Center. It was in that year, however, when I realized the full potential of what we had created.

Not sure how to break the news to my tutors that the future for our Writing Center was uncertain, I remained quiet for the first few weeks of the year while substitute teaching in different buildings in the district. However, I soon received emails from my tutors informing me that they had gone to the principal, convincing him that no matter what it took they wanted to continue to offer their services to their peers. Touched by their dedication, I decided that we would set up a structure that would allow us to continue in spite of the difficulties we would face as I jumped from building to building on a daily basis, not sure if I would get there on time for workshops or to coordinate tutoring sessions in the library.

Although it is not necessary to fully flesh out how we went about keeping our doors open, I will provide a general outline. I broke up Writing Center duties into three categories: advertising, scheduling, and tutor training. Each category was assigned two senior tutors who accomplished various tasks relating to their category. The senior tutors in charge of scheduling made sure the schedule was up each week, logged tutor hours, and reported tutor no shows to me so that I could speak with tutors about attendance. The senior tutors in charge of advertising made sure announcements were placed and came up with marketing strategies. Some of these included making Writing Center t-shirts and posters and selling vintage candy to raise funds for workshop snacks. Lastly, the seniors in charge of tutor training organized workshop sessions. This entailed coming up with pertinent workshop topics, finding a presenter, and arranging all aspects of the workshop. Knowing that these tasks would be difficult to organize, I assigned three student coordinators who would work closely with the senior tutors, coordinating duties

and reporting failures to me so that I could set things right. The structure was relatively successful, and allowed us to train new tutors and begin accepting tutees by October 24, 2011. However, it became even more difficult when I accepted a leave-replacement position at a school that was much further away.

Having no choice but to relinquish primary control of the Writing Center, I sought out the help of a dedicated substitute English teacher in the building. She had been present for many Writing Center workshops the year before, and had a thorough understanding of my goals and objectives. Furthermore, I believed that she could add an entirely new perspective to the Writing Center, since her background was in Educational Technology. As we struggled through the year, she proved to be an invaluable asset. For example, she arranged for our three student coordinators to speak at a faculty meeting about the writing center in an effort to increase awareness in the building of what our Writing Center functioned to do. She also arranged a fieldtrip for our tutors to visit fourth graders in one of the district's elementary schools to help them complete writing tasks for the ELA exam. Both events proved to be successful, and our numbers were relatively consistent for the remainder of the year.

As a testimony to the tremendous effort exerted by my tutors, we were invited to present at the 2011-2012 Northeast Writing Centers Association conference at St. John's University. Having continued our collaborations with the Suffolk County Community College Writing Center, we came together one last time to present on the value of our collaborations. We entitled the presentation, "Does Suburbia Need a Writing Center? The Shifting Landscapes of High School-College Writing Center Collaborations" and received permission to have our three student coordinators present with us. The pride I felt as I watched my tutors articulate their opinions of what they had learned as tutors cannot be expressed. Without hesitation, they added

to the discussion on the importance of the interactions between colleges and high schools, and fielded questions from the audience. To highlight some of the conversation, one of my student coordinators expressed that while she had struggled with writing for some time, helping others challenged her to understand the writing process, which made her more confident in her own writing. Another student explained to the audience that the Writing Center provided him with a positive outlet through which he could exert his own enthusiasm for writing. My third student coordinator expressed that tutoring enabled her to more fully comprehend essay structure, which allowed her to focus less on organization and more on the ideas she was expressing. As if the experience itself were not enough, we were also presented with the NEWCA Scholarship award, and received a small sum of money that helped support our Writing Center in the last few weeks of the school year.

Chapter 8

Unable to secure a permanent teaching position for the 2012-2013 school year, I had no choice but to part ways with the school where I developed the Writing Center, but I left with high hopes for the future. My successor was hired in a permanent position in the school and still coordinates Writing Center activities. Its continued success demonstrates that in spite of all obstacles, what we developed is sustainable, even without my presence in the building. I have also come away with a clear idea of what Writing Centers are capable of doing in the high school environment. The ever-present common core curriculum is placing more emphasis on the integration of more rigorous writing assignments in the classroom. While teachers are daily answering this call to action, they are going to need help from people who are accessible, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic. Who better to do so than the students who are engaged with

high school writing tasks on a daily basis, and whose successes prove that they are worthy to provide this support?

Through my work with the Writing Center, I have learned that the potential for such a program is endless. By employing the help of high school students, I was able to acquire tutors who were ambitious and enthusiastic. Their boundless energy encouraged me to constantly look for ways to improve how we ran our program. They made me realize that what we offered could not be confined within the library walls; my tutors needed to be allowed to take flight and reach students in classrooms both within and outside of the building. Jay Matthews in his September "Time to Retire the SAT" *Washington Post* article asserted that we are doing a bad job at teaching writing. While I do not have the space in this thesis to comment further on his argument, I can say that my tutors taught me that we do not have to continue teaching in the same traditional ways, but instead, we can reframe our thinking. They have shown me that with energy, positivity, and innovation, we can change how teachers and students alike view writing instruction. They taught me that not only is it possible to help students reach and surpass the standards set out for them, but that it is also within the scope of a high school Writing Center to help students reach their full potential in the immediate future and beyond.

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