

NARRATING THE WRITING CENTER: KNOWLEDGE, CRISIS, AND SUCCESS IN
TWO WRITING CENTERS' STORIES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	7
LIST OF TABLES	7
ABSTRACT.....	8
CHAPTER ONE	
WEAVING A WRITING CENTER NARRATIVE.....	9
Part One: My Path as a Student, Tutor, Teacher, and Researcher	9
Exigency #1:My Story	9
Exigency #2:Growth in the Internationalization of Writing Centers.....	14
Exigency #3: Global Economic Crisis.....	17
Part Two: Defining the Parameters of the Case Study	18
Writing Centers: Definition	20
Writing Centers as Research Sites	21
The University of Arizona Writing Center	25
London Metropolitan University’s Writing Centre	26
Methodology: Textographic Case Study	27
Overview of Project	33
CHAPTER TWO	
EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS AND ARTICULATIONS IN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PARADIGMS	41
Writing Center Epistemological Paradigms	44
Knowledge in the Center	50
On Becoming a Tutor	57
The University of Arizona Writing Center-Tutor Training	59
London Metropolitan University’s Writing Centre-Peer Mentor Scheme	63
The Making of Knowledge in the Writing Center	67
The Tutor as an Organic Intellectual	70
Conclusion	75
CHAPTER THREE	
RHETORIC OF CRISIS: ACCESS, LITERACY, AND FUNDING	78
Why Crisis?	88
Crisis of Access	89
Open Access in the US	92
UK Increased Access/Massification	95
Crisis of Literacy	104
Literacy in the Writing Center	109
Crisis of Funding	114

TABLE OF CONTENTS - *Continued*

Conclusion	118
CHAPTER FOUR	
REFRAMING WRITING CENTER STORIES: IDEOLOGY, IDENTITY, AND SUCCESS	120
Investigating Frames	125
Historical Frames #1: The Writing Center as Fix-It Center	126
Historical Frames #2: The Writing Center as a Site/ The Writing Center as a Method ..	128
Historical Frames #3: Focus on Peer Tutors.....	132
Historical Frames #4: The Marginalized Writing Center	133
Historical Frames #5: The Gendered, Nurturing Writing Center	136
Working with Faculty	142
Working with Students	148
Research	151
Concepts of Success	154
Resisting and Reframing Historical Writing Center Frames	159
CHAPTER FIVE	
<i>KAIROS AND STASIS THEORY: A PATHWAY TOWARD WRITING CENTER VITALITY</i>	164
<i>Kairos</i>	168
Kairotic Moments: London Metropolitan University’s Writing Centre and the UA Writing Center	170
Kairotic Moments: Working Horizontally and Vertically Across the Institution.....	172
Defining Terms on Our Own Terms	174
<i>Stasis in Writing Center Communication</i>	178
Stasis in Action	180
Bringing Kairos and Stasis Together	183
Crafting a Writing Center Identity	186
Kairos and Stasis as Praxis	187
WORKS CITED	193

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Epistemological Paradigms	48
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Crises Matrix.....	87-88
Table 2. US Enrollment and Institutional Growth, 1869-2009.....	92
Table 3. UK Total Student Population 1990-2007	96
Table 4. Secondary Graduates Leaving vs. Secondary Graduates Entering HE	97

ABSTRACT

Narrating the Writing Center: Knowledge, Crisis, and Success in Two Writing Center Stories is year-long comparative case study of two writing centers in the US and the UK and draws upon ethnographic and textographic methodologies. Using writing center documents such as annual management reports, websites, training materials, and interviews with writing center staff and administration, I investigate historical, cultural, and political influences on writing centers and trace moments of change in writing center history in order to contextualize the changes both writing centers faced in terms of funding, location, and identity. I examine traditional and contemporary epistemological paradigms that inform writing centers' everyday practices and underlying ideology that both correspond with and resist institutionally-sanctioned ways of knowing and institutionally-embedded ideology. Using documents and interviews from both sites, I explore the ways in which writing centers find themselves in a reactive position during crises, such as the crisis of access, of literacy, and of funding, rather than a proactive position. Drawing from frame analysis, I argue for reframing the narratives surrounding writing center identity and praxis through the use of code words which have the potential to align writing center praxis with institutional values and result in increased agency for writing centers during crises. I conclude with a blending of contemporary definitions of *kairos* and *stasis* in order to create a rhetorical method of writing center communication that can serve as a potential path toward writing center sustainability, and I offer current writing center administrators a heuristic for implementation.

CHAPTER ONE

WEAVING A WRITING CENTER NARRATIVE

Part One: My Path as a Student, Tutor, Teacher, and Researcher

I begin this project with a brief history on the path that led me here. I do this because any sustained project implies constant reflection. The recursive nature of my project, returning me again and again to the beginning, has exposed a deep connection between my research interests and my personal life. I am fortunate enough to be able to do work that I find important and that feeds me personally, and I want to share the personal connection I have with my research. I am weaved throughout this project, as the researcher, as the former writing tutor, as the marked student in need of “fixing.” Therefore, I begin with a few of the exigencies that pressed upon me and ultimately drove me here in the hopes of illustrating how my research is informed by and in turn informs my identity.

Exigency #1: My story

When I first read Richard Rodriguez’ *Hunger of Memory*, I felt that his book articulated my experience as a first-generation student. Rodriguez, particularly in the chapter titled “Achievement of Desire,” describes the continual tension between his private and public life; he details the pull/push sensation he experienced as a first-generation, Mexican-American student. Rodriguez narrates the push toward education from both teachers and parents and details the subsequent shift in his relationship and identification with his family. In the end, Rodriguez attributes his ability to reflect and understand how education changed him to his many years in education. In other words,

his education gave him the tools necessary to reflect and critique his growing distance from his family and to write about something so personal in such a public way.¹

His text touches upon the ways in which we categorize and value certain types of knowledge and knowledge-making. “From his mother and father the boy learns to trust spontaneity and nonrational ways of knowing. *Then*, at school, there is mental calm. Teachers emphasize the value of a reflectiveness that opens a space between thinking and immediate action” (Rodriguez 49). I understand the tension between these two ways of knowing, but like Rodriguez, I was really only able to understand it now, after years of education. Therefore, the tension sat just below the surface of my life and work, not reflected upon or placed within a broader context. Now that I have context, I can see how my experiences as a first-generation student and the subsequent internal and external tensions have fueled my research interests. Not succeeding the first time I attended college has made me want to explore, in detail, the relationship between first-generation students, student-support programs, and upper administration. In particular, I am interested in how differing epistemological paradigms impact first-generation students’ identities, student support services such as writing centers, and mission statements and material conditions of universities.

Student-support services and student identity connect in many ways, but one aspect that stands out is the concept of success. Rodriguez argues that his academic

¹ I acknowledge that Rodriguez’ stance on assimilation and bilingual education, among other things, are controversial and problematic. However, I feel his narration of his personal struggle with his public/private selves and the tension his education produced in himself and his family are deeply relevant to many first-generation students.

success came at a price—the connection with his family. Success in my working-class family meant doing exactly what I was told by those in authority; in other words, I should not disturb the *status quo* lest they (professors, other students, administrators) figure out I did not really belong. Rodriguez writes of similar feelings: “Always successful, I was always unconfident. Exhilarated by my progress. Sad. I became the prized student--anxious and eager to learn. Too eager, too anxious--an imitative and unoriginal pupil” (46). Here Rodriguez pushes upon and exposes the sensitivity and defensiveness I also encountered in my education. Taking chances was not a choice. So despite “success” as it is defined by educational institutions, for many students, success implies a process wherein students seek out available student-support systems. However, I encountered a conflict upon entering higher education because throughout primary and secondary schooling, I was told I was a successful student. So why did I do so poorly in my higher education endeavors? I did not know I needed support, or perhaps more specifically, I conflated support with remediation. In my mind, I thought that if I needed to head to the writing center for help, I must not belong at university. How I internalized this way of thinking, I cannot say. But no one can deny the ubiquity of the remediation or “fix-it shop” identity of writing centers. Therefore, I am interested in the role of writing centers in student success as defined by all stakeholders, but in particular first-generation, under-represented, multilingual, and multidialectical students. Further, I am also interested in the ways concepts of success are framed within institutions and writing centers.

First-generation students find themselves marked by the institution, by their diction, accents, ways of knowing, and ways of writing, habits, and tastes. Rodriguez’

marked difference also encompassed his Mexican-“ness.” While he attempted to change his diction, his accent, his ways of thinking and knowing, it could never erase his brown skin.

He sits in the seminar room--a man with brown skin, the son of working-class Mexican immigrant parents. (Addressing the professor at the head of the table, his voice catches with nervousness.) There is no trace of his parents' accent in his speech. Instead he approximates the accents of teachers and classmates. Coming from *him* those sounds seem suddenly odd. Odd too is the effect produced when *he* uses academic jargon...He even repeats exactly his professor's earlier comment. All his ideas are clearly borrowed. He seems to have no thought of his own. He chatters while his listeners smile--their look one of disdain. (70-71)

While Rodriguez does not explicitly argue that his experience was a crisis of identity, of culture, of education, I argue that crisis is the perfect description of what happens to some students who do not feel they belong in academia. While it is true that any student can experience a crisis, I am interested in the concept of crisis as it pertains to first-generation students. The tension created between public and private, home and school, presents a potential crisis for first-generation students. I felt everything was a crisis—a crucial and important moment of my progress as a student—which in turn had a paralyzing effect. The dichotomous relationship between home identity and school identity can lead to a positive, third, and fluid identity, one which is comfortable moving between spaces. But sometimes it takes an education, support, and reflection to figure that out. The crisis I

experienced, which echoes in many ways Rodriguez' experience, has proved to be another force behind my research interests. Recognizing the variety of crises in which students potentially find themselves, in particular crises connected to students' marked difference, can facilitate student support services and upper administration to move toward addressing such crises. By creating a space for students to articulate and reflect upon their own experience with crises, institutions have the potential to react to students' needs and provide services necessary for negotiating crises.

For some students, moving into higher education implies assimilation. Rodriguez' experience conflates change with assimilation, and I agree with him. Assimilation occurs on many levels for some students, including but not limited to language use, ways of thinking, and ways of knowing, and the value students place on their experiences and knowledge.² When I use the term change, I refer to the change some students encounter upon entering higher education, in particular non-traditional students. One way institutions can mediate that change is through providing support services that help students negotiate the potential destructive nature of assimilation. Writing centers in particular can serve as mediators for students as they negotiate higher education and the discursive practices surrounding writing and writing expectations. Strong, well-funded, and effectively assessed student support services have the potential to provide strategies for students as they encounter a crisis of identity. I am interested in studying crises in the context of higher education and the ways in which institutions react to crises of access, literacy, and funding.

² See *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households and Classrooms*. Norma Gonzalez, Luis C. Moll, Cathy Amanti, eds.

Exigency #2: Growth in the Internationalization of Writing Centers

The field of composition studies seemed like a natural place for me because the field's concern, or subject, is the student. I enrolled in an English MA program where I had the opportunity to teach writing in a first-year composition class as a teaching assistant. My husband, born and educated in Ireland, was boggled by the fact that I was teaching a writing course to first-year university students. "Why are you teaching college students how to write? Shouldn't they already know how to write?" I was just as intrigued to learn that first-year composition was, for a long time, a US-specific codified phenomenon. What was the reason for this? Why did writing instructors in the US systemize tertiary writing instruction, when, and how? I began researching writing pedagogy outside the US, thinking that researching writing instruction outside of the US would lead me to understand US writing instruction in a deeper way; in other words, learning about academic writing pedagogy outside of the US will serve to de-center my US-specific frames and make something familiar strange.

Beginning in the early 1990s, EU legislators have implemented some of the most drastic changes in educational reform, and it is currently taking effect on a transnational scale across Europe. One of EU's earliest mandates is the Erasmus program. Established in 1988, Erasmus's goal is twofold: to promote mobility and exchange of students and teachers within member countries and to develop a "European Dimension" through support of European institutions. "Bringing students to Europe, bringing Europe to all students," captures the spirit of Erasmus. Institutions apply for decentralized mobility funds that enable students and teachers to spend approximately five to six months in other

EU member countries. Participation has increased substantially each year (Communication Department of the European Commission, “Erasmus Celebrates”). The Bologna Declaration was drafted in June of 1999 in order to aid the Erasmus programs’ goals. The declaration included an adoption of comparable degree system and a standard system of credits, both in undergraduate and graduate studies, which further encourages students and teachers to move freely between member states. The Bologna Declaration set in motion what came to be called the Bologna Process, and like the Erasmus program that preceded it, has a central focus on the cross-national mobility of students. In addition, a main goal of the Bologna Process was to emphasize “the role of higher education in supporting European economic growth and the international resurgence of the Continent” (Gaston 2). A consequence of the Bologna Process was “The Quality Reform.”³ The Bologna Process and Quality Reform coincided with the largest organized movement to increase access in the EU and resulted in more students than ever matriculating into colleges and universities, students who were minoritized and socio-economically different than the previously admitted student population. Institutions across the EU have made it a goal to increase student enrollment, in some cases up to 50%.⁴

³ See Dysthe, O. “How a Reform Affects Writing in Higher Education.” *Studies in Higher Education* 32.2 (2007): 237-52 and Dysthe, O., K. Steinar, & I. Lima and “Variations in Portfolio Assessment in Higher Education: Discussion of Quality Issues Based on a Norwegian Survey Across Institutions and Disciplines.” *Assessing Writing* 12 (2007): 129-148, for detail on Norway’s educational changes due to Quality Reform.

⁴ See UK goals outlined in *EUA Trends: 2010*.

The legislation set in motion a significant shift in the discussion surrounding pedagogy, inclusion, and outreach, as well as a shift in material dimensions for students and faculty at certain higher educational institutions. In accommodating the new diverse student population within a space that formerly excluded them, EU higher education institutions faced a change similar to what US higher education institutions experienced with both the GI Bill and Open Enrollment. Both policies signified a shift in student population and brought those previously excluded into higher education: students from different socio-economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. US colleges and universities had to find ways to address these new students and their needs. Indeed, the changes in student body that resulted after the implementation of the GI Bill were instrumental in forming the field of composition studies. CUNY's Open Enrollment generated the basic writing movement, subsequently affecting change in higher education's curricula and classroom practices. The shifts in perception of ability, aptitude, and access that the US experienced after WWII and up until the late 1970s parallels what EU higher educational institutions currently face in finding spaces, both in theory and in practice, for the "new" non-traditional European student.

EU scholars began to look for ways to discuss academic writing, including how students write and what support they need in order to be successful in college writing (see Lillis, Scott). At the same time, US scholars began to take interest in what was happening in the EU and make connections to share ideas. Paula Gillespie and Harvey Kail detailed their visits to three European institutions, one in Germany, one in Hungary, and one in

Greece, in their 2003 *Writing Lab* Newsletter article “Tutor Training and Writing Centers in Europe: Extending the Cross-Cultural Dialogue.” Gillespie and Kail state:

Rather, with very few exceptions, we found institutions where a long tradition of extremely competitive entrance exams, many of them based on essay-writing ability, led to an elite student body that was expected to be able to write fluently and effectively from the start. University professors generally do not teach writing in the discipline and do not discuss their own writing processes with their students. Writing instruction and support, where they do exist in European higher education, often lack faculty interest and university resources of space and money to form programs with continuity. (7)

Gillespie and Kail’s visits illustrate that, at least in the institutions they visited, writing instruction was not an action grounded and informed by theory and research. Professors were experts in their respective fields, not writing studies. Institutions did not have an interest in funding writing support nor training instructors to teach writing in the disciplines because until the move toward increased access, there was no articulated problem with student writing concerns. The historical context spurred my interest in exploring the relationship between increased access and explicit writing instruction to those previously denied access and the role of writing centers in this change.

Exigency #3: Global Economic Crisis

The hard truth is that writing centers are almost never self-supported, and thus rely on ever shrinking budgets for support. Outside grants provide some seed money for

starting writing centers, as seen in both of the sites in this study: University of Arizona's Writing Center was founded through a private gift and funding from the English Department and Writing Program; London Metropolitan University's Writing Centre was funded through a shared grant from a larger UK organization, Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE). Both writing centers experienced the effects of budgetary cutbacks after the larger global economic collapse in 2008. The University of Arizona's Writing Center had its funding slashed because of state budget cuts to the university; the UA responded by moving the Writing Center under the umbrella of Student Affairs and charged a new, all-student fee to fund the Writing Center and began charging for extended tutoring consultations. The London Metropolitan University's Writing Centre was unable to find other sources of funding after HEFCE withdrew its funding from LMU due to institutional reporting discrepancies; the Writing Centre is currently closed. I elaborate on this in later chapters.

Part Two: Defining the Parameters of the Case Study

My guiding questions for this project include:

- What can we learn by looking closely at the sustainability of student writing support services in a cross-cultural context?
- Where can spaces of institutional critique and resistance be found in order to argue for institutional change?
- What are the risks involved in not supporting student writing within specific locations such as writing centers?

- Finally, what can the US writing centers learn from a case study of a European institution that was by all means successful but could not sustain itself?

I attempt to discover answers through a study of two writing centers, the University of Arizona's Writing Center and London Metropolitan University's Writing Centre. I chose these two centers for their similarities: they both serve a large and diverse student body comprised of graduate and undergraduates who identify as multilingual and multidialectical students. Both centers, as I briefly touched upon earlier, have recently experienced change in funding and sustainability, and in the case of the UA Writing Center, pedagogical control. In order to craft a comprehensive picture of these two sites, I gathered documents from each center that were written by the writing centers' staff and administrators for upper administration. In the case of the UA Writing Center, I also included internal English Department documents. I analyzed public documents, such as websites and mission statements from both sites. In addition to these documents, I interviewed staff and administrators at each site, asking them specific questions related to their everyday practices while asking them to position their writing center within their institutional home. Finally, I observed writing tutor practices at the UA Writing Center to illuminate how theoretical frameworks manifest in the everyday practice of tutors working with students. I present my exploration through the lens of three concepts: knowledge, crisis, and success, and connect with larger, more public narratives surrounding higher education.

Writing Centers: Definition

For this project, I define writing centers as designated spaces staffed with trained writing tutors who serve a variety of students from different disciplines. Writing centers may have graduate or undergraduate writing tutors or a mixture of both. Writing center directors tend to be credentialed, with at least a Master's degree not necessarily in a writing-focused field. Similar everyday practices can be found at most writing centers: students arrive seeking assistance with a variety of writing assignments and writing contexts. Tutors are trained to fluidly move between different prompts and learning styles with an overall goal to facilitate confident and independent writers. Tutoring sessions, or consultations as they are sometimes called, occur within strict guidelines according to each center; some centers have drop-in availability, 30 to 60-minute appointments, and can offer an online component for distance or online students. Depending on the student and the assignment, the tutor decides on a directive or nondirective approach, or a combination of both. Tutors can be held to discipline-specific standards regarding best practices, may be encouraged to adhere to strict parameters regarding helping students, and potentially strive to make the writing process and writing center practices transparent for both students and faculty. The transparency talk constantly occurs, and becomes somewhat of a mantra for writing center staff and administrators, for it is repeated at the beginning of tutoring sessions, in classroom visits, and in discussions with faculty. Often that mantra includes the focus on facilitating better writers, not better papers (North).

Writing centers have at times functioned in the margins of institutions, literally and figuratively. US writing centers have resided in the basements, at the ends of dark

hallways, in throw-away locations that spatially position writing centers on the margins. Traditionally, writing centers or writing labs have been considered the place to send bad writers for rehabilitation; this “fix-it shop” perception served to limit the visibility and possibilities of writing centers and their contribution to the institution as a whole.⁵

Writing centers resided in the service sector of the institution rather than the academic sector. However, the professionalization of writing center work, e.g., journals, conferences, international organizations, and dissertations focused on writing centers, has served to somewhat shift writing center work out of the service sector and into the academic sector. Writing center work has transitioned from a practical-based paradigm toward a theoretical-based praxis (Ede, Lunsford), where action is informed by theory and vice versa through research and reflection. Because of the shift from the pragmatic to the theoretical, in addition to the increased focus on empirical research, writing centers have moved closer to the center of the institution, but still face challenges regarding representation, funding, and status.

Writing Centers as Research Sites

In a case study wherein the sites are situated in different cultures, such as this one, writing centers serve as a specific site of research. Addressing and acknowledging moments of comparison and contrast between different cultural and national contexts, in this case writing centers, proves a challenge to any researcher conducting a case study. However, I follow along a growing number of scholars doing work outside of their own context. International writing research has grown each year, as evidenced in the increase

⁵ See Carino’s “Open Admissions and the Construction of Writing Center History: A Tale of Three Models,” Grimm’s *Good Intentions*, and North’s “The Idea of a Writing Center.”

in international-focused sessions at the Conference on College Composition and Communication as well as conferences dedicated to international voices in writing studies, such as the Writing Research Across Borders conference.⁶ Sometimes international writing research implies research by a non-US scholar on his/her contextualized writing practices; other times, international writing research implies a comparative analysis of two or more sites or programs/traditions. In this case, the point of inquiry must be carefully and critically considered in order to begin a viable research project.

For example, in their collaborative text “Exploring Notions of Genre in 'Academic Literacies' and 'Writing Across the Curriculum': Approaches Across Countries and Contexts,” David Russell, Mary Lea, Jan Parker, Brian Street, and Christiane Donahue use genre as the starting point for a comparative inquiry. The authors analyze the US writing across the curriculum (WAC) tradition alongside the UK’s academic literacies tradition (ACLITS). At first glance, these two traditions seem completely different, one focused on student writing within and across the university, the other focused on literacies and the connection between social literacies and cultural capital. Also, the WAC tradition, while interdisciplinary in its practice, locates itself and its theory in the rhetoric and composition field. ACLITS comes out of linguistics, ethnography, and literacy, though its practices are interdisciplinary as well. However, by using genre as a touch point to begin research and contextualize the two traditions, the

⁶ These two examples are in the US; the international conferences focused on composition studies, writing studies, and writing pedagogy are numerous. See European Association for Teachers of Academic Writing for international conferences’ call for papers.

authors begin to articulate the similarities. Both traditions arise from moments of increased access and both focus on moving past the concept of writing as a discrete set of skills towards a more action-based approach to writing. The essay's comparative approach to the two traditions shows one pathway to further cross-cultural dialogue, and serves as a model for decentering our discourse and ways of seeing traditions and practices locally, and instead helps position them globally. A site-specific focus, or in this case a tradition-specific focus, creates a space for a closer examination of the cultural contexts that inform perspectives of academic writing and instruction. Through a careful comparison that addresses the similarities and differences, research such as Russell, et al's offers ways of moving from the local to the global by extrapolating from the site-specific to the global implications.

Writing centers also serve as a point of inquiry for a case study as many writing centers share the same practices due to the proliferation of research. Writing center theory and pedagogy is well documented and accessible via *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *Writing Center Journal* online archives and *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, published online. While writing center theory maintains that writing center practices are contextual, there are practices that can be exported without comprehensive revisioning. For example, the tutor/student relationship should be thought of and practiced through the frame of peer collaboration. The center itself should be physically and aesthetically inviting in order to establish a safe and comfortable place for students to discuss their writing. Tutors focus on facilitating better writers, not better papers. Student visits and student feedback should be documented so that writing centers can present evidence of efficacy to upper

administration. These are some, but not all, commonplaces of writing center theory and practice that are most often exported as new writing centers emerge and older ones are redefined. Because of these commonalities, the writing center works as an effective point of inquiry for this project, but I also pay careful consideration to cultural differences.

Finally, a focus on writing centers creates a space to discuss institutionalized perceptions of academic writing, in particular student writing. Institutions have at times used student writing as a means to suit various ends. In his essay “Writing in Multiple Contexts: Vygotskian CHAT Meets the Phenomenology of Genre,” David Russell analyzes the various ways one institution conceives and talks about students writing. Interviewing both faculty and students in a third-year, General Education course, Russell illustrates a pattern in the disconnects between the ways in which students and faculty perceive the course’s writing assignments, which he then connects with “larger patterns institutionally....and ideologically” (360). Institutions publicly perceive writing as “necessary for critical thinking and democratic life” and that “[c]itizenship is...an accumulation of knowledge and skills taught to the masses--an ideology of mass education.” Writing programs across the US use similar language in their mission statement, which we can assume is supported by the institution. However, Russell discovers that this perception and its underlying ideology are at cross-purposes with a more traditional institutional ideology, one of an “elite, meritocratic education,” which manifests in the perceptions and practices of writing as a “tool of enculturation in some specific social practice, such as the activity of doing professional academic history” (360). Moving between these contradictory perceptions allows institutions to vocally

support writing across the curriculum programs while maintaining the *status quo* of writing as a means of identifying and marking those who belong and those who do not.

Russell's research shows the ways in which writing and writing support can be used to explore and discuss the material effects of institutional ideology on students, instructors, and writing support staff. Because of my interest in the inner workings of upper administration and the relationship between the institutional ideology and what I do every day, teach and talk about writing, Russell's research also illustrates a way into this relationship. In the following chapters, I explore the relationship between upper administration and writing center staff and administrators through the frameworks of knowledge, crisis, and success. Talking about writing center theory and practice needs to include the institutional context, and for me that means the practices and ideology of the institution as it relates to student writing support. Writing centers also serve as points of inquiry to institutional resistance (Porter, et al; Grimm, *Good Intentions*) because of their marginal status. Shamoan and Burns articulate one perspective that embraces the marginal status precisely because it offers a space to resist. Therefore, writing centers provide a perspective from which to explore and critique institutionalized ways of knowing, of reacting to crisis, and of conceptions of success.

*The University of Arizona Writing Center*⁷

Founded in 1991 by Dr. Tilly Warnock and a doctoral student, Chadwick Allen, the University of Arizona Writing Center was originally funded through the English

⁷ Throughout the dissertation, I refer to the UA Writing Center using the US spelling, and LMU's Writing Centre using the British spelling. When referring to the specific centers, I capitalize the centers in order to maintain and respect the brand; when referring to writing centers in general, I use lower case.

Department and a private grant from the Soldwedel family. In its first decade, the Writing Center moved locations four times, indicating an institutional lack of commitment to creating a permanent Writing Center. Student traffic increased exponentially; in 1991, the Writing Center employed 9 tutors and saw 131 consultations, which grew to 24 tutors and 2600 student consultations by 2003. However, by 2005, the English Department's Writing Program experienced severe budget cuts, starting with \$250,000 in academic year 2004/2005 and continuing each year until they exceeded over one million dollars (Hall, personal interview).

In order to save the UA Writing Center, the Office of Student Affairs took over funding the Center and provided a new home in the Think Tank, a centralized student tutoring space. The Writing Center is currently funded through student fees and functions alongside other tutoring services, such as math. The English Department strives to maintain pedagogical control over the everyday practices of the Writing Center, and I document some of the changes, both theoretical and material, that the Writing Center has faced in this transition. The Writing Center still exists, which is good news for students and the staff and administrators, but its current form may not be a representation of the original intent of the Writing Center's tradition and mission. I am interested in the ways the Writing Center has negotiated, and still negotiates, the move to Student Affairs and how that move manifests in everyday practices.

London Metropolitan University's Writing Centre

As a result of widening participation, grant money flowed to researchers/educators to fund student support programs across the UK, such as writing

centers and bridge programs. The London Metropolitan University's Writing Centre was funded through an HEFCE grant, along with two other writing centers that formed the Write Now Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Founded in 2007, the Centre increased traffic yearly and closely documented its growth. In addition, the Writing Centre staff and peer mentors⁸ worked together to present research at international conferences and publish their work in international journals. In every sense of the word, the LMU Writing Centre was successful. However, due to reporting discrepancies on student completion rate by London Metropolitan University's administration, the granting organization has ceased all funding to LMU.⁹ Programs such as the Writing Centre that were on renewable grants could not find other funding. In fact, the Centre was scheduled to close in 2010, but because it had a surplus, the Centre's administrators were able to keep it open until March 2011 (Bahkshi, interview). These events are no doubt devastating to students who have been admitted to universities such as LMU under the banner of widening participation, as well as the researchers who have done empirical work on these student support programs and published this work internationally.

Methodology: Textographic Case Study

According to Robert E. Stake, a case study methodology relies on two specific ways of creating new knowledge: Categorical Aggregation, an interpretation based on a collection of instances, and Direct Interpretation, an interpretation based on one instance (74). Both of these approaches to data imply looking for patterns, either aggregated

⁸ LMU's Writing Centre uses the term Peer Mentors to describe peer graduate writing tutors.

⁹ See Higher Education Council for England "Statement by the Higher Education Funding Council for England on the recovery of funding from London Metropolitan University"

patterns or patterns within a single instance. Either way, patterns to me implied significance, something worth a closer analysis. I looked for patterns in the texts I collected: writing center documents authored by writing center administrators and staff for a variety of audiences; institutional documents that were semi-public and public; government authored studies and declarations; texts about writing published for a mass audience. I also looked for patterns in each writing center's history, trajectory, funding, and everyday practices. So not only do I analyze documents and interviews, and I perceive both documents and interviews as texts, but I also analyze the events and the significant players in the events surrounding each center's founding, establishment, outreach, and current identity. John Swales identifies this as an examination of the conventions of a particular space or community in order to better understand that community (194). In his textography, *Other Floors, Other Voices: A Textography of a Small University Building*, Swales argues that because the texts he chose to analyze are situated – within the community in which they were written, within the textual history of the individual or collaborative authors, within the discipline from which the texts originated – these texts are able to inform in much deeper ways by illuminating a community's "discoursal practices" (4) or, as I explore in chapter 2, discursive practices and formations. In short, my methodology draws from Swales' textography, a rhetorical and potential critical analysis of what Swales calls "text and text-makers" that situates them within a particular context (spatial, historical, political, social, and ideological). It is a case study of the discursive practices of two writing centers while exploring the larger discursive formations to which they belong.

The collection of texts offers an understanding of the relationship between “the particularity and communality,” which is one of the larger goals of this research project (Swales 4). I move back and forth between the particularity, which I identify as contextualized and local, and the communality, a broader analysis that addresses the general. The local texts were the ones written by each specific writing center staff and administrators, such as management reports or internal memos, or texts authored or approved by upper administration, such as mission statements. But I also looked at documents with a more general audience and purpose in order to further contextualize each writing center’s story, documents such as government publications and studies, such as *A Nation at Risk* and *EUA Trends 2010*. I focus on the three different layers, the macro (national), the meso (institutional), and the micro (writing center) in order to present a fully realized portrait, one that shows the complex web of historical and cultural influences, of each writing center. Alongside the written texts, I weave in voices of those who offer their sense of the particularity and communality within their affiliated writing center. I ended up, as most researchers do, with more texts than I would actually use.¹⁰ I read each text including the transcripts from the interviews in order to discern patterns. I was looking for patterns in word choice; for example, the ways writing center staff and administrators talked about tutor training and how that discussion aligned (or not) with larger discussions on pedagogical trends. From these patterns I would extrapolate larger,

¹⁰ In a larger, more longitudinal study, the culled data could potentially serve a purpose, but for the purpose of this limited study, everything that did not fit within the research question parameters were saved for future projects.

controlling themes, such as the fetishization of credentialing in higher education, which is reflected in these two writing centers' focus on professionalization and credentialing.

However, because the two sites were situated in different cultures, the terms were not always the same. An example of this is the way each writing center refers to writing tutors. Each writing center decides how to refer to tutors and tutoring sessions. These are rhetorical decisions which reflect the value system of each writing center. For example, while the default term is "tutor," "peer mentor" explores a more comprehensive responsibility for the tutor. She is not just a tutor, but also a mentor. Behind that mentor notion lies a strong connotation of a responsible, mature person, which further implies consistency and a reflective adherence to best practices. Another example can be found in the ways writing center refers to the students who visit the writing center; they could be called "clients" or "customers," communicating a writing center identity grounded in a customer service model, which may or may not be in opposition to a pedagogical service model. I use all of these examples to illustrate the ways that the cultural difference between the two writing centers led to differences in their language use. These differences forced me to stop and look at each term differently and closely, taking apart some of the "God terms"¹¹ I may have taken for granted. The differences in language assisted in protecting the research from my bias.

As I discussed earlier, my introduction to writing center research as quite natural, and because of that, I took on the perspective that these commonplaces were universal. They are not. However, this decentering involves another layer: my perspective on what

¹¹ See Richard M. Weaver for his definitions of "God" and "Devil" terms.

works for a writing center is not the universal perspective, despite US writing center scholarship's focus on these commonalities and commonplaces.¹² So in this project, I attempt to articulate a version of two writing centers that represent their subjective lived truths, rather than a version of two writing centers that represent monolithic or objective universal Truths.

Convincing participants in other locations of my decentering presents another layer in a case study wherein one of the cases is located in another country. In my interviews with London Metropolitan University's Writing Centre staff, I made sure I gave participants ample space to ask questions before we began the interview because I wanted them to understand the scope and goals of the project. I chose to use Skype for my interviews in order for the participants to see my face instead of simply engaging with a disembodied voice on the phone. I was able to interview one administrator and two tutors from LMU's Writing Centre, and gathered a multitude of materials from the Centre, including management reports, student visit data, and published research.¹³ Because of my inability to visit the Writing Centre in person, the amount of texts I was able to procure was limited. I relied on the kindness of strangers; but that made each and every text from the Writing Centre special because I could not go back and request more.

I interviewed five people connected to the University of Arizona's Writing Center: two former graduate coordinators, one current graduate coordinator, the Writing

¹² See Shamoan and Burns for writing center scholarship that goes against the grain, so to speak, of US writing center commonplaces.

¹³ However, the director was reluctant to sit for an interview, and I do not want to assume the reasons behind her reluctance. When I was given permission to use LMU's Writing Centre as a site, it was still operational, but both staff and administrators knew that by March 2011, the funding would run out and the Centre would have to close. One administrator, my original contact, had already moved on to another position at different institution.

Center's current coordinator, and the current Writing Program Administrator. I wanted to get perspectives of the Writing Center before, during, and after the move to Student Affairs. The move from the English Department to Student Affairs was incredibly significant and yet somewhat common in an economic crisis. The significance lies in the very ways in which the UA Writing Center identifies itself, crafts a strong tutor training program, and articulates its importance in the institution, so choosing a variety of participants who had different experiences and could speak to those experiences was key in my ability to weave a comprehensive picture of the Writing Center. In addition, I gathered a variety of documents pertaining to funding, staffing, and outreach dating back to 1998. Again, because this center was/is in flux, moving from the English Department to Student Affairs, I had to anticipate and be conscientious of the apprehension current Writing Center staff may have. In other words, they found it challenging, and understandably so, to critique the move to Student Affairs because that critique could be perceived wrongly by the Office of Student Affairs and other administrators. Therefore establishing trust between the participants and me was key in gathering information. Establishing trust was also important when I observed consultations in the UA Writing Center. Tutors need to know why I was sitting there and documenting everything in the consultation. Undergraduate tutors are more conscientious of being observed and ensuring they make the "right" moves in talking with and guiding the student. So much is at stake for everyone involved, but I arrived at the Writing Center early before students arrived, and spoke with the tutors, letting them know my reasons and goals behind the observations.

A particular challenge to my project is writing about the sites as they faced continuous contextual shifts. Both sites were experiencing great change, and being careful and sensitive to that fact changed the way I approached interview questions. I am not just documenting and analyzing what happened in these two writing centers, but I am documenting and analyzing a massive shift in material effects in student writing support and the real people involved in providing and researching said support.

Overview of Project

In the second chapter, I explore institutional and writing center ways of knowing and uncover the connections and disconnects between the two perceptions. I begin with writing center scholarship definitions of knowledge and the ways in which knowledge is transferred or created within writing center everyday practices. Since earlier writing center scholarship focused on the pragmatic, I juxtapose earlier scholarship with the shift made in the early 1990s toward a more theorized articulation of writing center work; I then argue what that shift meant for writing center work, i.e., aligning with institutional hierarchy as it pertains to research and status and theorizing knowledge.

Through a social constructivist perspective, the collaboration that occurs during a writing center consultation serves to create new knowledge. Each participant, the writer and the peer tutor, brings with them a set of knowledge and through collaboration, conversation, and recursive feedback, they arrive at new knowledge.¹⁴ But my question was how this collaborative, social constructivist perception of knowledge aligns or not with traditional institutionalized perceptions of knowledge. I do this to explore the

¹⁴ See Bruffee's "Collaborative Learning and 'The Conversation of Mankind.'"

discursive practices surrounding writing centers representation and the ways they describe what they do and why they do it to upper administration, faculty, and students.

Writing centers, while resisting some forms of institutionalized ways of knowing, have moved closer to the center in regards to credentialing. Credentialing in tutor training becomes important to both the writing center and the institution it serves. For example, by credentialing tutors through an international organization such as the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), writing centers position their everyday practices within the framework of institutionalized hierarchy of expert and amateur. A credentialed tutor training program also reassures faculty that when they recommend the writing center to their students, the students will encounter a standardized experience. In other words, because of the credentialing system, faculty can be assured that each consultation will contain a standardized process, creating a sense of continuity. As I analyze external documents from each writing center, I discuss the fetishization of credentialing as it pertains to tutor training, and connect this with various perceptions of tutors as knowledge facilitators through a discussion of the tutor as organic intellectual.

In chapter three, I switch my lens to crisis. I explore the ways in which institutions react to crises, which at times places them in a nonproductive cycle because of the amount of energy and time spent reacting to crises. Crises also have the effect of creating top-down driven strategic plans as opposed to bottom-up tactical plans. This chapter analyzes the two sites' growth, pedagogy, and practice as a form of reaction toward the various crises, perceived or real, foisted upon institutions from outside forces, such as policy makers, government officials, and the public. I break down historic crises

into three categories that had a direct effect on the proliferation of writing centers in the US and now in the UK: the crisis of access, the crisis of literacy, and the crisis of funding. In particular, I look at the ways writing centers' everyday practices and sustainability are implicated in their reactions to the crises. Through analysis of management reports, institutional communication, and research, I draw conclusions regarding the two writing centers' reaction to crises. I first look at the crisis of access in both countries, citing enrollment trends, public policy, and the ways in which writing centers position themselves in response to the crisis and the subsequent increase in enrollment. Second, the increase in enrollment leads to the perception of a crisis of literacy, wherein I explore differing conceptions of literacy and the ways these conceptions work in, with, and against the two writing centers. Third, I detail the crisis of funding in the recent history of the two writing centers.

I focus on crisis because the relationship between various crises and the subsequent changes or reactions in higher education institutions in general and writing support centers in particular illuminate the historical chain of events – someone or something, such as government or a special interest group, proclaims a crisis of momentous proportion, then higher education institutions react. Rather than being proactive, multiple crises position institutions as the reactor without having time to get in front of the crisis, thus creating an inability to effectively frame the debate, in particular the terminology and ideology in the arguments surrounding the crisis. Reacting to crises continually places institutions and writing centers at a severe disadvantage by always playing defense. If writing centers constantly work from a defensive position, it is a

challenge to move forward in praxis, research, and outreach. However, many scholars, such as Linda Adler-Kassner, David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, claim certain crises are manufactured and rely on dominant frameworks to falsely construct a dire situation in order to bring in public support for the action plan provided by those doing the manufacturing. At times, these action plans, or reforms, are not in the best interest of stakeholders and have negative results, such as diminished resources for students. Berliner and Biddle argue that reforms, or change based on crisis, lead to reforms that “reflect only the personal experiences or prejudices of legislators,” or worse, are “based on misunderstandings about schools and education” (173). During my research, it became clear that the two sites I focused on were continually reacting to crisis – from their founding, to their research, to their current state of location and practice.

In chapter four, I look closely at the framing through which writing centers communicate with the institutions in which they reside, in particular the documents created for faculty and upper administration. First, this chapter looks historically at writing center narratives and how writing centers have changed the way they self-identify throughout the years. In particular, this chapter addresses the significance of the introduction of three things: peer tutoring, the writing center’s marginal position, and the writing center as a research-intensive space. After tracing historical ways of identification, I analyze documents and personal interviews and explore the ‘stories’ these two writing centers - London Metropolitan University’s Writing Centre and the University of Arizona’s Writing Center - tell through their own documents.

I argue for a reconsideration of the frames we use to describe writing centers to students and the institutions. I draw from Adler-Kassner's use of the term "frames" in her text *The Activist WPA: Changing Stories About Writing and Writers*. Adler-Kassner argues that "stories are always set within and reinforce particular boundaries"(4); in other words, the stories we tell ourselves and others about writing center work finds its origin and importance in other stories and frames. In her text, Adler-Kassner details ways to approach changing the frames and/or reclaiming them from others. Educational frames are porous and thus can be used to form a counter narrative, one at cross purposes with the field of writing instruction. The first step in changing writing center stories is to historicize the existing frames, such as writing center identity. The second step is to explore the values informing the current frames, as well as explore the ideology behind the values. Doing so assists in identifying the ways writing center ideology aligns or works against the more powerful institutional ideology, and assists in theorizing the institution while theorizing the writing center as a genre.

Chapter five discusses the use of contemporary *kairos* and *stasis* definitions and combines them to form a methodology to serve as a potential pathway toward writing center sustainability. I first use irenic rhetoric as a framework for collaborative, open, and action-oriented communication. Within that framework, I combine contemporary *kairos* and *stasis* theory to form a specific communicative methodology for writing center self-representation (or frames, to use the language from chapter 4). In particular, I detail ways *kairos* and *stasis* as a theory can be useful to writing center administrators in branding

their center, in communicating with students and faculty, and in aligning the goals and missions of the writing center with the institution's goals and missions.

Kairos traditionally implies an awareness and openness to seizing an opportunity. Sustainability for any student support service relies on timing. Timing is often the exigency for creating, growing, or eliminating a writing center. Therefore, a keen awareness of timing permeates through not only everyday practices such as gathering data on student visits, but also presenting and advocating for writing concerns across the institution. Place also plays a role in writing center theory and practice. Even though the place usually refers to the institutional home of the writing center, place also infers the location and willingness of the audience. In other words, *kairos* is also a rhetorical awareness of the right place to advocate for the writing center. However, *kairos* also implies the "situational context" and the educational and political dimensions surrounding the context (Kinneavy and Eskin 433). Writing centers could benefit from a *kairotic* awareness wherein directors and staff are intuitively sensitive toward faculty and institutional concerns and take advantage of exerting their expertise and connections at the right time. I use examples from the UA's Writing Center story to illustrate how moving under the umbrella of Student Services illustrates a *kairotic* moment that was used effectively to keep the Writing Center functioning and serving students.

In addition to seizing the opportune time and place, writing centers can also benefit from a consideration of *stasis*. In order for interlocutors to engage in argument, they must reach *stasis*; that is, they must realize they are at a standpoint where they must agree to build an argument. Then, as an invention strategy, they move on to agree upon

the terms of the argument. Contemporary *stasis* theory extends that to include agreeing upon the intersections between the interlocutors' arguments. For example, when writing centers engage in discussions regarding efficacy in their practice, they can increase their likelihood of success if they position their effectiveness within the paradigms of institutional perceptions of success, i.e., the number of repeat student visits and longitudinal studies on student writing. In this way, writing centers can frame their representation within the paradigms of what the institution values in order to begin the argument over sustained funding or growth. Starting from *stasis* is exactly that: a starting point from which to effectively begin an argument. It serves as a counterpoint to some of the marginalized narratives found in past writing center scholarship. But I wish to point out that finding *stasis* is not acquiescing or conforming to the dominant narrative. Instead, it is a realistic and potentially more humanistic approach for it implies a deep understanding and empathy for the audience. *Stasis* has the potential to break down binaries precisely because it looks for the third space where two opposing positions intersect and share terms, definitions, and values. Contemporary *stasis* theory provides ways for writing centers to reframe their narrative in terms that align them more closely with institutional goals and missions, and I focus on LMU's Writing Centre's Management Reports to illustrate this point. Writing Centre administrators rhetorically positioned the everyday practices and underlying theories behind LMU's Writing Centre in concert with the institution's mission. By clearly articulating where the goals intersect and focusing on those intersections, LMU's Writing Centre framed their narrative within

the terms used by the institution. In this way, they were enacting contemporary *stasis* theory.

In the end, I argue that both theories can be a useful way toward writing center representation and subsequent writing center sustainability. My goal in this chapter is not to point out what ‘could’ or ‘should’ have happened in these two writing centers. Instead, I use their stories to structure a heuristic for other writing center staff and administrators to guard against marginalization and reactive positionality and move forward in sustainable, viable ways.

CHAPTER TWO
EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS AND ARTICULATIONS IN
EPISTEMOLOGICAL PARADIGMS

“Epistemology provides a context in which to consider the rules and standards that organize perceptions, ways of responding to the world, and the conceptions of the ‘self.’”

(Popkewitz and Brennan 9)

In this chapter, I explore the discursive practices, and thus knowledge, of writing centers in general and the University of Arizona’s Writing Center and London Metropolitan University’s Writing Centre in particular and their respective institutions in order to uncover how these discursive practices indicate epistemological paradigms working within and influencing discursive formations. I do this at the beginning of the dissertation because I want to situate much of the texts, everyday practices, and other communicative practices within a context. Writing centers do not live in a vacuum; instead they are influenced by and thus influence their surroundings, both in material and abstract ways. One way into writing centers’ discursive practices and discursive formations is through a close analysis of their epistemological concerns. Epistemological concerns have long been a focus of composition studies scholarship and, subsequently, of writing center scholarship. Much of writing center scholarship locates knowledge within a context that includes the student, the space, the assignment, and the text. Writing center theory generally perceives knowledge as subjective and, more importantly, sees knowledge-making as a goal within the collaborative practice of consultations. Students

bring their own knowledge to the meeting, a knowledge that is valued and validated in a tutoring session. Kenneth Bruffee states as much in his article “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” when he delineates the types of knowledge brought to a tutoring session: the tutee brings the knowledge of the assignment, the course, and the content for the text. The tutor brings the knowledge of the conventions of academic discourse and the specific genres in which the student writes (10). Inside the writing center, both the tutee and the tutor find value in what they bring to the consultation.

I draw from one of Michel Foucault’s definition of knowledge as it allows me to distinguish the discursive practices, and thus definition of knowledge, within the discursive formations of the two sites’ institutions and writing centers. Bruffee’s example of contextualized knowledge in writing center consultations aligns with Michel Foucault’s definition of knowledge as arising from and supported through discursive practices, practices that in turn are then defined by the knowledge created. In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault first defines discursive formation as “[w]henver one can describe, between a number of statements, such as a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations)” (38). Discursive formations are formed and defined by (and in turn form and define) what Foucault calls “the rules of formation” (40). These rules of formation, to which all involved in the discursive practice are bound, form concepts that then become accepted truth, or knowledge, within the discursive formation (56-57). Discursive practices are not limited to everyday speech. In their article “Michel Foucault’s Theory of Rhetoric as

Epistemic,” Sonja Foss and Ann Gill argue that Foucault meant much more than just speech when describing discursive practices. In addition to written and spoken communication, discursive practices also entail “architectural forms, uses of space, institutional practices, and social relations” (387). Foucault is concerned with discourse that is accepted as truth precisely because of the rules of formation and the formation of concepts are both created through and reify discursive practices. In other words, as Foss and Gill summarize, knowledge is “whatever is considered to be the truth in a discursive formation;” furthermore, “discursive practices are equal to knowledge in turn, knowledge has an impact on the form and content of the discursive practices” (390).

Examples of discursive practices include public and semi-public texts, such as institutional websites and departmental memos, classrooms, and writing center documents and space. While writing centers can certainly be read as texts and analyzed as discursive formations, I work closely with other material conditions such as funding and articulated public and private support of writing centers. When institutions publicly and financially support writing centers and offer writing centers the autonomy to function within their own epistemological paradigm, they adhere to a fluid epistemological paradigm themselves; by supporting writing centers, they implicitly (and oftentimes explicitly) support writing center epistemology. However, the inverse is true as well. Therefore, I agree with Foss and Gill when they argue that exploring knowledge and discursive practices can be fruitful and transformative because it can lead interlocutors toward effective change through becoming more effective and transformative rhetors (397). By attempting to understand how knowledge, the accepted truth within a

discursive formation, is perceived and discussed within discursive practices, I seek to find the disjunctions but also the intersections between institutionally sanctioned ways of knowing and writing center praxis. My goal is to discuss these disjunctions and intersections in order to “explore options” for change in writing center practice that can lead to writing center sustainability.

Writing Center Epistemological Paradigms

Foucault’s definition of knowledge, or discursive practices, is useful to set the boundaries of my epistemological lens; however, I turn to James Berlin to explore, on a more particular level, epistemological paradigms on which some writing center scholarship is grounded. Berlin applies his epistemological paradigms toward composition studies, or academic writing instruction. Because writing center pedagogy concerns itself with similar issues that the field of composition studies concerns itself with, writing center praxis relies on much of the same epistemological paradigms. For the most part, writing center theories of knowledge align with the expressionist and social constructionist/social-epistemic theoretical paradigms (North, Bruffee, Warnock and Warnock, Ede, Lunsford). I draw from Berlin’s definitions of the theoretical paradigms or “assumptions about the very nature of the known, the knower, and the discourse community involved in considering the known” (*Rhetoric and Reality* 3). Berlin’s theoretical paradigms are not dissimilar to Foucault’s discursive formation in that a concept of knowledge is agreed upon within a context (or discourse community) and is then reified through discursive practices (or discourse). However, Berlin makes explicit the ways in which these paradigms manifest in student writing.

Expressionist rhetoric locates knowledge within the writer; the purpose of the writing instructor and/or writing tutor is to draw out that knowledge and assist the writer in expressing that knowledge through the writing process. Expressionist rhetoric “is an art, a creative act in which the process—the discovery of the true self—is as important as the product—the self discovered and expressed” (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 484). In the process of this discovery, the writer is also able to “discover the truth of the situation which evoked the writing” (485). Berlin defines expressionist rhetoric as one of resistance, for institutionalized sanctioned ways of being and knowing are resisted through “challenging official versions of reality,” through the act of self-discovery in the writing process (485). Thus, power and agency lies within the individual and the process of self-discovery. Ultimately, the individual’s discovery will correspond to and support everyone else’s truth and resist conformity from hegemonic forces, and power is a result of finding and using one’s individual voice.

Social constructionist rhetoric also relies on writing as a process, but acknowledges that the social construction of meaning constantly changes through critique and analysis. Berlin goes further to acknowledge that within social-epistemic rhetoric, “the self is a creation of a particular historical and cultural moment,” and that the self never acts with complete freedom, which can be mediated through critique (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 489). Social constructionist rhetoric “views knowledge as an arena of ideological conflict” in which “all arguments arise in ideology” (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 489). Meaning is therefore fluid and a confluence of the interaction between the writer,

the text, and the world, and subject to critique (*Rhetoric and Reality* 73-90). Furthermore, Berlin details knowledge creation within social-epistemic rhetoric:

For social-epistemic rhetoric, the real is located in a relationship that involves the dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse community (social group) in which the observer is functioning, and the material conditions of existence. Knowledge is never found in any one of these but can only be posited as a product of the dialectic in which all three come together. (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 488)

Knowledge and the material effects of knowledge are therefore critiqued within social-epistemic rhetoric, an action that has the potential to provide writers a space for agency. In other words, “The material, the social, and the subjective are at once the producers and the products of ideology...” (Berlin 489). Because of the communal nature of social constructionist/social-epistemic rhetorics, it provides a counter-balance to the individualized focus of expressionist rhetoric.

Each paradigm, the concept of knowledge as either in the writer (expressionist) or as a confluence of the writer, the text, and the writer’s world (social constructionist), conflicts with traditional epistemological paradigms as knowledge being fixed and in the possession of experts who are credentialed (read: not students). Another way to describe the differences between institutionalized sanctioned ways of knowing and the epistemological paradigms in which writing centers function is to look at these different paradigms as horizontal and vertical. In their essay “Re-mediating the University: Learning Through Sociocritical Literacies,” Kris D. Gutierrez, Jevon D. Hunter, and

Angela Arzubiaga define “traditional notions” of development along a vertical, one-directional dimension, from one end, incompetency, to the other end, competency. They describe learning within a horizontal dimension as “including everyday practices of individuals and their communities” (3). Rather than move from one category to another along a vertical dimension, horizontal learning implies a more holistic, social, and communal approach to learning and outcome measurements. The authors argue that a combination of these two learning dimensions can produce rich learning environments that take into account the lived experience of students.

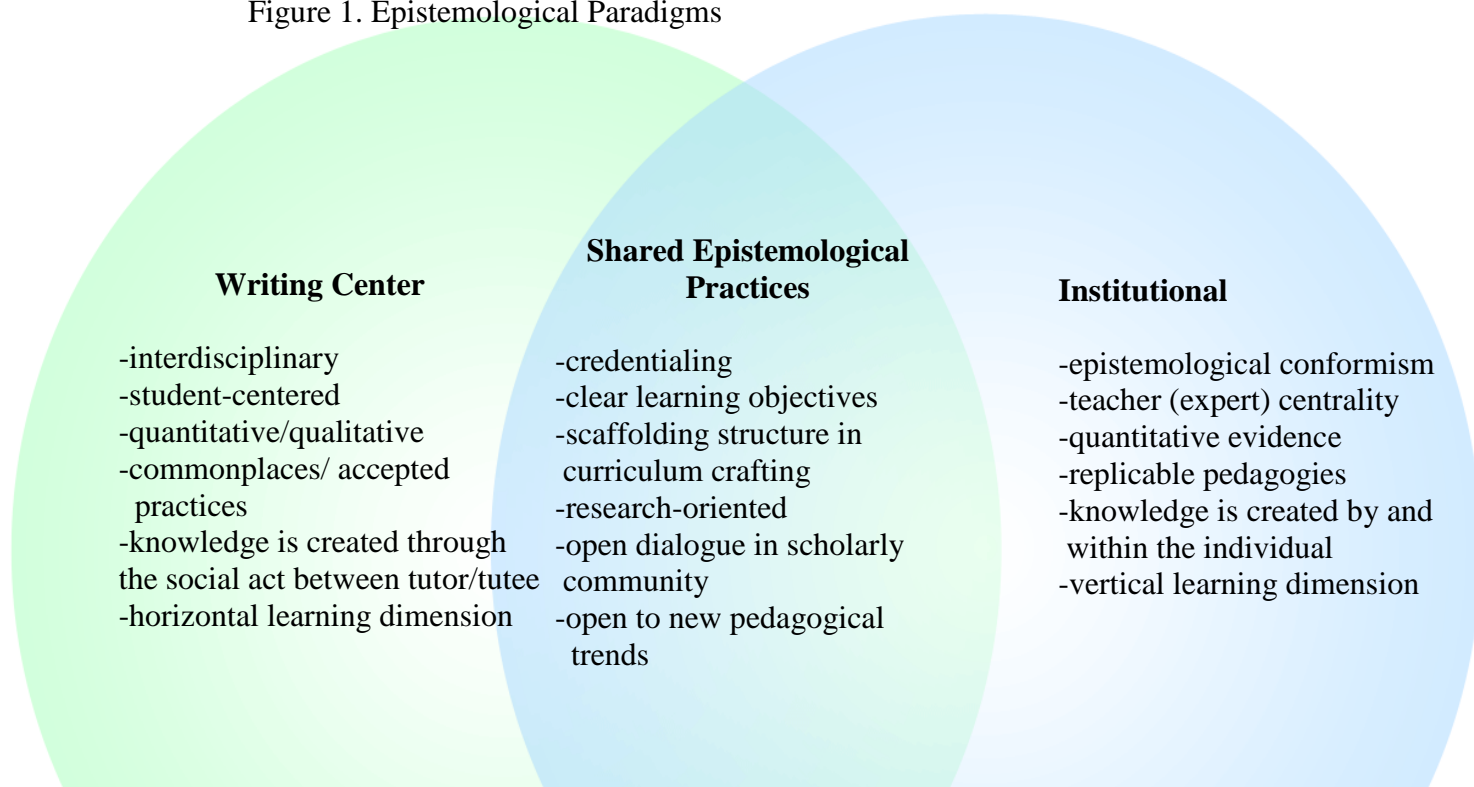
In order to further define institutionalized ways of knowing, I rely on Terrence Riley and his article, “The Unpromising Future of Writing Centers.” In his article, Riley details the difference between writing center practice and theory of knowledge and institutional perceptions of knowledge:

We still pride ourselves on our capacity for providing an alternative to mass education: to epistemological conformism within disciplines and courses, to teacher (expert) centrality, to assessment by measurable outcomes, to replicable pedagogies, to the thorough fixation on the isolated mind that above all characterizes the modern philosophy of education. When writing centers work like they’re supposed to, they encourage the intellect of the undergraduate writer in ways that either ignore these principles or subvert them: expertise is less important than personal engagement, for instance; cognitive “measurements” are usually abandoned entirely. Because our principles are different, the established

university culture has difficulty recognizing what writing centers do. (139-40)

Riley argues that these differences between writing center and institutional epistemological paradigms lie at the center of misunderstanding and mistrust between writing centers and the institutions in which they reside. Therein lies the tension between institutional perceptions of knowledge and writing center theoretical perceptions of knowledge: who has knowledge, how is knowledge transferred, what types of knowledge are valued. However, for the sake of resisting dichotomies, I prefer to look at the spaces where these two paradigms overlap, for within this overlapping space lies the potential to look for ways to address the tension between writing centers and institutions. Figure 1 details epistemological paradigms and the ways in which they manifest in praxis, the differences between writing center and institutionalized sanctioned praxis, and the important ways they overlap.

Figure 1. Epistemological Paradigms



Working from the intersection between the two epistemological paradigms seems like it would provide a transformative space for positive action and change within writing centers and the institutions in which they reside. However, Figure 1 does not take into account that most of the power resides with the institution; in many cases, it is the institution that allocates resources, space, funding, and staffing. The uneven power distribution creates the friction or tension between writing center staff and administrators who adhere to a different epistemological paradigm than that of the institution. Because knowledge directly relates to identity and power, it underscores the relationship between writing centers and institutions (Berlin, Gee, Shor).

Therefore, this chapter looks for the tension between the different contexts and the different perceptions of knowledge. I begin with questions from Jill Fitzgerald and her text *Towards Knowledge in Writing*: What constitutes knowledge? Where is knowledge located? How does one “get” knowledge? But I also want to extend that to my specific concerns: what types of knowledge are valued at the writing center level? At the institutional level? To me, these questions necessarily lead to further questions regarding writing center practices, to the extent that writing centers function autonomously, and the ways writing centers frame their praxis, goals, and mission to the students and the institution. Epistemological concerns in many ways drive the relationship, positive or negative, between writing centers and their institutions. Looking closely at the intersections between epistemological paradigms has the potential to serve as a discussion starting point whereby writing centers and institutions could find ways to discuss knowledge-making and the transfer of knowledge in mutually agreeable terms.

While there are certainly intersections wherein writing center and institutional perceptions of knowledge exist (see fig. 1), this chapter explores the conflict and subsequent tensions between differing perceptions of knowledge. But first I want to point out that the intent of this chapter is not to present writing center perceptions of knowledge as monolithic or in a dichotomous relationship between equally monolithic institutional perceptions of knowledge; instead, this chapter should be read as a “snapshot” of two particular contexts. Writing center theory and practice vary from center to center because knowledge, students, tutors, and directors are locally situated; therefore, theory and practice of knowledge transfer will be contextually defined. The same applies to institutions, particularly regarding the goals and mission of each institution, the background of administrators, and the students being served. However, for the purpose of this chapter, I will present writing center theory and practice through the lens of writing center scholarship, then narrow this down to the everyday tutoring practices and tutor training of both the University of Arizona’s Writing Center and London Metropolitan University’s Writing Centre.

Knowledge in the Center

Writing center scholarship has both implicitly and explicitly addressed epistemological concerns and paradigms within the realm of writing centers, and more specifically, within the realm of the tutor/tutee session. I say implicitly, for as Tony Carino points out in his article “Theorizing the Writing Center,” early works such as Stephen North’s “The Idea of a Writing Center” and Kenneth Bruffee’s “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” discussed ways of knowing and knowledge transfer

without naming specific epistemological paradigms. Carino argues that the slow (relatively) move toward theorizing writing center work hails from a strong pragmatic identity, one clearly articulated in often cited texts such as Muriel Harris' *Teaching One-to-One* and Emily Meyer's and Louise Z. Smith's *The Practical Tutor* as well as articles by North and Bruffee. In other words, writing center work identified, and still identifies in many cases, as the pragmatic work of helping students become better writers (North). Therefore, the shift toward theorizing writing center work found in articles such as Lisa Ede's 1989 article "Writing as a Social Process: A Theoretical Foundation for Writing Centers?" and Andrea Lunsford's 1991 article "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center" caused some backlash in the writing center community. Some scholars, such as Katya Amato and Eric Hobson, argue that the underlying academic insecurity implied by the act of theorizing the writing center results in a different type of practice and identity. To understand the tension between the theory and practitioner identity, it helps to turn a close eye to Ede and Lunsford's explicitly theoretical texts.

Training, tutoring, and administrating leaves writing center directors with little time for theorizing writing center everyday practices. As publications of writing center articles increased, due to *The Writing Center Journal* and *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, most articles focused on the pragmatic. For an example, see *Writing Centers in Context: 12 Case Studies*, eds. Joyce Kinkead and Jeannette Harris, which could be described as daily journal entries from twelve different writing center directors, detailing their everyday practices from making coffee in the morning to meeting with upper administrators. But most of the chapters detail the everyday practices without theorizing

those same practices. Ede argues as much in the beginning of her article “Writing as a Social Process: A Theoretical Foundation for Writing Centers?” when she categorizes the lack of theorizing as a failure, but she details reasons why this failure has occurred: “Because we have in a sense been inventing ourselves as we started, developed, and defended our centers, we have naturally focused on the pragmatic” (5). Further, Ede argues that a theoretical foundation is necessary for writing center work, not just for others outside of the writing center, but for the discipline itself. She sees theorizing the writing center and its practices as a continuation of the conversation regarding what we do and why we do it. While Ede makes this distinction (we are theorizing for ourselves), it is clear that the stronger driving force behind theorizing is institutionalized status. For example, she agrees with Gary Olson who argues that it is time for writing centers to grow up and out of their adolescent stage and pass into “professional adulthood...[which] involves grounding this ‘common form’ in a fully articulated theory” (5). On one hand, Ede acknowledges the daily work that prevents many in the writing center community from doing the heavy lifting of theorizing their work; on the other hand, she categorizes the lack of theorizing as part of an adolescent stage, positioning the practitioner as a frazzled, underdeveloped, albeit overworked teenager against the staid, mature theorist. But Ede’s move is more of a product of writing centers’ growing pains (to extend her metaphor) rather than any attempt to further the binaries of practitioner/theorist.

In the end, Ede’s article is a call to action for the writing center community to participate in the ongoing conversation regarding epistemological concerns. Ede sees a

shift in how knowledge is conceived, transferred, and located. More specifically, Ede extends the previous collaboration-focused articles, such as Bruffee's, and argues that knowledge is not objective, nor is it found within the student to be carefully extracted by a trained tutor. Instead, knowledge is produced within the very social act of collaboration within a discursive formation. In her article "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," Lunsford more explicitly addresses the political ramifications of this epistemological shift. She uses the analogy of "The Center as Storehouse" and "The Center as Garret" to illustrate the earlier epistemological paradigms writing centers worked in. "The Center as Storehouse" adheres to the notion that knowledge is objective and is to be doled out to students who come looking for it in terms of handouts and workshops. Further, "[t]hey tend to view knowledge as individually derived and held..." and do not see the value in collaborative work (3). "The Center as Garret" describes the notion that knowledge is located within the individual student, and it is the tutor's responsibility to "find their unique voices, their individual and unique powers" (4). The two epistemological paradigms fit comfortably within academia and thus caused little tension.

Collaboration, however, and its inherent implication that knowledge can be created through a social act, does cause tension. Lunsford argues for this third epistemological paradigm, but she states that working within this paradigm is a political move, which could lead to political ramifications for a writing center functioning within an institution that does not adhere to this paradigm. "The idea of a center informed by a theory of knowledge as socially constructed, of power and control as constantly

negotiated and shared, and of collaboration as its first principle presents quite a challenge” (8). The challenge lies with the pragmatic, the significance of recursive practices, and writing center identity. But, Lunsford points out, “[m]ore importantly, however, such a center presents a challenge to the institution of higher education, an institution that insists on rigidly controlled individual performance, on evaluation as punishment, on isolation...” (9). Challenging institutional ways of knowing can be risky for any writing center administrator, as Lunsford argues, particularly if she is working without the protection of tenure. But change occurs within the space of these challenges, or resistance, to more powerful institutional discursive formation.

Higher educational institutions, by their nature, are traditional and slow to change, however they are not monolithic. Identifying them as such implies that change is impossible. In their article “Institutional Critique Revisited,” Jeffrey T. Grabill, James E. Porter, Stuart Blythe, and Libby Miles argue that institutions are not alike; instead, institutions “function through written policies and procedures, through the decisions of those who enact them, and through the cooperation of those affected by the decisions” (224). In other words, institutions are discursive formations, and as such can be considered dynamic processes. Writing centers are also discursive formations, but smaller, less powerful and always functioning within the institutional discursive formation. Therefore, the exploration of the discursive formation and perceptions of knowledge within the discursive formation allows for the uncovering of “the points (fissures) where humans have the ability to change things” (225). But this change can only arise through praxis, not just theorizing on its own nor through a pragmatic stance

void of theory (Lunsford, Grabill et al). By creating a writing center identity based on a solid recursive, theoretical and pragmatic foundation, writing centers can move closer to uncovering the “fissures” in order to disrupt and enact change within the institutional discursive formation.

One of the challenges in adhering to a theory of knowledge that generally conflicts with institutional theories of knowledge involves institutional identity. I refer to the ways institutions see (or do not) the work of writing centers. Writing centers must always function according to the institutional discursive practices, but institutions do not need to function with regards to the writing center. The tension between epistemological paradigms also prevents institutions from seeing writing center work as central to higher educational missions. Riley argues that the strength of writing center identity is not just concerned with the theoretical but also the pragmatic implementations regarding knowledge-making, and these concerns at times differ greatly with institutionally sanctioned ways of knowing (139-40). He argues that these differences harbor suspicions in institutions of writing center work and theory, suspicions that contribute to the marginalization of writing centers and their work. The marginalization fuels different reactions in the writing center community. Some embrace it soundly, and prefer to remain marginalized practitioners, for that marginalization offers a certain amount of freedom to continue the everyday practices of the writing center (Riley, Shamoan and Burns). Others prefer to subvert the paradigm, theoretical and institutional, by adhering to the institutional hierarchies and working from within to change these hierarchies (Ede, Lunsford, Grabill et al.). In fact, Grabill et al., argue that it is a combination of “macro-

structures (e.g., top-down flow of power) and micro-level resistances and actions (e.g., the bottom-up revolution)” as well as “the spaces in which both strategies and tactics meet and interact” that has the potential “for lasting social and institutional change” (220). Examples of working within the hierarchy can be found in the change in material conditions: the increased number of dissertations on writing centers, the increased presence of international writing center-focused conferences and organizations, and peer-reviewed journals focused on writing centers. Taken together, these examples all point to a professionalization of the discipline that has the potential to lead to more writing center security and sustainability within institutions. In some ways, this professionalization is an example of working within the discursive formation while looking for and working within the exposed “fissures.”

The writing center community has also professionalized its practices with specialized tutor training and national organizations that recognize excellence in training and tutoring such as the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). Tutor training and tutor credentialing, such as the CRLA’s categories of tutors based on hours, have the potential to look like writing center practice in some ways mirrors the hierarchical *status quo* regarding the identity of amateur/expert. Therefore I find tutor training an interesting point of inquiry for what it can tell us about writing centers’ theory of knowledge and the ways this theory and practice fits in (or not) to institutional paradigms of knowledge. The following sections look closely at the language used by both the UA Writing Center and the LMU Writing Centre regarding tutor hiring and training, with a focus on writing center representation on websites, and tutor training

documents. I focus specifically on issues of credentialing and how that credentialing occurs and is represented at the UA Writing Center and Think Tank. Using personal interviews and publications regarding tutor hiring at LMU's Writing Centre, I parallel the focus on credentialing and presentation of tutors as "experts" on websites and external, institutional communication. Finally, I document three tutoring sessions at the UA Writing Center in order to show how writing center epistemological paradigms manifest in actual practice. I use these varied texts in order to weave a rich snapshot of these two writing centers and illustrate the discursive formation of the writing centers, and to illustrate the "fissures" these writing centers explore within the dominant institutional discursive formation. My goal is to complicate the epistemological paradigms of writing centers and institutions, showing how writing centers work as a part of their institutional home while also working within the "fissures."

On Becoming a Tutor

In many writing centers, a student becomes a tutor through training and subsequent credentialing process. Writing center administrators choose specific readings and discussion topics for training purposes; students read and discuss articles that immerse them in writing center practices and theory. Texts such as *Bedford Guide for Writing Tutor* and *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, which provide tutor narratives and training exercises, are read along with articles by North, Harris, and Bruffee. Finally, students engage in the tutoring process as part of their training, first observing tutoring sessions between an experienced tutor or writing center administrator, then moving to tutoring sessions overseen by a mentor or writing center administrator

who then offers feedback. The College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) provides certification of tutor training programs; this certification then allows the training program to certify tutors. According to their website, CRLA has certified 830 tutor training programs, mainly in US higher education institutions. Writing centers and tutoring centers must submit all training materials to the CRLA to be reviewed before granted certification status. Training programs must provide tutors with a minimum of ten hours of training and twenty-five hours of actual tutoring to meet the Level 1 (L1) CRLA-approved certification requirements. CRLA also requires certain topics that must be covered in first level training, such as “Definition of tutoring and tutor responsibilities,” “Communication Skills,” and “Modeling problem solving” (CRLA “ITTPC Certification Requirements”).¹⁵

Level II (L2) certification does not require new tutoring topics, only a requirement of hour spent tutoring and training. Tutors can reach Level III (L3) certification by completing six more hours of training and fifty more hours of tutoring, but also requires a shift in training topics. Level III certification includes:

1. Review of Level 1 and Level 2 topics
2. Self-regulated Learning and/or Brain Learning and/or Memory
3. How to tutor/deal with Target Populations
4. The role of Learning Centers in Higher Education
5. Structuring the learning experience
6. Training and supervising other tutors (supervisory skills)
7. Group management skills (group interaction and group dynamics)
8. Other (please specify) (CRLA “ITTPC Certification Requirements”)

Here the topics turn toward a closer alignment with epistemological concern, from the specific context of learning and development to the larger context of the “role” of writing

¹⁵ For a full list of certification requirements, see http://www.crla.net/ittpc/certification_requirements.htm

centers. As this happens, the tutor training also turns from the more practical focus from Level I requirements to a more theorized, professional focus. Next I explore the UA Writing Center's and Think Tank's use of the CRLA certification in their external documents, as well as analyze tutor hiring practices and tutor training documents.

The University of Arizona Writing Center-Tutor Training

The University of Arizona Writing Center staff recruits new tutors through listservs and flyers geared toward first-year composition (FYC) instructors. The reliance on FYC instructors to recommend students is common, and it results in a group of tutors from all majors who take FYC. Students then go through a formal application process along with recommendations from faculty. The University of Arizona Writing Center, as part of the Think Tank (the university center for all tutoring), is credentialed by CRLA to certify writing tutors, and training at the Writing Center follows CRLA guidelines. After general training, required by all tutors at the Think Tank, writing tutors then go through a discipline-specific training program, sometimes referred to as tutor enrichment. As per documents provided by the current Writing Center Coordinator, writing tutors who wish to obtain L1 CRLA status must work through the training steps, including One: visiting the Writing Center as a student and reflecting upon that experience, Two: observing a tutoring session and writing a reflection on the observation, Three: be observed at least two times by Writing Center staff, which includes an informal discussion combining student feedback, observer feedback, and tutor reflection. These observations are usually completed by the fifth and tenth week of the semester (University of Arizona's Writing Center "WC L1 Training Document"). In addition to these practical introductions to

writing center tutoring, the UA Writing Center also provides readings for tutors who seek L1 certification on topics such as time management, tutoring multilingual students, strategies for the drop-in session, and working with students with disabilities. Readings include Steve Sherwood's "Censoring Students, Censoring Ourselves: Constraining Conversations in the Writing Center," Thomas Newkirk's "The First Five Minutes: Setting the Agenda in a Writing Conference," and Andrea Lunsford's "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center." Tutors are then charged with reflecting on the ways these articles align (or not) with their tutoring experiences. They are offered carefully crafted prompts to assist them in the reflection process as they move toward a conception of their tutor philosophy, which is an assignment due at the end of their training. An example of one of the prompts pushes tutors to consider the nuances behind encountering and reacting to offensive writing:

Interpreting our First Amendment rights as Americans and applying those to our personal and professional lives is, without a doubt, a tremendous challenge. As Sherwood discusses, freedom of speech issues are incredibly relevant to tutoring in a writing center. When faced with confrontational, offensive, or possibly inappropriate writing, what is our job as tutors? What are the limits of "freedom of speech" when it comes to our work in the WC? *Should* there be limits? What about hate speech? How do we create ethical tutoring situations that honor both a student's right to free speech with our commitment to creating more effective writers? In your response, feel free to include any personal tutoring that

challenged or reinforced your notions of "ethical tutoring". (University of Arizona's Writing Center "Prompts for L1 Readings")

The required readings and associated prompts illustrate an epistemology based on social constructivist paradigm. Tutors are prompted to consider a variety of truths that arise from specific moments in their tutoring experiences, in this instance on the sticky issue of censorship in a tutoring session. The prompt helps tutors understand that truth is not black and white, but instead should be carefully constructed in nuanced ways based on situational contexts.

After achieving L1 tutoring status, tutors can move toward L2 status with readings and reflections on "tutoring writing in unfamiliar subjects" and "ethical dimensions of writing tutoring" (University of Arizona's Writing Center "Writing Center L2 Tutor Enrichment"). Tutors revisit their tutoring philosophy and are asked again to reflect on the practical and theoretical dimension of tutoring work while they workshop their final drafts. By workshopping final drafts and reconsidering a previous draft of their tutoring philosophy, tutors become reflective practitioners. This move toward reflective praxis works with the paradigm of a fluid knowledge that is constructed socially and contextually. Finally, for the L3 training, tutors facilitate training sessions, moving into the position of mentor/expert, revisit larger writing center concerns, such as tutoring non-Native English speakers, and write a mentor philosophy.

The current website for the UA Writing Center resides within the larger website for the Think Tank, which houses tutoring for math, science, Spanish, and other

disciplines. The “Message from the Director” page of the Think Tank website details the tutoring credentialing process directly under the Think Tank’s mission statement.

In order to accomplish our mission we have rigorous training programs, two of which have International Training Program Certification through the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). Our content tutors are certified through our International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC) and our Academic Skills Tutors are certified through our International Mentor Training Program Certification (IMTPC). In addition, our Supplemental Instruction Leaders undergo a rigorous training in cooperative learning techniques and strategies in group management. All of our employees are required to attend ongoing training to enhance their skills. I am very proud of our excellent programs and have confidence in our ability to provide you quality service.

(University of Arizona Think Tank “Message from the Director”)

There are two things that stand out in this message. First, the focus on “certification,” a term repeated often in the above paragraph, positions tutor training within the institutional hierarchy of credentialing and can serve to ensure faculty members and students that the Think Tank’s tutors no longer are just “students,” but instead belong to an “expert” category. Because of the “rigorous” training, these tutors are more than able to serve as experts leading students through understanding and comprehending assignments. Secondly, the connection between tutor training and “quality” of product positions this paragraph within the realm of corporate speak. The product is the tutoring

session, or “service,” and this product is all but guaranteed a certain level of quality because of the training. The only reference to learning, knowledge, or collaborative praxis resides in the sentence on Supplemental Instruction Leaders who undergo “training in cooperative learning techniques...” Otherwise, the message focuses on the fact that tutors are credentialed but does not delve specifically into what type of training tutors receive.

The UA Writing Center page of the Think Tank website also focuses on tutors’ training and credentialing, right in the first paragraph: “Do you want tutoring help? We have it. And it comes in many different forms, including Drop-in, Quick Question, Online, Individual Appointments, Weekly Course Reviews, Exam Preps and more! Let our *CRLA Certified Tutors* help you” (emphasis mine, University of Arizona Think Tank “The Writing Center”). Again, the text focuses on the credentialing, seeming to state that these are no longer “regular” undergraduates, but that instead they have been bestowed with the title of “expert.” The focus on credentialing serves as a way to legitimize the tutoring services and tutors who work in the Think Tank, which functions within an institutional hierarchy, and thus, speaks to a more traditional, institutional epistemological paradigm.

London Metropolitan University’s Writing Centre-Peer Mentor Scheme

LMU’s Writing Centre employs graduate students as peer writing mentors, and casts a wide net in recruiting. Because writing studies in the UK align more closely with writing in the disciplines and its related concept of Academic Literacies, the Writing Centre seeks students from various disciplines. In the article “Training Peer Tutors in

Writing: A Pragmatic, Research-based Approach,” Peter O’Neill, Kathy Harrington, and Savita Bakhshi, who worked together at LMU’s Writing Centre, detail their modes of staffing the Centre:

Recruitment at London Met is selective, with all university students encouraged to apply. The application process involves submitting a writing sample and statement explaining the student’s interest in the positions. We then hold interviews and (crucially) obtain an academic reference from successful candidates. When selecting mentors, we look for students whose own writing is above average (but not necessarily of the highest classification) and who, importantly, demonstrate an ability and a desire to facilitate other students’ writing development in a non-directive, supportive way, rather than through more directive teaching or providing answers. In addition, we ask staff members to recommend students who they think will make excellent writing mentors, and this has helped us gain academic approval for our scheme. (3)

This passage, which is actually a footnote in a descriptive scholarly essay on LMU’s Writing Centre’s practices, offers a point of entry into the ways in which the Writing Centre works within both the institutional paradigms *and* writing center theory paradigms of knowledge. First, the selection process for writing mentors echoes the UA Writing Center and Think Tank repetition of terms such as “selective” and “crucial” examination of recommendation letters. The difference, however, lies in what is described. Whereas the UA Think Tank vets its tutors through its highly regulated training process, LMU’s

Writing Centre rigorously vets its applicants through a careful application system. The end result of both processes again sets these tutors apart from the general student population, reflecting the institutional paradigm of expert and novice.

Secondly, the above passage illustrates tutoring practices as not “directive teaching” but instead “non-directive, supportive” ways of interaction. By searching for this trait early in the selection process, LMU’s Writing Centre addresses faculty concern that writing centers cross the ethical line of intervention, i.e., faculty’s concern that writing centers do the students’ work for them. US writing centers have long dealt with this misplaced perception, and often have had to loudly articulate to the rest of the academic community that writing center practices do not step over that ethical line, for tutors guide students to conclusions rather than conclude for them.¹⁶ The inclusion of the indirect approach to tutoring in the above passage appeals to an audience unfamiliar with what writing centers do, which we can safely say is a fair amount of faculty both inside and outside of the US.

Therefore, the inclusion of tutoring practices and the term “academic approval” illustrates a necessity on behalf of LMU’s Writing Centre: in order for this relatively new concept of student support to work, the Writing Centre’s staff needed to anticipate the concerns of faculty regarding the theories and practices of the Writing Centre. They address these concerns through a rigorous selection of candidates who will not do the

¹⁶ However, it is important to note that not everyone agrees that non-directive approaches serve students best. In their text “A Critique of Pure Tutoring,” Linda K. Shamon and Deborah H. Burns argue that at times, direct intervention can sometimes be the only way for students to learn academic discourse and codes. The authors state that modeling can be a useful approach with student writers, especially in longer, sustained projects such as theses and dissertations. So to say that the indirect approach to tutoring is accepted as orthodoxy in writing center practices is false.

work for the student. This effective rhetorical move positions LMU's Writing Centre's practices both within the existing writing center scholarship and institutional concerns.

The training program at LMU's Writing Centre went through a few iterations as they worked toward a program that would serve their needs. At first, they began with a two-day intensive training program followed by weekly meetings, but the weekly meetings were eliminated in the second semester due to time constraints (3). In September 2007, tutor training consisted of a revised two-day training with a significant focus on reflective practices and professionalization (5). The two days were separated carefully into sections focusing on a variety of writing center theory and practices, such as "The Writing Process," "Disciplinary Writing," and "Dealing with Reports." O'Neill, Harrington, and Bakhshi's article illustrates a writing center focused on a reflective ethos, which they encouraged through a written reflection after each session. The authors argue that "[e]ncouraging a culture of reflective practice is the most essential aspect in producing high quality tutoring and in ensuring that standards do not slip and that tutors do not run on 'auto-pilot'" (5). In this way, LMU's Writing Centre establishes a reflective praxis similar to the UA Writing Center's tutor training. The recursive act of reflecting on a particular session or on tutor identity situates these two writing center practices within an epistemological paradigm that values making new knowledge out of social act (the tutoring session).

Finally, the Writing Centre works within an epistemological paradigm that positions students as agents in the learning process and with peer writing mentors facilitating that process. More significantly, it positions knowledge as subjective, created

by social acts. In this way, the Writing Centre resists traditional conceptions of learning and knowledge production: “In addition, peer writing tutorials put constructivist and student-centred theories of learning into action, enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning and making them active participants in their own development” (Write Now, “Summary Report,” 2009). The Writing Centre appears to be taking the risk highlighted by Lunsford when she argued that “[t]he idea of a center informed by a theory of knowledge as socially constructed, of power and control as constantly negotiated and shared, and of collaboration as its first principle presents quite a challenge” (8). Institutions face that challenge in finding a space for the writing center and understanding, as well as approving, what a writing center does.

The Making of Knowledge in the Writing Center

In order to explore what happens in a tutoring session, I interviewed two experienced tutors from LMU’s Writing Centre and observed four tutoring sessions at the UA Writing Center. Between the interviews and the observations, a pattern emerged regarding what students seek in a session, which at times mirrored what tutors and students actually work on. Students sometimes arrive at writing centers thinking they want assistance on grammar or correctness, reflecting Jeanne Gunner’s concept of a “cultural fetishization of correctness” (16). According to the interviews and the observations, students continually use language focused on correctness, such as “I need help to fix this” and “I think I need to correct this” in their first few minutes of the session. Both LMU Writing Centre tutors pointed out that many of the sessions they participated in involve non-native English speakers and these particular students come to

the writing center explicitly for guidance on Standard Written English (SWE) (Bakhshi, Wallace Interviews). Native English speaking students often need different strategies, but they are usually not familiar with writing studies jargon; the meta- language used in the field does not filter down to students immediately. They too focus on grammar or correctness. Students enter writing centers with vague ideas on what needs to be worked on; these vague ideas are articulated in vague language couched in a concept of correctness. Therefore, it is up to the tutor to carefully assist the student in assessing the writing process and articulate what needs to be addressed in the consultation.

Student A, a UA undergraduate, arrived for a half hour appointment in the UA Writing Center with a revised paper and instructor comments. Student A continually pointed the tutor to specific sentences and asked if they made sense. The student focused on grammar as a way to construct meaning; s/he persistently asked about comma and coordinating conjunctive usage and following that up with questions of clarity. The student was on the third draft of the essay and was instructed by the professor to work with writing center until the essay was free from errors, which explains the hyper-focus on correction. But within the conversation regarding sentence structure, both tutor and student constructed meaning by focusing on word choice and clarity. For the student, having a present and immediate audience assisted in understanding how meaning was shared between audience and author. This exchange allowed for the student to see what information was necessary for the audience to understand the argument, and explore the variety of ways in which that information could be expressed.

Students B and C also had half hour appointments at the UA Writing Center, and both arrived with revised drafts and instructor comments.. They were both non-native English speakers who also focused on grammar and sentence structure, asking the tutors to focus on sentence-level issues. Student B also brought the scientific article s/he was summarizing for the assignment. In the consultation with Student B, I observed the tutor carefully reading each sentence out loud, pausing often to ask the student to clarify meaning. Then, both tutor and student would refer to the summarized article to ensure that what the student wrote clearly articulated the meaning in the article. For example, when the student used the term “implication” in the essay, the tutor questioned the use of that term, prompting the student to reassess the use of the term in the summary. Comparing what the student meant to write with what was actually written assisted in the student understanding the gap between what the audience sees and the intent behind the student’s words. The tutor and the student work within the paradigms of SWE, but the tutor acts as a mediator for the student as s/he negotiates academic discourse in a non-native language.

The final pattern in student/tutor interaction was in Student D’s session. Student D arrived to the UA Writing Center with a rough outline for an assignment. S/he began with a question on MLA citations, but the session quickly turned to questions regarding the tasks expected from the writing prompt. After inquiring on citations, student D questioned the use of one source over another, but then transitioned into the prompt, asking the tutor what the essay was supposed to do. Student D grappled with the definitions of terms from the prompt, and the tutor assisted in defining the parameters of

the terms. In this way, the student was better able to see if the moves made in her essay aligned with the prompt. This particular session illuminates the ways in which tutors guide students toward a stronger grasp on the goals of assignments. Terms such as “analyze” and “evaluate” seem clear to instructors as they draft assignment sheets, and may even seem clear to students while they are in class. But when it comes time to write, those terms can confuse and challenge students.

In her essay “Cracking the Codes Anew: Writing about Literature in England,” Mary Scott details the challenges students face when attempting to crack these “codes” that inhabit certain ways of knowing and being. For instance, student D was asked to evaluate, and quickly articulated an evaluation. But when it came time to support that evaluation, s/he was at a loss. The student did not have evidence to back up the evaluation, only a feeling. Providing evidence for claims, as Scott alludes to, presents a specific way of producing and exhibiting knowledge. The tutor’s goal was to move the student closer to understanding that within the paradigm of institutionalized epistemology, evidence is valued over feelings. In other words, the tutor assisted the student in “cracking the codes” of academic discourse and argument.

The Tutor as an Organic Intellectual

Antonio Gramsci defines organic intellectualism as a social act. In *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, he argues that unlike traditional intellectuals, who arise from a specific learned class and serve to perpetuate the tastes and habits of that class through oratory, organic intellectuals serve as a liaison between the working class and the political class. Organic intellectuals accomplish this liaison through “active participation

in practical life, as constructor, organizer, ‘permanent persuader’ ...” (10). Rather than be assimilated into what Gramsci calls “high culture,” organic intellectuals are situated within the materiality of the working class. And while traditional intellectuals serve as “the dominant group’s ‘deputies’ exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government,” (12) organic intellectuals provide a counterhegemonic force that “becomes the foundation of a new and integral conception of the world” (9). This counterhegemony does not “take place on the terrain of abstract democracy but in accordance with very concrete traditional historical processes” (11). Gramsci’s concept of the organic intellectual facilitating a “new and integral conception of the world” can be found in Freire’s goal of critical consciousness through problem-posing education: “...people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire 83, author’s emphasis). Problem-posing education, because it is a shared praxis in which both educator and students working toward critical inquiry, aligns itself with the concept of organic intellectuals, who work with and alongside the working class to challenge hegemony. Writing center tutors, because of their position within the institutional hierarchy (not a credentialed professor yet trained in the theory and praxis of writing centers), and because their social act falls squarely within the definition of praxis, fit within the organic intellectual definition. In this section, I complicate this concept, in particular its notion of power and agency. But more significantly, I situate tutors as organic intellectuals to highlight the praxis necessary for institutional change and resistance. It is not just writing

center directors who can be identified as change agents; instead it is the actual everyday practices that assert change, both within the institution itself and within students and their perspective of knowledge, expertise, and writing.

In his 1988 article “Cultural Studies and Teaching Writing,” John Trimbur argues for cultural studies as a useful frame for shifting composition studies’ praxis and institutional identity because of cultural studies’ inherent political discourse and explicit examination of power dynamics. He states that “for cultural studies, domination is never complete, and one of the central tasks it sets for radical intellectuals is to point out the relatively autonomous areas of public and private life where human agency can mediate between the material conditions of the dominant order and the lived experience and aspirations of the popular masses” (9). Cultural studies serves as a mode of inquiry into institutionalized power structures, thus offering ways to talk about and critique institutionalized knowledge paradigms. The site of inquiry and critique, Trimbur argues, is the writing classroom and writing centers. Trimbur makes his argument at a time when composition studies and writing center scholarship focused centrally on methodology. This focus on methodology, however, has the ability to remove the teaching of writing from its socio-rhetorical context and thus erases or ignores the student and the teacher/tutor’s lived experience that informs their identity. As a consequence, the teaching of writing must be “located historically at the critical intersection where student subjectivities and cultural forms meet – in classrooms and writing centers” (14). While Trimbur uses the term “radical” intellectual rather than organic intellectual, he positions them in the same way Gramsci does, as intermediaries between the dominant class and

the “lived experience and aspirations of the popular masses” (15). The radical intellectuals’ mediation between student subjectivity and the dominant discourse of the institution can be said to describe what writing tutors hope to accomplish in consultations, thus position tutors as radical intellectuals, or as Gramsci and Freire describe them, organic intellectuals.

Marilyn Cooper takes Trimbur’s notion of radical intellectuals in composition studies and writing center scholarship and argues that writing center tutors are uniquely positioned to facilitate institutional critique. As a consequence, “the role of the tutor should be to create useful knowledge about writing in college and to empower students as writers who also understand what writing involves and who act as agents in their writing—these two goals being closely intertwined” (98). Cooper also uses the term “empower” quite a bit, in the sense that tutors can “empower” students in their writing. I am not sure I agree with the concept that tutors are in a position to empower other students, for they are still students, albeit trained and credentialed students. Power is just not theirs to convey onto writers. If anything, power is created collaboratively along with knowledge within the tutoring session. But outside of this idea of transference of power, Cooper’s positioning of tutors as organic intellectuals who assist in critiquing institutional ways of thinking, knowing, and expressing along with student writers works well up to a point. Gramsci’s concept of organic intellectuals implies someone who, while situated in the materiality of the working class, speaks to the dominant class. And while tutors mediate students’ negotiation with dominant discourses within the institution, it is not clear how they explicitly speak on behalf of students to those in

power. However, writing center consultations can be considered subversive or transgressive if we consider the ways in which tutoring functions within the paradigms of institutional ideology.

The theoretical underpinnings of tutor work and writing center everyday practices does subvert the power structures of the institution through the act of collaboration, but theory and practice within an institution is preceded by institutional ideology. I draw from Jeanne Gunner's article "Ideology, Theory, and the Genre of Writing Programs," published in the 2002 edited collection *The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist: Making Knowledge Work*. Gunner's arguments focus on writing programs, but I extend her framework to include writing centers. Gunner argues that despite the ways in which theory and practice are taxonomized within institutions, theory and practice must work "within an already existing ideological operating system that controls the material effects of theoretical work" (8). Because the institution precedes the formation of the writing center, writing centers must work within the institutional paradigms of power and knowledge. However, Gunner argues that a move toward agency can be achieved "in moments that allow for discursive reshaping" of dominant paradigms through an "intermingling of discourses of differing cultural value" in order to "elevate the power of lesser-status discourse[s]" (15). In other words, if the epistemological paradigms of writing centers, and thus the everyday practices of writing centers, can be tied to shifts in the dominant cultural epistemological paradigms, then the gap between institutional paradigms of knowledge and writing center paradigms of knowledge can be lessened.

Gunner points to the writing center practice of shifting the dominant discourse paradigm of valuing correctness and standard English to illustrate her point. Writing centers, by aligning with changing cultural values regarding what she calls “the cultural fetishization of correctness,” and thus move “theory and practice into closer relation” (16). Gunner positions cultural discourse as more powerful than institutional discourse; therefore, if writing centers take the opportunity to articulate the ways in which they more closely align with cultural forces, mainly employers and the forces of globalization and multicultural identity, then writing centers, both in theory and practice, can subvert the ideological paradigms of the institution. In this way, writing centers have “subversive and transgressive potential” because it “serves as a conduit between the cultural groups and practices [Susan Miller] terms ‘high and low’” (17). Through Gunner’s framework, writing center tutors can be seen as organic intellectuals, for although they do not speak directly to the institution for students, through the act of collaboration, they serve as mediators, or “conduit[s]” to examine institutional discourse and practices. By aligning with more powerful cultural discourses that value multi-vocality and plurality in epistemological paradigms, writing centers, and thus writing center tutors, work to subvert and transgress institutional paradigms of knowledge.

Conclusion

I would like to turn back to the questions from the beginning of the chapter: What constitutes knowledge? Where is knowledge located? How does one “get” knowledge? Writing center theory and practice implies that knowledge is something, or anything, that fits within a framework of claim, support, and reflection. Knowledge is not something

static to be conferred upon someone else, but instead something wonderfully fluid and real within a context. That fluidity allows for a concept of knowledge to be everywhere and nowhere at once; it is tangible in student writing, but it is also ethereal, found within conversations and workshops. Finally, one does not “get” knowledge; one creates knowledge through a social act. At times, that social act is a writing center consultation wherein a tutor mediates a student’s negotiation through not just academic discourse, but making meaning out of a text or context.

Looking closely at the ways writing centers negotiate institutionalized concepts of knowledge with their own concept leads to other connected, and just as tension-filled, concepts. Historically, writing centers have proliferated and have also closed down through a variety of crises. The next chapter focuses on three interrelated crises that I see as integral to writing center work: the crisis of increased access, the crisis of literacy, and the crisis of funding. In many ways, the crisis of increased access spurred the proliferation of writing centers across the US. As more students arrived in higher education institutions, some of them were marked as different, and writing was a clear way to measure that difference. Changes in student demographics also foster fear of the unknown and connect to the crisis of literacy. I explore the historical narrative of the literacy crisis to illustrate how it is a continued and repeated national and now global crisis. Finally, I explore the material effects the funding crisis has on the UA Writing Center and LMU’s Writing Centre. My goal is to encourage writing center administrators and staff to recognize crises and find ways to get in front of the crises; in

other words, to proactively approach recurring crises and thus guide the discussion surrounding writing centers.

CHAPTER THREE

RHETORIC OF CRISIS: ACCESS, LITERACY, AND FUNDING

Within academic institutions, change may be slow but it is also inevitable. Institutions face change within disciplines, as in changes in research foci and faculty demographic changes; change within the organizational structure, in particular in the growth in size and power of upper administration; and change within the student body, both in demographics and in preparedness. Most change is necessary, but I wish to focus on the problematic nature of crisis-based change; that is, change within higher education that is so often predicated on a perceived or real crisis. I say perceived or real crisis because in many ways all crises are manufactured and yet all crises have material dimensions. In many ways, it is not the crisis itself that affects writing center practices but instead the narrative that drives crises. These narratives are almost always grounded in economics, as I explore later, and it is this economic drive that continues an individualistic narrative rather than a collaborative, coalition-based narrative. The causal relationship between crisis and abrupt change in higher education institutions' goals, policies, and funding present a unique framework through which to analyze everyday writing center practices as they function within their institutional home. Writing centers are so often caught between the cause and effect of crisis-based change (i.e., writing centers do not cause crises yet must address the effect of crises-based change) with little time to get in front of the framing of the crisis; therefore, writing centers can only react rather than enact change.

This is not to say that higher education institutions change without input from stakeholders. In their article “Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change,” James E. Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey Grabill, and Libby Miles argue that institutions can be changed by stakeholders: “Though institutions are certainly powerful, they are not monoliths; they are rhetorically constructed human designs (whose power is reinforced by buildings, laws, traditions, and knowledge-making practices) and so are changeable” (611). The authors argue for institutional critique as a form of rhetorical action in public discourse in order to further understand institutional workings and enact change. The authors outline a methodology of institutional critique grounded in rhetorical action, a pragmatic approach to “change and restructuring” which draws from visual and spatial methodology, citing Michel deCerteau, Edward Soja, David Sibley, as well as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Donna Haraway (615). Space is significant in the “writing of institutional identity,” such as location, size, amenities, and web presence, but space is also significant because spatial analysis allows for an examination of “power moves used to maintain or extend control over...boundaries” (620-624). The exigency behind institutional critique as a methodology was that existing categories, systems, and methodologies did not serve emerging research in the Rhetoric and Composition field that went beyond classroom critique; the authors wanted a “pragmatic mechanism for change that extends the power of our field beyond the composition classroom” (612-13). Significant to their argument, however, is the authors’ claim that “there exists a gap between global ideals and either local or systemic institutional change. Somewhere between the macro-level national

critiques and the micro-level practices on individual campuses is space for an action plan informed by critique yet responsive to local conditions” (616). It is in these spaces, also called “zones of ambiguity,” where stakeholders can enact rhetorical means for change.

The authors cite the establishment of graduate programs in Rhetoric and Composition as a strong example of institutional critique and action. The expansion of such programs in the mid-1970s to mid-1980s serves to illustrate a “pragmatic effort to use rhetorical means to improve institutional systems” (625). That example could be expanded to include dissertations on writing center theory and practice. Another example would be the “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,” collaboratively authored by three organizations, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Program. The joint task force came together to craft this document because members felt that educators’ voices were missing from the larger national discussions on literacy (O’Neill, Adler-Kassner, Fleischer, Hall). The “Framework” document represents a rhetorical means for change regarding literacy. The task force leaders note that the document is a starting point for action, claiming there is still work to be done in advocating for work that “reflects the principles outlined in the document” (523). While “Framework” focuses on the classroom, it addresses the larger conversation that had heretofore omitted voices informed by a tradition of research and expertise. The document also articulates voices from K-12, two-year colleges, and four-year universities. The document serves to interrupt the discussion (and ubiquitous crisis) surrounding literacy by inserting the voices who do the actual work of “literacy development” (520).

Another recent example of institutional critique is the growth of the grassroots organization the New Faculty Majority. The organization is a coalition of adjuncts and contingent educators whose goals include equal pay; job security; academic freedom; participation in faculty governance; professional advancement; and benefits, such as health insurance and unemployment insurance.¹⁷ The organization's purpose is to change working conditions for contingent faculty and do so by addressing the macro-level issues such as national and state legislation and litigation, while simultaneously working on micro-level issues such as aligning with local unions to change conditions at the institutional level. The all-volunteer organization also forges coalitions on the macro and micro-level with non-profit organizations such as the Ford Foundation and similar higher education advocacy groups. The organization uses rhetorical means—blogs, social media, frameworks for implementing change, crowd sourcing, the national Summit 2012—to critique institutions and enact change regarding contingent labor agency.

While this project wants to encourage writing center administrators and staff to look for ways to enact institutional critique, it is not an example of institutional critique. But I do draw from Porter et al.'s methodology in the sense that for this chapter in particular, I look closely at the institutional manifestations of three different crises, the driving narrative, and the material effects on writing center viability. I take a broad view of the macro-level before drilling down to the micro-level. In this chapter, I seek to critique on a national macro-level the narrative that drives the higher educational crises of access, literacy, and funding. Afterward, I explore how these crises materialize on the

¹⁷ See <http://www.newfacultymajority.info/equity/>

local, pragmatic level of everyday writing center practices. Finally, I look to the in between space, between the “macro-level” and the “micro-level,” to argue for rhetorical action.

Since crises do not necessarily emanate from within the institution and in many cases, it is outside forces that create/force change, I start at the macro-level to find larger, national conversations and rhetorical forces pushing for institutional changes. Change does not necessarily amount to crisis; however, when institutions attempt to change because of outside pressure, that change can be construed as a crisis. In his 1994 article titled “Crisis, What Crisis? Rhetoric and Reality in Higher Education,” Malcolm Tight argues that:

Universities are large, complex, semi-democratic institutions, within which the interests of the directorate are balanced by those of the disciplines. A basic understanding of organizational change processes would suggest it is not possible for institutions to maintain their *modus operandi* and make abrupt or major changes in practices. Hence, when universities come under significant external pressure to change – as they have in the post-war period through the twin pincers of expansion and economy – they are forced into lengthy periods of continuing compromise and incremental change. Such periods may drain the energies of many of their employees, and could readily be accorded the characterization of crisis. (371)

Although written in 1994, Tight's argument is just as relevant to higher education today. Examples of external influences in crises within higher education can be traced to outside political, social, and economic pressures. While higher education institutions are a part of the discourse surrounding higher education, these institutions are not alone in demanding or construing institutional change. In other words, institutions do not act alone on change-based decisions; in fact, as I point out later, outside forces at times have a larger influence on institutional change than the actual institutions themselves. So while higher education institutions are a part of the national discourse on education, they can often be perceived as reacting to the national discourse, or driving narrative, on higher education crises rather than influencing the discourse. In some ways this tension between higher education and outside influential forces represents the tension between writing centers and their home institutions writ large. There is an uneven distribution of power; funding can be contingent and come with stipulations; and rhetorical means can serve as one way to mitigate funding and power issues.

I draw from Tight's quote in my definition of crisis: the external pressures pushing for, and at times demanding, immediate change from institutions that traditionally move quite slowly. This exigency causes many stakeholders--upper administration, faculty, writing center staff and administrators, and students--to consider a complex issue in simple terms. Crises may also have the effect of creating top-down strategies as opposed to bottom up, organic-based plans. The latter is desirable for its multi-vocal, multi-perspective and at times multi-modal approach to complex issues; however a middle ground wherein strategic plans and tactical plans come together to

enact rhetorical action amounts to the best possible process. The framework of crises and higher education institutional change is a timely and worthwhile discussion, in particular through the lenses of competition, literacy, and funding.

I focus on three interrelated crises and their driving narrative: the crisis of access, the crisis of literacy, and the crisis of funding (see Table 1). The crisis of access focuses first on increased higher education access for the sole benefit of increasing the nation's global competitiveness. Increased access to higher education implies an educated population, and an educated population creates a larger pool of potential scientists, astronauts, and engineers. A larger pool of homegrown research-oriented professionals increases visibility and leadership on the supranational stage. We might even view the crisis of access and certainly its driving narrative as deeply rooted in globalization, wherein national and regional policy makers cite global competition as the catalyst for major change in higher education institutions. I point to two exigencies behind increased access--international competition and social justice. Global competitiveness as exigency encourages increased access while simultaneously creates structures and programs that are research-oriented, such as the GI Bill and Project English. In addition, international competition as exigency for increased access tends to reinforce a perception of literacy as intertwined with patriotism, as I explore later. Social justice also serves as an exigency to increased access, including the shift to open access at City University of New York and the California Community College system. These examples illustrate the breadth of institutional change caused by both internal and external forces. I go further into the rhetoric surrounding the crisis later. The UK has its own crisis of access, which resulted

in massification, spurred by both international competition and social justice.

Furthermore, the increase in enrollment leads to the second crisis: the crisis of literacy.

The crisis of literacy's driving narrative bases itself on the assumption that student performance is in continual decline.¹⁸ The crisis of literacy often stems from differing and competing definitions of literacy that are "often associated with deep ideological divisions about the nature of language and of learning" (Street 34). In his article "The Meanings of Literacy," Brian Street defines competing definitions as falling into two categories: the "autonomous" model of literacy and the "social approaches" to literacy. The autonomous model defines literacy as a culturally neutral, discreet and measurable set of skills such as reading and writing at a certain grade level. Furthermore, literacy is perceived as "autonomous in the sense that it has its own characteristics, irrespective of the time and place in which it occurs and also in the sense that it has consequences for society..." (35). National literacy levels are often used to measure the educational health of a country, which influences the ability to compete on a global stage. The connection between national literacy levels and global competition is often used as the opening for outside forces, politicians and the public for example, to demand change from educational institutions. The "social approaches to literacy" see literacy as a dynamic, social act and highlights the "plurality of literacies that this brings to light" (35). In this approach, literacy cannot be a "uniform" set of skills to be replicated and measured in a variety of contexts and spaces. Instead, it is informed by the context and space, the

¹⁸ The narrative driving the crisis of literacy in the US dates back to when women and minoritized men were entering higher education. I did not have the time to delve deep into the history of this narrative; however, I acknowledge that this narrative has been around since the early part of the 19th c.

student writer, and the instructor or facilitator. These two definitions have rhetorical, political, and material dimensions for educators, higher education institutions, and students; they are more than just definitions. They represent different notions not just of what literacy is but why it matters and what it can do. Furthermore, the crisis of literacy is often connected to the final crisis I cover here: the crisis of funding. The crisis of funding can be exacerbated in public institutions when funding becomes political and ideological due to its connection to state and regional government. Differing perceptions of literacy are grounded in differing ideologies. On one hand, more funding is necessary when institutions open access and find students do not fit into homogenous ways of writing. On the other hand, funding can be used as a way to prevent students from reaching success in higher education because they do not fit into a homogenous idea of literacy. So while institutions, policy-makers, and bureaucrats argue for increased access but then do not provide funding for student support services, they can effectively say one thing while their actions promote another. Writing centers often find themselves within a crisis of funding for their institutional home makes the decision to fund student writing support or not.

My goal is to explore the ways in which institutions react to crises, often placing them in a nonproductive cycle because of the amount of energy and time spent reacting to crises; the reaction disallows writing centers to participate in the larger narrative driving the crises. In particular, I look at the ways writing centers' everyday practices are driven by crises. This chapter analyzes University of Arizona, and London Metropolitan University's writing centers' growth, pedagogy, and practice as a form of reaction toward

the various crises foisted upon them by policy makers, government officials, and the public. I first look at the crisis of access in both countries, citing enrollment trends and the ways in which writing centers position themselves in response to the crisis. Secondly, I look at the crisis of literacy and conceptions of literacy and the ways these conceptions work in the two writing centers. Third, the crisis of funding is detailed in the recent history of the two writing centers.

Table 1. Crisis Matrix

Type of Crisis	Material Dimensions
Crisis of Access	Crisis of Access
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ occurs on a national/regional level ▪ spurred by global competition ▪ spurred by social justice ▪ stated goals include increase in general population education ▪ conflates patriotism with higher education ▪ national and state investment in and the occasional Humanities project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ increased access for underrepresented populations ▪ federally-funded educational programs such as STEM educational projects ▪ private/public partnerships (see Gates Foundation projects) ▪ GI Bill, Project English, Open Access ▪ Erasmus Program/Bologna Process/Massification movement in the UK ▪ 1997's Dearing Report
Crisis of Literacy	Crisis of Literacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ occurs on a national/regional level ▪ spurred by conservative educational reform ▪ argues for more standardization and accountability within higher education ▪ defines literacy within an "autonomous" model or discrete set of skills(see Street) ▪ conflates literacy with patriotism or competitiveness of the country ▪ politicized and ideologically-driven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1975's Newsweek's "Why Johnny Can't Write" ▪ 1983's Reagan administration's <i>A Nation at Risk</i> ▪ student-run movements demanding culturally-relevant curriculum ▪ shift in composition studies' theoretical grounding drawing from postmodernism/cultural studies ▪ public money used for vouchers for charter schools ▪ growth of basic writing movement ▪ rise of writing centers as a response to increased access/literacy crisis

Crisis of Funding	Crisis of Funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ occurs on a national/regional/state level but materializes on a local level ▪ related to taxes collected and distributed to public higher education institutions ▪ highly politicized and ideologically-driven ▪ upper administration blames the state/ the state blames the federal government/ the feds blame the economic meltdown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LMU's Writing Centre's grant from HECFE not renewed ▪ LMU does not find funding to continue the Writing Centre in its present form ▪ sustained cuts to UA English Department Writing Program ▪ student fees fund the current UA Writing Center in Student Services ▪ higher education tuition and fees increase globally ▪ massive student protests in the UK and the EU ▪ no one takes responsibility for cuts

Why Crisis?

The relationship between various crises and the subsequent changes or reactions in higher educational institutions in general and writing support centers in particular illuminate the historical chain of events--someone or something, such as a government or a special interest group, proclaims a crisis of momentous proportion, then higher educational institutions react. Rather than being proactive, institutions under crises are positioned as reactors without having time to consider ways to affect the narrative, thus creating an inability to effectively frame the debate and the terminology and ideology in the arguments surrounding the crisis. Reacting to crises continually places institutions and writing centers at a severe disadvantage by always playing defense. If writing centers constantly work from a defensive position, it is a challenge to move forward in praxis, research, and outreach. However, many scholars, such as Linda Adler-Kassner, David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, claim these crises are manufactured and thus rely on dominant

frameworks to falsely construct a dire situation in order to bring in public support for the action plan provided by those doing the manufacturing. At times, these action plans, or reforms, are not in the best interest of stakeholders and have negative results, such as diminished resources for students. Berliner and Biddle argue that change based on crisis leads to reforms that “reflect only the personal experiences or prejudices of legislators,” or worse, are “based on misunderstandings about schools and education” (173). This is not to say that at times educators have taken advantage of crisis and subsequently taken control of the institutional and national discourse driving the crisis. Examples of this can be seen in the open access movement of the 1970s, and the crisis of literacy and the subsequent shift to the social constructionist paradigm in composition studies. In these two examples, educators and institutions agreed that change was necessary; however, educators and institutions took charge over the narrative and imbued the rhetoric of crisis with their own political and ideological perspectives. Thus change was enacted somewhat on their own terms. Therefore I do not want to use too broad a brush in describing the interlocutors surrounding these crises, so after I define the more global dimensions of these crises, I dig into the local dimensions. During my research, it became clear that my two research sites were continually reacting to crisis, and this reaction has had material consequences for both centers.

Crisis of Access

I define the crisis of access as a national movement with two exigencies: the first is an exigency of global competition, or as I stated earlier, economics. In the US, one of the catalysts began in WWII and continued throughout the Cold War and continues to

resurface in the present day. It is a movement that begins with a governmental shift in responsibility regarding education and education's connection with global competition, a competition to be the first in research, development, business, and trade. For example, the competition between the USSR and the US in the space race and in the arms race. Each country competed to be the first in science and military technology. One way to ensure a strong, competitive space program was to properly fund organizations such as NASA. Another way is for the federal government to take on the role of promoting legislation that encourages as many US citizens to attend higher education institutions so that the probability of the next homegrown Albert Einstein increases. Currently, competition with other countries in regards to student achievement continually dominates public discourse on education; many cite the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) figures continually using them as warning signs that the US is declining in its global standing; the connection between competition and higher education, particular research-intensive education, has become a national priority, at least in public discourse.

For the US, one of these moments occurred in the years following World War II. The GI Bill offered many veterans a chance at higher education. In 1944, the GI Bill of Rights was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to aid veterans readjusting to civilian life. In addition to offering assistance with health care and mortgages, the bill guaranteed higher education for veterans. Veterans were free to choose the institution of their choice as long as they met minimum requirements. To get an idea of how transforming this bill was to higher education institutions, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of students graduating with bachelor degrees

in academic year 1949-1950 was 135% higher from just 10 years earlier.¹⁹ Post-war veterans enrolled in record numbers. The University of Arizona saw a 187% increase in enrollment in the ten year time period after the war (1945-1955). The increase in enrollment, sponsored and encouraged by government policies such as the GI Bill and the expansion of state university and community college systems, continued after the Russian launch of Sputnik I in 1957. The government's goal of a competitive, educated populace seemed all the more critical because of the Cold War and the space race.

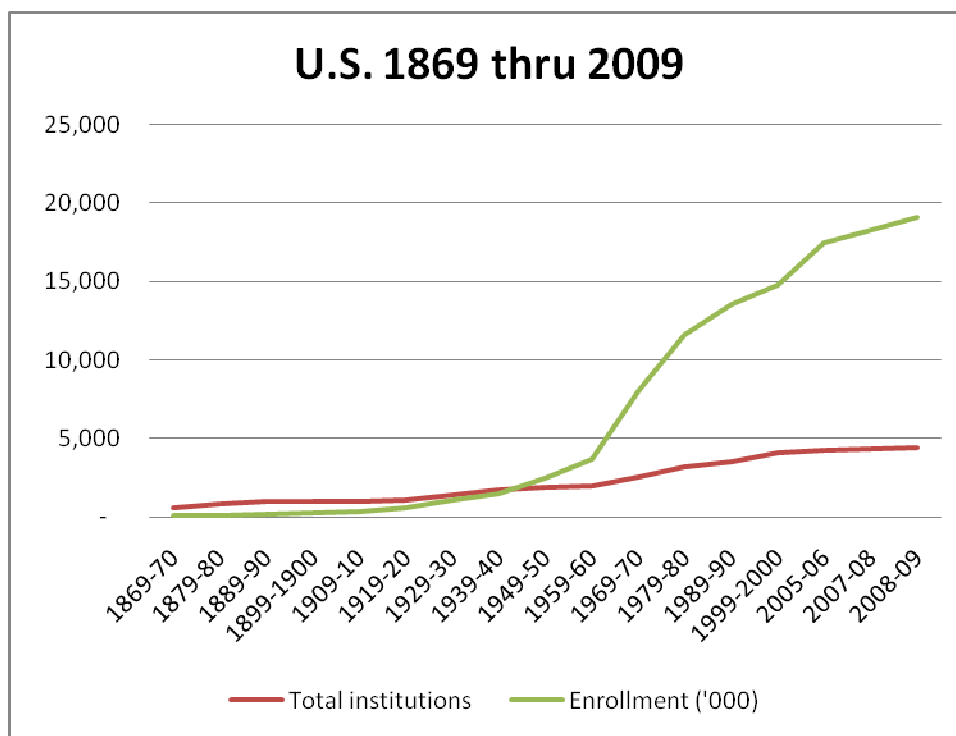
The second catalyst comes from the larger social movements during the 1960s and 1970s. Social justice organizations pushed for increased access for women and minoritized groups. One could argue that the social justice goal of increased access was a subversion of the economic argument of increased access. Educators claimed the crisis of access and recast it in a social justice lens. The social justice exigency led to the second largest increase in higher education enrollment in the US. In the decade between 1960 to 1970, fall enrollment nationwide increased 120%, and total enrollment reached 8,004,660, up from 3,639,847(see Table 2).²⁰ The University of Arizona's enrollment reflects this trend: in 1960, the university enrolled 12,518 students; just ten years later, enrollment had increased 108% to 26,021. To contextualize these numbers, in the decade between 1995 and 2005, the University of Arizona's enrollment increased 6.4%.²¹

¹⁹ <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_196.asp>

²⁰ According to "Historical summary of faculty, students, degrees, and finances in degree-granting institutions: Selected years, 1869-70 through 2008-09." National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_196.asp>

²¹ University of Arizona student enrollment statistics based on Office of Institutional Research and Planning Support. <http://oirps.arizona.edu/files/Student_Demo/enrollment_old_current.pdf>

Table 2. US Enrollment and Institutional Growth, 1869-2009



Open Access in the US

Certainly the size of the baby boomer generation contributed to the increase in national higher education enrollment figures, but more significant to writing centers and composition studies, open admissions at two of the largest higher educational systems in the US, University of California and City University of New York (CUNY), contributed to the increase. CUNY chancellor Albert Bowker initially had a plan to gradually increase enrollment through open admissions by 1975, but student activism pushed him to enact open admissions in 1970²² (“Open Admissions” Carino). The effect open admissions had on the proliferation of writing centers is inarguable, but how much of an

²² Student activists occupied a section of the CUNY City Center campus and burned down the student center auditorium in 1969 (Carino 33).

effect is up for debate. In his article “Open Admissions and the Construction of Writing Center History: A Tale of Three Models,” Peter Carino analyzes various histories of writing centers and identifies three different types of histories: evolutionary, dialectic, and cultural. The evolutionary model history posits open admissions as the origin of the modern writing center. While no one denies writing centers existed before open admissions, the evolutionary model of history sees open admissions as the catalyst in the proliferation of writing centers across the US. The dialectic model of history positions writing centers in a “pedagogical and political dialectic with writing programs and other institutional entities” (31). Rather than just one catalyst, the dialectic model sees the growth of writing centers as a result of interactions and discussions between writing programs and increased access. Carino feels the evolutionary and dialectic model of history, while not discrete – scholars such as Muriel Harris often combine the two – do not offer an adequate representation of writing center history. At the very least, articulating writing centers with open admissions has the effect of positioning writing centers as remediation for the new, heterogeneous student population. This historical perspective only reifies the writing center as a “fix-it” center. Carino instead argues for the cultural model, a reflective approach to history that takes into account the complexities surrounding writing center history. A cultural model of history acknowledges significant figures and contributions to the field “without reifying their work as doctrine” and “would account for progress with an awareness that progress is untidy” (31). In many ways, pinpointing open admissions as the driving factor in the growth of writing centers is naïve and does ignore the social, political, and economic

factors of the time, such as the perceived literacy crisis, the growth of the composition field, and more importantly the relationship between these factors, i.e., the push/pull that occurs between the institutions, the public, the faculty, and the needs of students. The dialectic history does address the push/pull, but has the potential to position heroes and villains in writing center history, and furthers the dichotomy between writing centers and upper administration. It seems in some ways that Carino attempts to downplay the significance of open admissions/increased access as it pertains to the increase of writing centers across the US. Carino does not deny the evolutionary model's argument, but instead states that history is more complex than a simple origin story. His point is difficult to argue with; but for the purposes of this project, all signs point to increased access as the watershed moment in writing centers.

Other scholars, such as Nancy M. Grimm, agree with the evolutionary model's perspective, and while they position increased access as the catalyst for the proliferation of writing centers in the 1970s, some dismiss the controversy and instead address the tension surrounding upper administration and its relationship with non-traditional students and their writing support needs. In her text *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times*, Grimm discusses what she calls "institutional distancing," a rhetorical move by institutions in which they distance themselves from the very students given access to higher education, in particular the newer, urban working-class students whose "language and background marked them as different" (8). The marked difference – language and background – is what the institution distances itself from, and they do this by sending students to the writing center. The writing center, in turn, is charged with

bringing the “marked” students more in line with the institution’s concept of literacy, or as Grimm states a “culturally neutral notion of literacy.” Furthermore, Grimm argues, “[t]he contradictory situation whereby universities establish writing centers, then repeatedly question their value is connected to this distancing mechanism” (10).

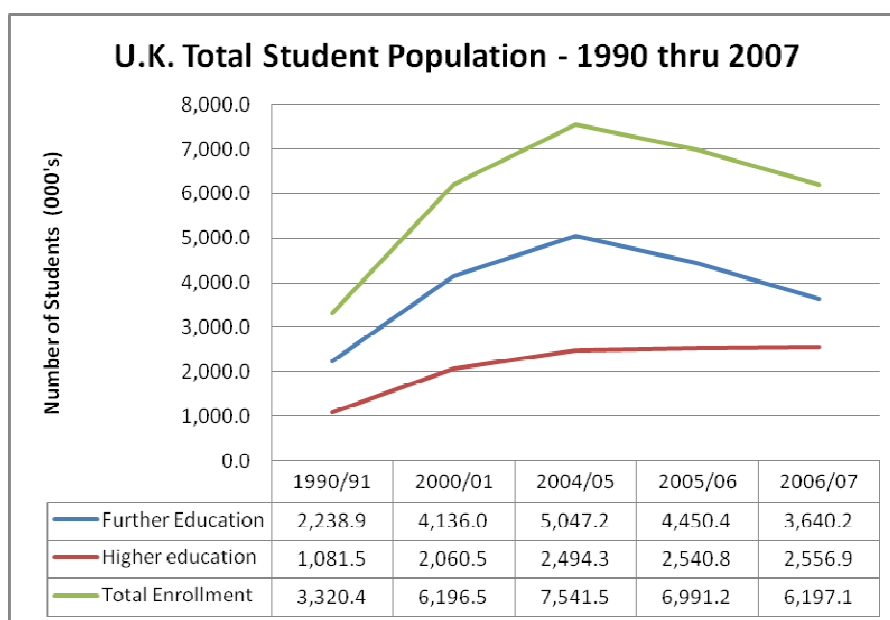
Distancing is not done out of malicious intent, but rather, it is a coping mechanism used to deal with change. What is problematic, however, is when writing centers distance themselves from the remedial function that may or may not have been their cause of existence while at the same time adhering to the “culturally neutral notion of literacy” rather than a socio-rhetorical concept of literacy.

UK Increased Access/Massification

In the UK, increased access did not begin until around the early 1990s, due to regional policies such as the Bologna Process (which I detailed in Chapter I and discuss in more depth below) and the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, which consolidated many institutions and created new ways and agencies to fund higher education. Toward the beginning of 1990, UK total student population was around 3,320,400. By 2004-2005, the total student enrollment increased to 7,541, 500, a 120% increase (see Table 3). Table 3 illustrates the increase in the higher education student population in the UK from 1990 to 2005. At that point, there is a slight downward trend in total enrollment mirrored by a corresponding downward trend in further education enrollment, which is similar to community college education in the US. However, the number of students obtaining their leaving certifications who then choose to enter higher

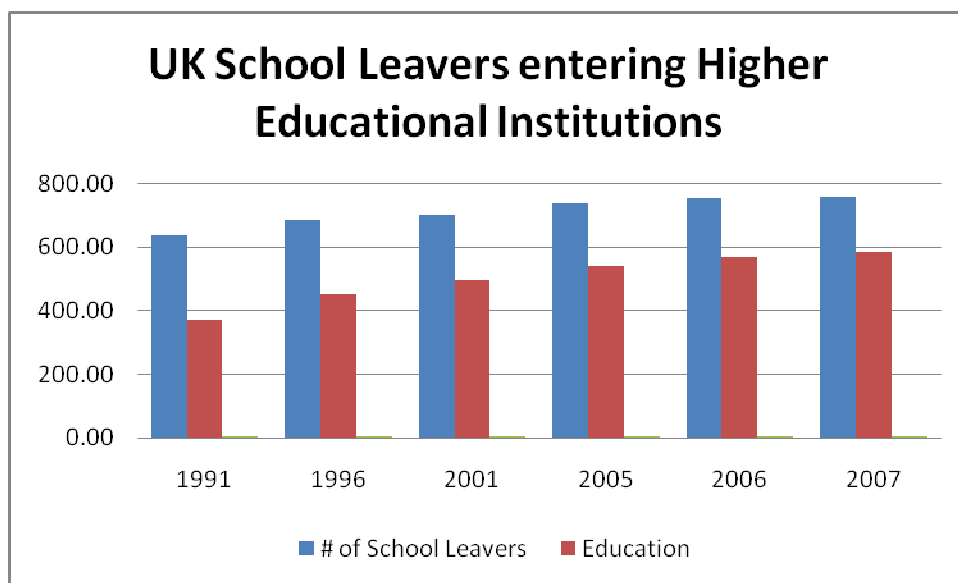
education has increased each year since 1991(see Table 4).²³ The number of students entering higher education right out of secondary school is on an upward trend, but the number of students who choose further education, a category that includes adult continuing education, is on a downward trend since AY '04-'05. What this downward trend could mean is that returning adult students entered higher education under the auspices of massification, but found student support services, such as writing centers, sorely lacking.

Table 3. UK Total Student Population – 1990-2007



²³ Table 2 and Table 3 statistics provided by UK Government at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/children-education-skills/higher-education-and-adult-learning/higher-education-students>

Table 4. Secondary Graduates leaving vs. Secondary Graduates Entering Higher Education



Similar to the evolutionary model of writing center history in the US, increased access may function as a precursor to the development of the London Metropolitan University's Writing Centre and an general increase in writing support interest. In their 2009 article "Training Peer Tutors in Writing: A Pragmatic, Research-Based Approach," Peter O'Neill, Kathy Harrington, and Savita Bakhshi articulate the clear relationship between increased access and the LMU Writing Centre:

Today in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, many universities find themselves in a situation similar to the US in the early 1970s, with university education more and more seen as an economic necessity rather than a humanistic or a cultural privilege, and governments putting pressure on universities to expand into new populations. It is not surprising, then, to find that there has been increasing interest in peer mentoring as a means of

writing support. (2)

In addition, the Write Now Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)'s March 2009 "Summary Report" also points to increased access as a catalyst for the Writing Centre and once again highlights the parallels between US increased access and UK widening participation. The report quotes Paula Gillespie from her letter of support for the LMU Writing Centre:

Writing centers have historically been established in the US during times of influxes of students who are underprepared for university-level writing and academic literacy...As the Bologna Accords have shifted postsecondary education in Europe, universities are increasingly adapting models of writing assistance, and as they begin to adopt writing centers and peer tutoring, they look to other institutions as models. London Metropolitan's innovative programs can position themselves as models for other institutions worldwide, as writing instruction becomes increasingly global. (Write Now "Summary Report" 28)

LMU Writing Centre staff and administrators, authors of the two above-cited texts, place increased access as the catalyst of the Writing Centre, similar to Grimm and Harris in the US. The parallel is significant for both US and UK writing center practice and theory, for it creates an entry point into a comparative study between the two contexts. Further exploration illustrates that this entry point – increased access or massification – was a situation created under the crisis of competition in the UK as well.

In the UK and the rest of Europe, the exigency of competition affected change on the higher education institutional level in 1992. Originally, the EU was the European Commission, primarily three separate economic unions of six countries: Belgium, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, France, and the Netherlands. The three separate economic unions, European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Atomic Energy Commission (EURATOM), and the European Economic Community (EEC), were created to remove trade barriers and form a common market. In 1965, the Merger Treaty combined the three economic European communities into one council, and created the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. In 1979, the first direct elections of the European Parliament were held; citizens from member states now directly elect members of Parliament every five years. Then, the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 created the groundwork for cooperation and collaboration between member countries, including defense, justice, and education.²⁴

²⁴ Article 26 in the Maastricht Treaty, addressing education, states:

1. The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.
2. Community action shall be aimed at:
 - developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States;
 - encouraging mobility of students and teachers, inter alia by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study;
 - promoting cooperation between educational establishments;
 - developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States;
 - encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors;
 - encouraging the development of distance education.

In order to assist higher education institutions' implementation of the Maastricht Treaty goals, the Bologna Declaration was signed in June of 1999.²⁵ Similar to the Erasmus Program that preceded the Bologna Process, one main focus is mobility of students; the Erasmus Program encouraged European students to study in member country different from their own and educators to spend time abroad in other member states. In order to encourage students and faculty to study and work in other member countries, certain aspects of higher education had to be standardized, such as a three year BA degree and a two year MA degree. Regarding PhD programs, the Bologna Process highlighted the importance of European students attending European institutions; for some time, European doctoral programs competed with US doctoral programs, and subsequently experienced a certain brain drain of its best academics who studied and stayed in the US.

²⁵ The declaration set a date of 2010 for its main objectives:

Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries. Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned. Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to: for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services: for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies. Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, interinstitutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

But the Bologna Process was much more than just a declaration for increased student and educator mobility between member countries. It called for region-wide increased access on a large level:

The Bologna Process should be regarded as means to an end: its main goal is to provide the educational component necessary for the construction of a Europe of knowledge within a broad humanistic vision and in the context of massified higher education systems; with lifelong access to learning that supports the professional and personal objectives of a diversity of learners. (European Union *EUA Trends 2010 9*)

By 2010, the European University Association reports that the majority of European higher educational institutions have attracted a more diverse student body and changed institutional policies to reflect the new student body and incorporate more inclusivity.²⁶ The incorporation of more inclusive institutional policies results in pedagogical changes. One manifestation of this inclusivity is a clear focus and articulation of student-centered learning, pointing to a pedagogical shift in which the focus moves from the teacher to the student:

- A student-centred approach to learning involves a different relationship between teacher and learner, whereby the teacher becomes a facilitator, and where the responsibility for learning is shared, and the learning is ‘negotiated’.
- The process approaches learners as individuals – taking account of their particular backgrounds, experiences, perceptual frameworks, learning style and needs.

²⁶ However, I must note that to educators in the EU, the Bologna Process and connected narrative was drafted for educators by bureaucrats. The documents surrounding the Bologna Process and Quality Reform are seen as top-down strategy with little input by those charged with implementing change.

- The learners ‘construct’ their own meaning by pro-active learning, discovery and reflection. The teacher builds critical thinking as part of the learning process.
- There is often a stress on interdisciplinarity, with the goal of attaining higher level, generic skills and knowledge. (European Union *EUA Trends* 31)

Through these documents, a relationship between increased access and a move toward student-centered pedagogy becomes clear. The LMU Writing Centre, certainly not the first in the region, embraced student-centered pedagogy in its practices. In the 2009 “Summary Report,” Writing Centre staff and administrators state that “[P]eer writing tutorials put constructivist and student-centred theories of learning into action, enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning and making them active participants in their own development” (Write Now “Summary Report” 2-3). In addition, the writing mentors interviewed for this project detailed a student-centered focus in consultations. For example, they discussed the use of free writing to assist students in brainstorming, asking students open-ended questions, and working with students at all stages of the writing process. In addition to tutoring practices, the LMU Writing Centre also works with faculty to create practices and curriculum that reflect student-centered learning, such as careful consideration of feedback on student writing. These everyday practices illustrate the practical implications of policy changes such as massification that occurred under the auspices of competition. Other national and regional reports illustrate the pervasiveness of this specific crisis, such as the Dearing Report.

The 1997 UK National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education report titled “Higher Education in the Learning Society,” and also known as the Dearing Report,

outlines an agenda addressing UK students/universities competitiveness in the global arena, and it points to the “powerful” outside forces in order to support its claims.

Powerful forces – technological and political – are driving the economies of the world towards greater integration. Competition is increasing from developing economies that have a strong commitment to education and training. The new economic order will place an increasing premium on knowledge which, in turn, makes national economies more dependent on higher education’s development of people with high level skills, knowledge and understanding, and on its contribution to research. The UK will need to invest more in education and training to meet the international challenge.²⁷

The report points to outside forces driving increased access while it argues for more government funding alongside an increase in student fees (tuition). More significantly, the report also claims that higher education, and thus an educated populace, share the responsibility as both the “guardian and transmitter of culture and citizenship.” Education and higher education in particular have a tacit tradition of reproducing certain values (Protestant middle-class in both the UK and the US), but the report is quite explicit in its educational and cultural goals. In addition to reproducing cultural values and reinforcing the subjectivity of students via the concept of “citizenship,” the report further argues the connection between an educated populace and the continuation of a strong democracy relies on educated citizens critically engaging in democracy. The report states students

²⁷ See United Kingdom. National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. “Higher Education in the Learning Society.” <<https://bei.leeds.ac.uk/Partners/NCIHE/>>

must “be part of the conscience of a democratic society, founded on respect for the rights of the individual and the responsibilities of the individual to society as a whole” (UK, “Higher Education”).

The belief in education as a way to promote and reproduce democratic ideals can also be found in John Dewey’s texts, mainly *Democracy and Education* (1916) wherein Dewey argues that democracy does not function because it lacks a central authoritative group or figure; it functions because its citizens participate and promote democracy. Education begins the socialization necessary for students to see themselves as part of the whole. In addition, the report’s statement on the democratic ends to education alludes to Paulo Freire and his argument of critical consciousness – being with the world rather than simply being in the world. I point to these connections – a modern UK report on higher education and a Deweyan/Freireian Progressive education perspective – because prior to the increase in access in the UK, the concept of higher education and the promise of increased cultural capital for non-elites were non-existent. Therefore, we can in some ways measure the effect of the crisis of increased access in the sense that the crisis created a sea change in social, economic, educational possibilities.

Crisis of Literacy

The proliferation of writing centers across the US can be seen as a reaction to increased access. The writing center narrative is linked, tacitly, to the motives and moves of the US government and the ensuing public voices to increase access. The next crisis, however, pushed more institutions to create centers, or labs, where students can be worked on and ‘fixed.’ This next crisis is the all too familiar literacy crisis, a narrative

recycled since the turn of the 19th century. After the increase in enrollment in US higher educational institutions as a result of the G.I. Bill, some critics claimed the “new” students would be unable to meet the demand of higher education. Instead of failing out, though, these critics claimed that standards would be lowered. In their text, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America’s Public Schools*, authors Berliner and Biddle detail the critics’ resistance to increased access: “Some alarmists considered this (enormous number of veterans who entered colleges) an onslaught by the unwashed masses, particularly certain ethnic groups who had previously been kept out of higher education - Italians, Eastern Europeans, the Irish, the Jews, and the like” (36). The authors go on to state that increased access in the form of the G.I. Bill allowed the opportunity for other groups, such as the working poor, to see a college education as a possibility. Usually doomsday reactions came from elite institutions and by scholars who wish to maintain the educational *status quo* of only admitting “the sons of white, Anglo-Saxon privilege,” but Berliner and Biddle are quick to point out that many veterans did quite well, and this claim is substantiated by the increase in bachelor degrees seen post war (see Table 1) (37). However, despite the success of many veterans, the literacy crisis narrative in higher education began once again in earnest.

The literacy crisis has its roots in a shifting conception of literacy and the nation’s role in promulgating literacy. Deborah Brandt historicizes the shift from the traditional national perspective of a moral imperative for literacy as it changed into the production imperative and the US government’s (in particular the military’s) role in literacy instruction in her article “Drafting U.S. Literacy,” and she begins her analysis with the

literacy crisis during WWI.²⁸ The role of mass literacy changed from what it could do *to* people to what people could *do with* literacy (italics mine) (490). During WWI, the literacy crisis was originally perceived as a morality crisis because of the link between literacy and morality, i.e., the literate and those practicing reading were the basis of US morality and those who were literate had a moral obligation to teach literacy to others. Since the government did not embrace the role of literacy instructor, the literacy crisis of WWII saw a shift. Instead of morality underscoring the goal of literacy in the army, thus positioning the US government in the role as teacher, technology becomes the lead influence or scope of morality, and therefore technology takes over from morality in “organiz[ing] the meanings of literacy” (Brandt 495). The US government began to conceive of literacy as a raw material for the war effort, a shift that changed the very concept of literacy and instruction. Brandt claims this begins what is called the Knowledge Economy:

This is what happens when literacy links up with competition, with the need to win the war. It is this competition that justifies the strip mining of literacy, the ranking of skill, the expendability of human potential, and the production of just-in-time literacy. It is the blueprint for the Knowledge Economy. (499)

Brandt’s argument is useful in understanding present day literacy policies and approaches and understanding how these crises are rooted in economic concerns even though they may be framed in other ways. In the end, the production imperative has literally led to a

²⁸ As I stated earlier, however, the narrative surrounding and promulgating the literacy crisis has existed in the US since women and minoritized men fought for the right to attend colleges and universities.

production of literacy – a business paradigm for teaching literacy in the most cost effective, time efficient way. Finally, this supports the concept of a literacy crisis continually and perpetually manufactured by policy makers in reaction to increased global competition and thus increased access to higher education.

Besides Brandt, Berliner and Biddle, other scholars such as Andrew Sledd have also concluded that the literacy crisis is in fact a manufactured crisis without a basis in reality. Sledd, like Brandt, trace the crisis to subversive goals of profits and government power in his 1988 article, “Readin, not Riotin: The Politics of Literacy:”

If it is deluded to treat literacy as a panacea, it may be deceptive to discuss it at all, for there is no thing, literacy, only constellations of forms and degrees of literacy, shifting and turning as history rearranges the social formations in which they are embedded. Pieties about Literacy with a capital L ought to be scrutinized: Which literacy? Whose literacy? Literacy for what? How? Authors of the present crisis, those who have done most to produce it, insofar as it is genuine, and most to pronounce it, insofar as it is fraudulent, hope to shape a structure of literacies to serve their purposes – principally, higher corporate profits and, to insure them, more power to the Pentagon. (499)

Sledd’s argument, still relevant today, forces the reader to reconsider definitions of literacy as well as to stop and take a moment to reassess the supposed crisis rather than take for granted government reports claiming the US will face its downfall precisely

because of a literacy crisis, which, if it was real, should have been called the illiteracy crisis.

The crisis in the US moved toward the public arena with two specific documents: *A Nation at Risk* and *Why Johnnie Can't Write*. These two documents created the public space to lament the supposed awful state of literacy in the US and brought the driving narrative into US homes. It is easy to fall into the rhetoric of this crisis and believe that there is in fact a crisis of literacy. Scholars such as Berliner and Biddle work to discount the data used in *A Nation at Risk*, but their text was written ten years after the widely disseminated government publication. Regardless, it is easy to see why a nation unsure of its ability to compete globally would latch on to such a manufactured crisis. The exhausted trope of unprepared students in higher education found footing in the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, and thus the battle cry of the literacy crisis made its way onto campuses around the country. The document, sponsored by the US government and widely disseminated, claimed that “American students never excelled in international comparisons of student achievement” (Berliner and Biddle 3), and it began a deep misunderstanding and subsequent mistrust in US schools to educate students to an acceptable “level” of literacy. In many ways, the crisis of literacy benefitted the field of composition studies and created the space for writing center pedagogy. What better way to fix a literacy crisis than to support writing labs where students can get fixed and conform to institutional culturally neutral definitions of literacy/literate? *A Nation at Risk* was published one year before North’s article, “The Idea of a Writing Center,” and many

point to this moment, and the creation of *The Writing Center Journal*, as the moment when writing center scholarship began to articulate its significance to others.

Literacy in the Writing Center

The concept of literacy in the writing center has, at times, reflected the culturally neutral conception of literacy found in academia, government, and the public. But some scholars feel that adherence to the *status quo* works at cross-purposes with everyday practices of writing centers. Nancy Grimm is quite critical of accepting *status quo* concepts of literacy in her text “Rearticulating the Work of the Writing Center.” She posits that writing center work is not central to “intellectual work” of the institution, and because of this writing centers lack institutional power, in particular regarding concerns of literacy. This lack of power leads Grimm to conclude that “[w]riting centers are the handmaidens of autonomous literacy – a value-free, culturally neutral notion of literacy – which although extensively challenged theoretically is still strongly at work in the academy” (524). Grimm asks the audience to consider who owns the particular definition of literacy in the institution, and in what ways do writing centers promote this definition and reproduction of *status quo* concepts of who is and who is not considered literate.

Lacking institutional power is not the only obstacle to reclaiming literacy and thus the literacy crisis. The ambiguity of the term “literacy” presents a challenge, especially when stakeholders hold different and at times conflicting definitions of literacy, of teaching literacy, and of creating and assessing outcomes from literacy instruction. Grimm states, “[i]n fact, almost any adjective can be attached to literacy, and we all pretend to know what it means--cultural literacy, visual literacy, sexual literacy,

emotional literacy, critical literacy, scientific literacy...” (525). Drawing from Brian Street’s conception of academic literacies, briefly the concept that literacy is socially, politically, and economically contextual, Grimm points out that this overdetermination of the term ‘literacy’ “allows us to divert our concerns about grave social issues into discussions of literacy” arguing social issues such as poverty and unemployment can be couched in terms of literacy (525). The very nebulous nature of literacy offers stakeholders ways to avoid discussing social issues, issues that have a direct effect on education, and instead turn to the heated, emotionally charged argument of literacy. It also provides a way to talk about educational inequality in the US without having to reference economic and social inequality. Instead, the literacy crisis places blame solely on the educational system and avoids difficult discussions of class, race, and gender. Finally, positioning literacy as the way toward economic freedom is an effective rhetorical move. Who would argue with the idea that the US needs more literacy or that individuals would not benefit if they were more literate? But the problem, as pointed out by Grimm, Sledd, and Berliner and Biddle, is the very concept of literacy and who defines literacy and the supposed literacy crisis.

Since massification took effect at UK higher educational institutions, British scholars have refocused their work on literacy and what that means to both educators and students. In her text *Student Writing: Access, Regulation, Desire*, Theresa Lillis details her research on non-traditional students²⁹ and their struggles with writing in the dominant academic discourse. She states she was drawn to this research because of her experience

²⁹ Non-traditional student is the term Lillis uses to define the students and herself.

as a working-class student, feeling the push/pull so many non-traditional students encounter upon entering university. Lillis conducts her research with five non-traditional students, looking at their writing and interviewing them on their perception of institutional expectations, teacher feedback, writing processes, and ultimately their academic identity, creating a “thick description” of these students’ experiences. She argues “that detailed attention to specific instances of students’ writing helps to illuminate the nature of the writing practices within the academy and, consequently, to raise important questions for all of us who engage in them” (2). Lillis pays close attention to the dominant essayist literacy expected from students and its inherent ideological framing, which can deny many students success in higher education as it values a particular way of thinking and knowing, sometimes at odds with students’ own ways of thinking and knowing. Students see essayist literacy as a mysterious way to create new knowledge, for they do not see the reasons behind all of the “rules.” Lillis echoes US scholars and their argument for a clear articulation of the socio-rhetorical context in which student writing is located (Bizzell, Rose, Lu). In other words, instructors, writing center staff and administrators’ definition of literacy and the ways they approach literacy must contextualize literacy. This definition of literacy, however, is at cross purposes with the institutional definition of literacy.

At times, the institutional definition of literacy can be internalized by those working within academia, and that definition becomes the norm, and to challenge it, I argue, would take courage. Mary Scott’s research on students taking literature courses at UK universities focuses on the words used in the course, words frequently used in US

first-year writing courses and writing center consultations. In her essay “Cracking the Codes Anew: Writing about Literature in England,” Scott uses Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* in her argument that students, however well prepared in high school, encounter difficulty when faced with terms such as “analyze,” “discuss,” and “argue,” while the instructor has internalized these ways of knowing. Thus, students encounter problems when attempting to crack these “codes” that inhabit certain ways of knowing and being. Scott analyzes student essays that illustrate a belief in a false continuity between high school and university writing expectations and concludes that the change in writing expectations must become more transparent to student writers, as well as arguing for more student support such as writing centers. The need for more transparency and support becomes even more urgent during massification. Scott contends that while instructors currently laud increased access, at the same time they are not doing enough to support non-traditional and underserved students, causing her to argue that “elite institutions and mass forms presently co-exist” (89). In other words, increased access must go hand in hand with an institutional understanding of the varied linguistic, educational, and sociocultural (and I would add literacy) backgrounds students bring with them. Furthermore, in their article “Student Writing in Higher Education: Contemporary Confusion, Traditional Concerns,” Theresa Lillis and Joan Turner conclude that “mass education requires an adaptation to the greater diversity of the student population;” however, the reality is that currently students “are welcomed into the academy by the rhetoric of widening participation, but at the same time denied an adequate participation by taken-for-granted assumptions about academic conventions” (66). What the institution

sees as acceptable literacy practices does not always synch or align with the literacy practices with which students arrive. Writing centers in both countries were founded because of this tension, and because of this, writing instructors and writing centers must reflect on the institutional definition of literacy; however, they also tend to resist/reject the concept of culturally neutral literacy. Out of this resistance comes a new tension between writing centers' everyday practices and what institutions believe should be writing centers' everyday practices.

Another way to look at the unfolding events in both writing centers is through the framework of literacy and literacy practices. In *Knowledge, Culture, and Power: International Perspectives on Literacy as Policy and Practice*, editors Anthony Welch and Peter Freebody claim that “literacy practices reflect and themselves build dominant political and socio-cultural experience” (7). I argue that this is exactly what is happening at London Metropolitan University’s Writing Centre and the University of Arizona’s Writing Center – that “socio-economic and political contexts are acted out” through the initial opening and subsequent closing of the LMU Writing Centre and the defunding of the UA Writing Center and subsequent move to student services.³⁰ In other words, because no one owns the term “literacy” and “literacy practices,” dominant political institutions use the literacy crisis to either create the situation where writing centers thrive or close. The closing of LMU’s Writing Centre and the move of the UA Writing Center from the English Department to Student Services can be seen as reflecting a dominant political perspective. I am not saying that depleted finances were not the reason behind

³⁰ See Chapter 1 for a detailed and contextualized description of this move.

the changes at these two writing centers, but that the very fact that the money ran out represents larger narratives at play.

Crisis of Funding

Both the LMU Writing Centre and the UA Writing Center reacted “successfully” to the two different crises detailed above in all the usual measurable data points: student visits, student feedback, a well-researched and established tutor training program. That in and of itself is commendable but also points to an obvious conclusion: well-run writing centers are incredibly necessary on campuses, unless there is no money to fund them. This brings me to the final and present crisis: the crisis of funding. With the global economic meltdown of 2008 bearing its full weight upon governments, the UK has argued for cuts in funding for higher education, and the first thing that will be cut is the subsidies for student fees followed by cuts in services. London Metropolitan University’s chancellor also cut courses and programs. Savita Bakhshi, an LMU Writing Center Administrator, stated in a personal interview she was “worried that students who can afford the new fees will go to the universities that offer services, in particular student support services” (Bakhshi, personal interview). The unspoken understanding is that only students who have no need for student support services will attend universities, i.e., student demographics will change. It implies, however, that more students will leave publicly-funded institutions to more financially-stable private ones.

According to annual management reports, the LMU Writing Centre continually ran under budget. In fact, they were slated to close in 2010 as the grant from Higher Education Funding Council for English was discontinued, but they were able to keep

their doors open until March 2011 (Bakhshi, personal interview). In their final management report, terms like “sustainability” and “cost-efficient” first appear:

Within the London Met context specifically, the focus of Write Now work has been to develop sustainable, cost-efficient programmes informed by pedagogical theory and research, in order to provide students and staff with high quality learning and professional development experiences which address institutional agendas of:

- improving student retention, progression and achievement;
- developing staff pedagogical research capacity and output;
- fostering international partnerships and collaborations;
- expanding online teaching and learning provision. (Write Now “Summary Report” 3)

The document points to the successful implementation of student-facing programs, faculty-facing programs, inter-university collaborations, and details ways to raise income in the upcoming year. The authors of the document also list support letters from international writing studies and writing center scholars, scholars such as Paula Gillespie, Magnus Gustafsson, Michelle Eodice, and Christiane Donahue, but the original grant was depleted and the university could not replace the funds.

The UA Writing Center has suffered indirectly from cuts made to the Writing Program, housed in the English Department. According to the Writing Program Administrator, cuts were implemented beginning in academic year 2004/2005 with cuts of \$250,000 that year. These cuts continued until they exceeded over one million dollars

(Hall, personal interview). Consequently, the English Department experienced a decline of support for graduate students, a reduction of course offerings, and a hiring freeze. These cuts were a direct effect of the state of Arizona slowly cutting its funding for higher education and public universities. A land-grant university, UA technically exists to serve Arizonans; in fact, it states in the Arizona constitution that higher education instruction be as nearly as free as possible, giving powers to the state legislature to provide funding through taxes and other revenue.³¹ But Governor Jan Brewer and the current state legislators continued the cuts; according to the Arizona Board of Regents, by fiscal year 2012, those cuts will result in a total of 46% cut of per student funding.³²

In order to save the UA Writing Center, the Office of Student Affairs took over funding for the center as well as provided a new home in the Think Tank, a centralized student tutoring space. This move was *kairotic* as much as it was strategic; the founder of the Writing Center happened to be close with the Vice President of Student Affairs. I use *kairotic* because not only was there a relationship on which to build a strategic partnership, but the VP of Student Affairs was already considering consolidating student tutoring services. Therefore, it was the right person and the right topic, and most importantly, it was the right time for the UA Writing Center. But while the Writing Center and writing support for students survives, this experience points to the tenuous nature of sustaining writing centers. One cannot make a *kairotic* moment appear; one can only recognize and take advantage of that moment. But in stating that, I also want to

³¹ <http://www.azleg.gov/Constitution.asp>

³² According to a January 14th, 2011 Media Release authored by the Arizona Board of Regents in response to Gov. Brewer's FY 12 budget recommendations.

point out that it is not like anyone saw this coming for years and did not do anything. It happened quite quickly in a busy department at the same time the Writing Program Administrator and her staff had to figure out how to keep class caps low, continue to attract graduate students with a shrinking amount of benefits such as course releases, and attract established professionals to adjunct teach composition courses. But the move is in no way a relief or win for the English Department, to which the Writing Center has traditionally aligned in terms of disciplinary terms. The concern of losing pedagogical control is present. Anne-Marie Hall, the UA Writing Program Administrator states: “It is now a student service and that’s a non-academic part of campus. Social services (Disability Resource Center, Associated Students of the University of Arizona, Residence Life) have programs but they are not teaching-related. For us, writing center work has a disciplinary core that informs how we do the work and I don’t ever want to stop saying that or lose that. That’s the scary thing about not having the control” (Hall, personal interview). The Writing Center still exists, but its current form may not be a representation of the original Writing Center’s tradition and mission.

In both countries, the public, students, faculty and staff protested the huge cuts. In London alone, hundreds of thousands of students protested the increase in student fees; Arizona student organizations such as the Graduate and Professional Student Council in conjunction with undergraduates chartered buses to the state capital to show their displeasure and protest the cuts. But like other crises, the crisis of funding has become *status quo*. Living in a perpetual state of crisis almost makes the crisis invisible for it becomes normalized. That is not to say people are not doing the difficult work needed to

change these decisions and work toward a more sustainable future in writing center support. But without the larger support of the public, of students, of faculty and staff, the changes in the LMU Writing Centre and UA Writing Center will remain permanent.

Conclusion

The three crises outlined in this chapter – the crisis of access, the crisis of literacy, and the crisis of funding – have a causal relationship to institutional reaction and writing centers. The crises are manifestations of a driving narrative underscored by economic concerns. The stories of the two writing centers reactions to these crises are local and contextual, but their stories speak to writing centers in general. The origins of the two writing centers, arriving during times of increased access, illustrate a larger trend in writing centers globally. The literacy crisis assisted in positioning the writing centers as the space to discuss, explore, and push back institutional concepts of literacy. Finally, the crisis of funding eliminated LMU's Writing Centre, a fate no one wants to see repeated in any institution. However, at the UA, the move from the English Department to Student Services, which charges a nominal fee to all students in order to provide support, saved the UA Writing Center. This strategic move, which keeps student writing support alive in the university, could become a model in some ways to other large institutions. But in the midst of a manufactured or real crisis, reaction, rather than proaction, will not result in sustainability; instead the crisis must be considered, reflected on, and include many of the stakeholders before the rhetoric is hijacked by those with more access to disseminating the crisis. Porter et al, state that change cannot happen in one area of the institution. The

authors use the example of the classroom, but we can easily substitute writing centers in their argument:

By focusing on the classroom without adequately theorizing the institution, such classroom critiques make institutions seem monolithic and beyond an individual's power for change--except in a kind of liberal, trickle-up theory of change that pins political hopes on the enlightened, active individual. (617)

Writing center staff and administrators must rhetorically position themselves within the institution and see themselves not on the margins, relying on their rugged individualism as apart from the institution, for the marginal identity leads to an dichotomous relationship with upper administration. Instead, writing center staff and administrators must strive to understand the “power and operation” of institutional structures; only in this way can change occur (626). In addition, it is only through engagement with other stakeholders that writing center administrators and staff can collaborate on ways to move forward. Openness and collaboration cannot occur on the margins; all must have seat at the table. Addressing these three crises, and not just in the ways they affect writing centers but how they proliferate and reproduce in institutional structures, is essential to understanding--thus strengthening--the positions of writing centers. The next chapter looks at ways writing center identity and positionality in institutions has changed, and considers the rhetorically positioning necessary to reframe writing center success, and re-tell writing center stories.

CHAPTER FOUR

REFRAMING WRITING CENTERS' STORIES: IDEOLOGY, IDENTITY, AND SUCCESS

Throughout this project, I keep returning to the necessity for clear communication between writing centers, upper administration, faculty, students, and the public. I also keep returning to the issues of power and agency when it comes to speaking and being heard. As I discussed in previous chapters, writing center communication is a key component in writing center sustainability. Writing centers need to articulate epistemological paradigms and how they inform everyday writing center practice. Writing centers can position themselves more favorably in regards to crises that often times threaten sustainability. But I became concerned about the ways writing centers communicate, in particular the terms, codes, metaphors, and stories they tell about everyday practices. This becomes important to writing centers for they are often not in a position of power; writing center administrators and staff work within an already existing structure and discourse. As a result, writing centers work within a set of boundaries and rules for communicating to stakeholders, and I am interested in. For this chapter, I turn to more specific ways writing centers communicate within existing dominant framing and I explore how this negotiation manifests in actual writing center documents.

As I discussed in chapter 3, higher educational institutions, for the most part, adhere to a “culturally-neutral” concept of literacy, erasing any socio-rhetorical context (and thus at times erasing students’ backgrounds and lived experiences). Writing centers, as a genre, are created in institutions to promote this concept of literacy and bring

students in line with this concept. The writing center genre also implies an expectation to reproduce writing that reflects a specific cultural meaning, and to participate in and reproduce “a valence system of competence/incompetence and thus social differentiation” (Gunner 11). To consider writing centers as a genre gives us a space in which to theorize writing center work, discourse, and ideology. I draw from Jeanne Gunner’s article “Ideology, Theory, and the Genre of Writing Programs,” published in the 2002 edited collection *The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist: Making Knowledge Work*. Gunner’s arguments focus on writing programs, but I extend her framework to include writing centers. First, Gunner defines ideology as the “practices mediated by political power” that form “a kind of cultural operating system” providing “the unstated codes that determine the functions and manner of functioning of any given operation within a social unit” (8). Therefore, ideology “precedes...theory in general,” and any attempt to analyze theory does so “within an already existing ideological operation system that controls the material effects of the theoretical work” (8). Attempting to theorize writing centers without awareness of writing center ideology or institutional ideology is thus “constrained by ... ideological context and formation as an institutional genre” (9). Second, Gunner argues that because writing programs appear after the organization of the institution, for any change to occur within writing programs, it must happen “in concert with larger historical change and any agency we may have is likely to be found in understanding the historical moment”(7). If ideology is to be considered as an operating system, then genre pertains to the rules, symbols or codes, and assigned roles of communication within the operating system. In addition, before any

change can occur, writing centers need to have those decisions regarding change informed by historical contexts.

In the same way ideology precedes genre, ideology also precedes framing. Framing works as a way to communicate within the operating system, thus reinforcing existing dominant ideology. In the introduction to the 2001 edited collection *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, Stephen D. Reese defines framing as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (11). Framing is different from genre in the sense that framing is not just a set of rules for communication and identification; framing has “tremendous symbolic power” for it carries “excess meanings” that in turn “activate related ideas, social history, beliefs, experiences, and feelings” (Hertog & McLeod 141). In fact, framing serves as “one of the most powerful forces in determining public and private social policy” (Reese 11). In “A Multiperspectival Approach to Framing Analysis: A Field Guide,” James K. Hertog and Douglas M. McLeod argue that framing reinforces existing dominant myths, metaphors, and narratives by being efficient in its message, widely disseminated, and understood (160). Framing works on the abstract, using codes or symbols such as “liberty” or “bootstraps.” Subframes, however, work on a more specific level of narratives, such as the stories of Patrick Henry or Horatio Alger. Frames determine value, meaning, and context because frames have the power to “legitimize and delegitimize relationships...and privileges sets of goals and ethics over others” (Hertog & McLeod 143). For example, the value prescribed to liberty serves to position it as an important

cornerstone in US history and identity. Liberty is an abstract concept, but when Patrick Henry personifies liberty, or at least in the stories we tell about him, then liberty, its value, and its place in our cultural identity is reinforced not as an abstract concept, but a lived, shared experience. Patrick Henry's or Horatio Alger's story then becomes a narrative that is understood across the participating culture (in this case, US culture) and serves to weave and subsequently reinforce a certain cultural identity based on an abstract concept of liberty or individualism. Framing can be found within all forms of communication, through all strata of culture and society. Finally, narratives work within frames while at the same time serve to reinforce framing.

Framing's ubiquity accomplishes a few important things. First, because framing can be found everywhere, frames can seem quite natural and less likely to be resisted or critiqued.³³ Frames offer a way to share meaning across a culture, and serve to reinforce dominant cultural identity. Second, the ubiquity of frames also provides stability for institutions that in turn "contribute to the stability of frames" (Hertog & McLeod 142). To use an example from chapter 3, the framing surrounding literacy uses symbols and codes that have meaning and inscribed value, as well as an underlying ideology. If, as Hertog and McLeod argue, frames determine context, then the framing surrounding the current literacy crisis reinforces the idea that the literacy crisis is new, incredibly problematic for national safety, and can only be addressed through conservative reform. This specific context then reinforces the literacy crisis as a pressing crisis, quite the opposite of the fact that the US has historically derided the current state of student

³³ See Gramsci's concept of hegemony and the role of common sense in reinforcing hegemony.

reading and writing, literacy and national safety have a tenuous relationship at best, and progressive reforms have just as much merit as conservative reforms. Regardless of reality, the discussion surrounding literacy in the US continues to position literacy within the framework of reading and writing and that discussion reinforces the “shared meaning” of literacy as defined by a set of “culturally-neutral” skills. In addition, because framing also defines and legitimizes who gets to speak within a certain context, i.e., frames dictate who is a “peripheral or essential actor”, the narrative of literacy is contextualized through the frames used by legitimized speakers (Hertog & McLeod 143). Therefore, instead of experts discussing their research and work on literacy, pundits and policy-makers with a distinct ideological agenda crowd the discussion.

This chapter looks closely at the framing through which writing centers communicate, in particular in the documents created for faculty and upper administration.³⁴ First, this chapter looks historically at changing writing center narratives and identities in order to contextualize the UA Writing Center and LMU’s Writing Centre’s use of code words and framing narratives. Writing centers have traditionally grappled with issues of power and authority, and I explore the ways this struggle has led, in time, to a reconsideration of writing center identity. In particular, this chapter addresses the significance of the introduction of peer tutoring and writing centers’ marginal positioning. In addition, this chapter looks at the significance behind the shift toward the writing center as a research-intensive space. Drawing from Gunner, I attempt to uncover the parameters of the writing center genre through the ways writing centers

³⁴ I do not look at student-facing communication in this project, but look forward to expanding my research to include analysis of student/writing center communication.

identify and define themselves. What is important is how writing centers have identified themselves in opposition to or in alignment with institutional goals, and thus institutional ideology. Change in writing center identity can only come after a historicizing of traditional narrative frames. After tracing historical ways of identification, I analyze documents and personal interviews and explore the ‘stories’ these two writing centers - London Metropolitan University’s Writing Centre and the University of Arizona’s Writing Center - tell through their own documents.

Investigating Frames

I draw from Linda Adler-Kassner’s use of the term “frames” in her text *The Activist WPA: Changing Stories About Writing and Writers*. Adler-Kassner argues that “stories are always set within and reinforce particular boundaries”(4); in other words, the stories we tell ourselves and others about writing center work finds their origins and importance in other stories and frames that “both reflect and perpetuate dominant cultural values and interests” (12).³⁵ When we use words such as “success” and “sustainability,” our use is grounded in our values and the ways in which we perceive our work, how we go about our work, and ultimately how we articulate that work to others, but usage is also grounded in dominant ideology. That is not to say frames cannot be resisted. In her text, Adler-Kassner details ways to approach resisting and reframing educational frames, which I apply to writing center frames toward the end of this chapter. Educational frames in particular are porous and thus can be used to form a counter narrative, one at cross purposes with the field of writing instruction. The first step in changing writing center

³⁵ See Erving Goffman, considered to be the first scholar to articulate frame analysis.

stories is to historicize the existing frames surrounding writing center identity. To that end, I detail what I see as the five dominant, traditional writing center historical frames. These are general frames and are not the only one prescribed to writing centers, but ones that have a definitive influence on writing center identity and practice. Historical frames also assist in contextualizing the UA Writing Center's and LMU's Writing Centre's "stories" that they tell in their documents. The second step is to explore the values informing the current frames, as well as explore the ideology behind the values. I do this by carefully analyzing both UA Writing Center and LMU's Writing Centre documents and websites. Doing so assists in identifying the ways writing center ideology aligns or works against the more powerful institutional ideology, and assists in theorizing the institution while theorizing the writing center as a genre.

Historical Frame #1: The Writing Center as Fix-It Center

One way to begin exploring the narrative of writing centers and the tension within that narrative is to look at historical scholarship from writing center/lab administrators. Elizabeth Boquet traces writing center positioning in her article "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions," examining fifty years of writing center scholarship. Boquet uncovers the inherent contradiction found within the narrative practices surrounding writing center theory and practice, with a broader goal of "making a more self-conscious appraisal" of writing center identity (465). Boquet points to the contradiction found in defining writing center identity alternatively by method and by site. By looking at the discursive practices surrounding the historical shifts, which Boquet characterizes as, "collapsed and distinguished and collapsed again the difference

between method and site,” she also offers an uncovering of writing center narratives and how they have worked in tandem and also in opposition with institutional narratives of student writing support.³⁶ Using Carrie Ellen Stanley’s 1943 article “The Game of Writing: A Study in Remedial English,” which details Stanley’s experience as the writing center administrator of the University of Iowa’s writing lab, Boquet concludes that in this point in history, early to mid 20th century, writing centers reproduced *status quo* conceptions of literacy. The *status quo* conception is synonymous with the “culturally neutral” concept of literacy I cover in chapter 3. By focusing solely on the individual student rather than the social aspect of writing, this writing center frame emphasizes and reinforces the belief in the capacity and ability of the individual. However, while doing so it also ignores the social context in which all writing and writers move. Furthermore, when writing centers focus on the individual, writing centers position and define themselves within frames dictated and reinforced by the institution, and thus function within the institution’s ideology. In other words, a focus on the individual writer erases or ignores an informed and disciplined methodology. Instead, a focus on an individual student implies an epistemology that locates knowledge within the individual, as discussed in chapter 2. It is not until historical changes occur within higher educational institutions and institutional ideology, such as open access, the basic writing movement, and the rise of social constructivism, that we see a change in writing centers.

³⁶ Traditionally, writing centers identified as a site where students went and became fixed or healed, depending on the metaphor. This type of identification reifies the perception of writing centers as remediation sites. However, when writing centers began to articulate their identity with their methods, as I describe later, the shift positioned writing centers within a disciplinary framework focused on the theory that informed method.

Historical Frame #2: The Writing Center as a Site/ The Writing Center as a Method

Open admissions resulted in a narrative shift in composition studies, one that focused on the social context from which all writing and writers move in; this shift extended to writing center frames. Within the narrative shift was also an implied rejection of the “culturally neutral” concept of literacy (Grimm *Good Intentions*). Institutionally, writing centers were created and promoted to support those students marked as unprepared. But writing center administrators had something else in mind and worked to distance themselves from the lab/fix-it shop for students labeled as “under-prepared” and their writing that was marked as “deficient” by shifting the focus from a frame of site to a frame of method. Boquet states:

Site and method come into more direct conflict as this period progresses, largely because authors move away from mere descriptions of their labs (a tactic which kept the literature fairly focused on site) and toward theoretical justifications of writing lab work. Situating labs within a philosophical framework leads quite naturally to discussions of method, and these conversations make apparent the methodological differences operating in the various lab arrangements. (473)

What Boquet alludes to are the frames writing centers use to identify their practices. At first, writing centers worked within a site frame, which focused on and thus reinforced writing centers as a *place* for remediation. This identification aligned with larger institutional ideology and subsequent framing of writing centers as labs/fix-it shops. Later on, writing center scholarship shifted from site identification toward a theoretical and

methodological identification, positioning the scholarship within a disciplinary framework focused on the theory that informed method. Writing centers began to identify as a sub-discipline, complete with the markers that identify disciplines, such as journals and conferences, and thus began to theorize their place within higher education institutions. However, looking through the lens of writing centers as a genre, situated and working within the larger institutional ideology, it appears that writing centers changed their theoretical justifications, but they did not fully change the narrative surrounding writing centers, in particular the narrative as articulated from those working outside of the writing center. So many writing center staff and administrators today still have to insist that the writing center does not “fix” students or their papers. The writing center as place to fix broken students fits well within the frame of literacy as “culturally-neutral,” and thus has strong staying power. The fix-it shop trope still exists on many campuses, despite changing the frame from site to method.

In the early 1980s, writing center scholarship begins to clearly articulate a rejection of traditional hierarchical institutional power structures along with a more clear description of what writing centers do within the institution. In addition, writing center scholarship begins to explicitly reject the “competence/incompetence” rubric of the institution as well. But as Gunner points out, in order for any change to occur within writing centers, it must happen “in concert with larger historical change and any agency we may have is likely to be found in understanding the historical moment”(7). The “historical change” occurred a decade earlier with open admissions. It took a decade for scholars, pedagogy, and writing center philosophy to begin articulating the ways that

“historic change” affected discursive practices, and thus, writing center identity. Scholars such as North, Bruffee, and Harris set about dismantling and rearticulating the parameters of the writing center genre, and thus the ways writing centers identify themselves. By doing so, writing centers were able to reframe their narratives toward a focus on methods.

The clear description of the “idea” of a writing center occurs as a result of a shift toward closer examinations of method. In 1984, Stephen North begins to articulate that shift in his article “The Idea of a Writing Center.” North pushes back against the fix-it-shop identity and instead describes “the new writing center” as a manifestation of both the process movement and student-centered pedagogy, defining itself “in terms of the writers it serves” (438). North creates a writing center identity based on method, a process method that is student-based and contextual. Further, North proclaims writing centers’ independence from faculty, but what this really means is that writing centers will not advocate for faculty issues, and they will also not question faculty and assignments. Instead, writing center staff and administrators will focus on the writer, not the writing. “The Idea of a Writing Center” marks a shift in the story of writing centers using new frames, and leads to a reconsideration of writing center identity and the ways in which writing centers are perceived by the institution, in particular, the faculty.

What I have not mentioned yet is the relationship between the shift in focus toward method and writing center research. Ede, Lunsford, Grimm, and Boquet all argue for more research in the writing center. But there are multiple tensions that writing center administrators encounter in regards to research in the center. The first is time. Writing center directors and staff are usually quite busy administrating and teaching courses. A

writing center director who is only an administrator is rare; many directors have course-loads in addition to service and publication expectations if they are on a tenure track. Some writing center directors are non-tenure track, which leaves them little room to conduct research. In addition, non-tenure track administrators and instructors are usually not expected to conduct research, which leads me to the second point of tension: respect. Classroom research has just recently begun receiving respect in research institutions; writing center research has yet to reach that level of significance. Writing center research is often collaborative, and collaborated publications do not hold as much weight as single-authored pieces. Promotion and tenure committees may see writing center research as just “counting beans” instead of rigorous, theoretical-based scholarship.

Finally, writing centers’ marginalized identity may dissuade non-tenure track writing center directors from conducting research. They may feel like upper administrators or faculty members question the need, audience, and purpose for writing center research. These are all great questions for writing center directors to ask themselves, and sometimes the answer will be the writing center itself. The narrative of research for the sake of the academic community has permeated the academic ethos. However, writing center directors may find that research can be transformative – for the students and tutors who use that particular writing center. In other words, writing center research does not have to be for the world, although getting published certainly has some advantages. But even if research does not get published, that research can help the particular writing center(s) do a better job at serving students.

Historical Frame #3: Focus on the Peer Tutors

However, the largest contributor to the shift in writing center identity is the introduction of peer tutoring, creating a need for a new narrative that more closely reflects the contradictions found within writing centers. The presence of tutors shifted writing center identity, and thus narratives, because of the reassessment of the writing center as a method and as a site; this reassessment came along with the introduction of students inhabiting and working within the space. The selection of peer tutors and subsequent training dominates most of the scholarship from the period during and after open admissions, and this focus also highlights the contradiction of writing center identity of being both “a mix of institutional accountability and critique, of credit-bearing courses and informal discussions over pizza or doughnuts” (Boquet 475). The shift toward peer tutors, tutor training, and writing center identity finds its way into the stories writing centers tell themselves and others. It is the moment where writing center identity becomes “decentered” because of the non-linear and non-hierarchical aspect of peer tutoring, while also forecasting the shift toward critical pedagogy we see in later scholarship (see North, Kail, Warnock and Warnock). For example, in his 1984 article “Collaborative Learning and ‘The Conversation of Mankind,’” Kenneth Bruffee argues for peer tutors in the writing center. But he also radically positions writing centers by challenging traditional conceptions of knowledge and learning, and thus ideology.³⁷

But if we accept the premise that knowledge is an artifact created by a community of knowledgeable peers constituted by the language of that

³⁷ See chapter 2 for an in depth discussion on the concept of knowledge within writing center frames.

community, and that learning is a social and not an individual process, then to learn is not to assimilate information and improve our mental eyesight. To learn is to work collaboratively to establish and maintain knowledge among a community of knowledgeable peers through the process that Richard Rorty calls "socially justifying belief." (646)

Bruffee's argument regarding issues of authority and knowledge contributes to the shift in writing center narrative and identity. Conceptions of success change; instead of simply assisting the institution in its goal of reproducing middle-class sensibilities and the "culturally-neutral" concept of literacy, success now includes peer tutors and establishing a training program and space that encourages self-reflection and improvement in the tutor's own academic endeavors. Collaboration implies its own conception of success intersecting with knowledge, but one that is less tangible than the traditional banking concept of knowledge. Paulo Freire argued that the banking concept of knowledge (he uses the term education) implies a perception of students as empty vessels waiting for the expert to "fill" them with knowledge, which students will regurgitate at test time.

Historical Frame #4: Marginalized Writing Centers

In some ways, writing centers embody a punk rock identity in their acknowledgement and subsequent dismissal of traditional power structures. Writing centers worked on the margins of higher education institutions, first put there by institutional ideology and framing. But then writing centers began to embrace their marginal status and openly reject dominant framing. They rely on a "do it yourself" ethos that permeates throughout the scholarship. Marginal positioning then becomes an

outsider's badge of honor in some sense, proclaiming writing centers' difference from and subversiveness toward the institution. In their article "Labor Pains: A Political Analysis of Writing Center Tutoring," authors Linda K. Shamoon and Deborah H. Burns describe those who in fact embrace the marginalized defensive position.

Indeed, there seems to be an ethos of rugged individualism celebrated by many writing centers, seeing the facility as the last bastion of independence in an institution that otherwise pressures for conformity, and maintaining that the marginalized position offers tutors and tutees a space for a special kind of work and critical vision. (62)

The authors point to the problematic nature of this positioning, claiming that it maintains the *status quo* marginalization writing centers find themselves in rather than pushing writing centers to want/demand more than just outsider status. Further, they argue this positioning will eventually "close rather than open the discipline's critical eye to its bounded or narrow practices and ways of thinking" (63). Their article focuses specifically on tutor training and approaches toward student papers, but their framework can be expanded to include the ways in which writing centers position and present themselves to upper administration. If writing centers embrace marginal status, it is nearly impossible to illustrate how writing center work aligns with the institution's mission and core values. Indeed, arguing for sustainability from a marginalized position can be problematic, especially during times of austerity, for how can one argue the necessity of a writing center when the writing center does not work from the center of the institution? Instead,

writing centers must become experts at rhetorically aligning themselves with the institutional goals in order to argue for maintaining their existence.

The ambiguous nature of writing centers--not a classroom yet academic, not credit-bearing yet serving students from all majors and disciplines, not income-generating and without a disciplinary home--makes it difficult to position writing centers within traditional hierarchies of the institution. This ambiguity, as Peter Carino argues in "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring," contributes to writing center marginalization. The marginal positioning permeates through every action and decision made within writing centers. Carino further argues, "[w]riting centers have functioned more like a minority party, recognized as a voice but lacking institutional power, operating pedagogically somewhat clandestinely ...to increase their authority and power base within the institution" (101). The consideration and subsequent deconstruction of power and authority issues feature prominently in writing centers, from the welcoming and egalitarian design of writing centers to the use of peer tutors with the goal of deconstructing traditional power relationships in the transfer of knowledge.

This is not to say that writing centers have traditionally worked within existing power structures; instead some have implicitly and explicitly rejected existing power structures and attempted to carve their own space within institutions and the field of composition.

Neal Lerner agrees that aligning with institutional goals will lead to sustainability. Further, Lerner argues that tutor training and professionalization should be included in writing center stories, in particular with writing center outcomes and research, in part because tutor training and professionalization illustrate writing center success and values

(71). By broadening the base of what writing centers value and consider successful, and doing so in either longitudinal studies of peer tutors' experience, writing centers can express these values in ways that the institution will understand.

Historical Frame #5: Gendered, Nurturing Writing Centers

While the frame of de-centered, non-hierarchical situated learning gained attention from all stakeholders during the open admissions period and continues to this day, another frame has persisted and continues to work both for and against writing center identity. I refer to the supportive, nurturing foundation of writing center work noted previously by scholars such as Nancy M. Grimm. Institutional narratives have taken control of this frame and repeat it constantly. The result is that the supportive and nurturing frames become part of the hospital/fix it-shop story of writing centers. The hospital/fix it-shop finds its origins in increased access and the subsequent distancing from these students by the very institutions in which they were matriculated. Writing centers became a way to mark these students as different and send them to a place to become "fixed" or to recoup until deemed healthy enough to join the rest of the student body. Grimm discusses the institutional distancing from the very students given access to higher education, in particular the newer, urban working-class students whose "language and background marked them as different" (*Good Intentions* 10). This difference is what the institution distances itself from by sending students to the writing center. Furthermore, Grimm argues, "[t]he contradictory situation whereby universities establish writing centers, then repeatedly question their value is connected to this distancing mechanism" (*Good Intentions* 10). So just as writing center staff and administrators

locate their stories and frames within a nurturing and supportive standpoint, their sustainability often relies on those who also use the same frame to position writing centers as the place to send those students in need of “fixing.” When budgets are tight, as they currently are across the country’s state institutions, writing centers, along with other tutoring services, are usually on the chopping block first, for the students they serve have been identified or marked as incompetent.

The gendered, nurturing frame and the marginalized frame at times inform each other and can co-exist. Instead of working on equal footing in institution-wide coalitions, embracing marginal status reifies a subordinate position within the institution. Grimm positions writing centers as the dutiful wife, sprucing and prettying things up before the rest of the institution comes home from work (“Rearticulating” 532). Grimm further argues that writing centers are marked by gender specific connotations of support, “refuge, nurturance, emotional support, personal guidance,” and that writing centers are “handmaidens” of a particular notion of a neutral concept of literacy, a concept that continues without critique. Grimm’s “handmaidens” continue the concept of literacy stripped of its articulation with culture, class, gender, and race precisely because they do not wish to upset the *status quo*. Grimm wants writing centers to move out of their subordinate position in order to push back against homogenous concepts of literacy and learning, but she wants to stop the subversive maneuvering.

The nurturing frame potentially prevents writing centers from taking on an identity of a research-intensive space. Moving toward a research agenda complicates the nurturing identity; it no doubt causes friction between the concept of the writing center as

a fix-it-shop and the writing center as an academic unit. Additionally, a research identity and subsequent research projects have the potential to take control of the writing center story and to get in front of any writing center narratives that originate outside of the center. But we must consider reasons why many writing centers have not become research-intensive centers. In her article “In the Spirit of Service: Making Writing Center Research a ‘Featured Character,’” Grimm argues that writing center administrators and staff are too busy to conduct research projects. The majority of writing center time is spent working with students, recruiting new students and tutors, and training tutors. Other scholars have implied just as much, and further argue that issues of money and respect (not enough money for research; writing center research may not count toward tenure) also discourage spending time on writing center research. Historically, creating faculty-facing services such as curriculum workshops, assessment workshops, and support for grant writing were essential to writing center sustainability and success; writing centers saw faculty services as a way to get faculty support. Further, Grimm details the reasons behind bringing faculty on board with the writing center mission and goals, the efforts “to please faculty, to survey faculty, to assess faculty satisfaction, to gain faculty approval” were necessary for sustainability (“In the Spirit” 42). But if writing center administrators spend so much time conducting research “that explains our services, there is little time left to develop research projects based on the unique level of access writing centers have to students” (“In the Spirit” 43). In other words, continually explaining writing center services to faculty leaves little time to seize the opportunity to research student writing and/or how writing centers affect student writing. A proactive research agenda implies a

shift from a defensive position that seeks out faculty and administrative perceptions of student writing problems and articulates the ways in which writing centers attend to those problems toward a student-centered research agenda that looks more closely at students, their needs, and their perceptions of literacy.

Grimm's concept of what writing center research should address not only improves what writing centers do on a daily basis--help students become better writers--but also articulates to upper administration the writing center's successes and values. However, despite calls for more quantitative research in writing center work (see Harris, Lerner), writing center scholarship has by and large remained within the realm of qualitative research. Writing center scholarship tends to be more anecdotal, (i.e., this is what we do here, and this is what I have learned as a writing center tutor/administrator), although throughout the years there have been reflective moments on what the data actually mean. While writing center administrators consistently create reports for upper administration highlighting the number of return students, budgetary concerns, and future projects, these annual reports do not necessarily present the full picture of what writing centers do. In her study "Bridging Quantitative Analysis with Qualitative Experience: Two Concerns Working Together for a More Comprehensive Perspective," Jane Hirschorn argues for different ways to collect and look at data in order to formulate a more "nuanced" way of counting. Hirschhorn's study went deeper into categorizing the type of support students sought in the writing center, such as support in the getting started stage, the intro/thesis stage, and the revision stage. These are qualitative data points accounted for in a quantitative measuring system. The information Hirschhorn gathered

assisted her, as writing center director, to see the daily activities in a more precise way and help assist in tutor training and staffing. But would upper administration appreciate this nuanced approach? In other words, would Hirschhorn's local study assist in procuring some sense of stability and sustainability?

Deans, provosts, even presidents tend to focus on verifiable outcomes while writing centers focus on service to the student and the tutors, but this service is not easily quantifiable, and even if it is, that data may mean something different depending on the audience. While a writing center may see an increase in consultations with students as a strong indicator of success (or not), administration may not interpret the numbers as such. Writing centers and administration do not speak the same language, especially when discussing what kinds of evidence are accepted as valid proof of writing centers' contributions to the university, such as the writing center as a means toward fulfilling the institutional mission. In his article "Writing Center Assessment: Searching for the "Proof" of Our Effectiveness" Neal Lerner asks, "[H]ow do our writing centers contribute to the teaching and learning goals that our institutions hold dear? How do we begin to investigate such matters?" (64). Lerner wants his audience to consider what writing center research measures, how it is measured, and how that data is presented to upper administration. He encourages writing center administrators and staff to broaden traditional writing center goals "to include not just our effect on student writers, but our effect on the entire institution" in order to position writing center work as "central to the conversation about writing at our institutions" (68). Lerner addresses the contradiction facing writing centers today: how a marginalized writing center articulates its work as

“central” to the institution by highlighting its successes and values in order to sustain student writing support. This articulation depends heavily on understanding writing center identity and the stories writing centers tell to themselves and to other stakeholders (upper administration and students).

For the rest of the chapter, I detail LMU’s Writing Centre’s and the UA Writing Center’s documents in order to further illustrate their identity through the stories they tell through their work with faculty and students, and through research. I begin with analysis on the ways each writing center works with faculty, then move on to the ways each writing center works with students, and end with the ways each center presents its research. These three touch points have the potential to fully flesh out the “stories,” or narratives, each writing center tells about itself to stakeholders as well illustrate how each writing center functions within both the writing center genre and the institutional genre. I then move to concepts of success in each writing center’s frame. Success is a nebulous term, but it is constantly referred to in regards to funding and sustainability. No one wants to fund an unsuccessful writing center, but my question was what constitutes success? Who defines success? Therefore, I explore the ways each writing center defines success and then articulates that success to stakeholders. I end the chapter by revisiting Adler-Kassner’s approaches to changing dominant frames—an interest-based, a values-based, and an issue-based approach—and expand upon her approaches to illustrate ways they can work for writing center administrators and staff as they resist and reframe their stories and identity.

Working with Faculty

London Metropolitan University's Writing Centre works within a Writing in the Disciplines framework for a variety of reasons that I outlined in Chapter 1. The main reason worth repeating here is the lack of disciplinary history traditionally tied to English departments via writing instruction. Because writing instruction in formal academic discourse did not occur on a mass scale (and still really has not), the center or housing of writing expertise and dissemination of that expertise, typically found in English departments in the US, is missing in the UK. Therefore, writing instruction must work under the writing in the disciplines frame. LMU's Writing Centre's Management reports detail the goals of working with faculty: "to promote better and more engaged student writing through curriculum and teacher development" (Write Now, "Management Report," 2009, 6). Adhering to writing in the disciplines framing and concepts of success, the report argues that a close relationship between faculty and writing specialists to improve curriculum and "embed the teaching of writing in their (faculty's) own courses" has an established tradition in the US and Australia and has a strong record of improving student writing. Drawing from this established tradition of success, the 2009 Summary Report quotes from an Interim Evaluation Report conducted by an external evaluator in regards to their work with faculty: "Write Now's approach of promoting 'writing in the disciplines' has enabled it to engage a much wider range of disciplines than was expected...there is a very strong culture of cooperation and collaboration between Write Now and staff at the host institutions" (Write Now "Summary Report" 6). The Writing Centre achieved its goals and such a positive review not only by working with faculty on

curriculum development but also through a Writing for Publication program that aimed to increase faculty research and publication. To further support faculty research, the Writing Centre designed a mini-pedagogical research grant program in order to “support staff professional development, enhance the link between teaching and research, increase staff research outputs, and expand the development of evidence-based approaches to improving student writing” (Write Now “Summary Report” 7). The key code words that appeal to upper administration are clear: increase research outputs, evidence-based, link between teaching and research. In some ways, however, the research grant program’s approach to “professional development” could be seen as encroaching on the responsibility of the institution. On the other hand, this program does the job the institution could do and probably does it at a lower cost. Some example of projects supported by the program: “Understanding student transitions between ‘everyday’ and ‘academic’ writing;” “Investigating online peer review for PhD students;” “Turning plagiarism detection into writing development” (Write Now “Summary Report”). The focus of these projects is student writing--how to improve, assist, and generate better student writers. I want to stress the significance of seeing these topics in a place that does not have the traditional and historical connections to composition studies. Therefore, these are not faculty members from the rhetoric and composition field but instead from all other disciplines.

To return to the concept of writing centers as a genre, it appears the LMU Writing Centre consistently worked with the more powerful institutional ideology instead of working outside of it or trying to subvert it. Institutions value publishable research, so to

identify as an institutional genre that assists with the institutional goal of increased output positions the Writing Centre in alignment with institutional ideology. By focusing equally on the services offered to faculty to assist in research in addition to student support creates a new frame through which to view writing center work. Writing center work then becomes theorized as an institutional necessity; a space wherein the majority of stakeholders can find support, not just the “marked” students. And this shift does not imply the Writing Centre is simply a service, a dispensable utility, but instead the shift identifies the Writing Centre as a space vital to the institutional mission of research and student success.

However, just because the Writing Centre successfully worked within the institutional framing in its outward-facing documents does not equal success and viability. Funding for writing centers in general has many variables, and the LMU Writing Centre is no different. The Writing Centre was funded through a grant from the Higher Education Council for England (HECFE), which distributes grants to higher educational organizations and institutions themselves. In 2009, an investigation into LMU uncovered discrepancies with student data, in particular full-time enrolled students and graduation rates, numbers upon which HEFCE base much of their grants. When these discrepancies were uncovered, HEFCE stopped their grants and handed LMU a bill to repay already received grants of 34 million pounds (HEFCE “Statement”). After this discovery, the Writing Centre lost its source of funding and certainly could not count on funding from the institution itself. The Writing Centre’s surplus kept it going for another year without HEFCE funding, but it closed in 2011.

At the UA Writing Center, working with faculty does not appear to be a strong thread running through its narrative. That is not to say its history does not work within the Writing in the Disciplines framework in the same way LMU's Writing Centre does. In 2002, the writing center coordinator offered a workshop series designed to assist students in writing in their major. This series of workshops focused on different parts of the writing process and aspects of writing formally within a discipline, such as development of a text, documentation, and revising for audience, purpose, situation (Florence "The Writing Center"). Students were to provide a writing sample from their discipline. The 2003 "The Writing Center at the University of Arizona Report on Operations Fall/Spring 2003 and Five Year Development Plan" document highlights an increase in faculty requests for in-class workshops. Examples of requests come from a variety of disciplines and include "a workshop on the composing process," "a presentation on writing in the sciences," and a "colloquium on technical writing" (Florence 8). Finally, there is some evidence in the "The Writing Center at the University of Arizona Report on Operations Fall/Spring 2003 and Five Year Development Plan" that the writing center was perceived by faculty as the place to go with questions on writing instruction. The previous writing center coordinator reported increased communication between faculty and the writing center, and a variety of questions and concerns, such as simple questions about the writing center and its work to "extended communications on how to integrate writing into established curriculums..." (Florence 8). But the report fails to articulate the significance of the increased interaction between the writing center and the faculty; instead the example is used to argue for more tutors. This is unfortunately a

missed opportunity to position the writing center more firmly within the center of the institution by winning support from a wider range of disciplinary faculty and creating some kind of interaction that was more sustainable over time. Instead of creating a plan to brand the Writing Center as the center for Writing in the Disciplines that would move in the direction of a more successful, sustainable story, these interactions were glossed over. By not moving toward a brand more aligned with the institutional ideology, the Writing Center fails to position itself into a more centralized institutional role. The risk, as I have noted before, is losing the Writing Center's narrative to the more powerful institutional narrative. In more recent writing center documents, there is no mention of faculty interaction, although that is the goal, stated by both the current coordinator and the Writing Program Administrator in interviews (Hamel, Hall, Interview). Also in an interview, the current coordinator expressed excitement at working with a specific faculty member from the sciences on ways to approach writing lab reports (Hamel, Interview). However, working with faculty in an official, goal-oriented way is not part of currently missing from the UA Writing Center story.

Situating the narrative of the Writing Centre within a Writing in the Disciplines framework makes sense for LMU's Writing Centre because of the history of writing instruction in that institution and UK institutions in general. Without the English department, writing instruction does not have a center, a point of origin, funding, philosophy. Thus, it makes perfect sense that the writing center (and I am speaking generally) becomes the literal center of writing instruction for the institution. Without a center, without first-year composition, writing instruction must occur within the

disciplines. The LMU's Writing Centre's reports reflect an identity that is firmly positioned within the disciplines and within the institution. When compared to the tutor training section, it is clear that the Writing Centre's staff see working with faculty a key part of their story because the Writing Centre has no disciplinary home. Without a disciplinary home, a foundation to secure it, the Writing Centre must form interdisciplinary coalitions.

For the UA Writing Center, working with faculty does not occupy a large part of its narrative. And this could be for a variety of reasons: an institution hostile toward student writing, faculty who do not understand what first-year composition is or does, upper administration who do not see writing center work as integral to the mission of the institution. Many faculty members believe writing instruction is someone else's responsibility, an ideology found especially among English Department faculty. Therefore convincing faculty that the responsibility of writing instruction falls on everyone means first understanding from where this ideology originates, and that means contextualizing and familiarizing oneself with the historical formation of composition studies. As Gunner states, "any agency [writing centers] may have is likely to be found in understanding the historical moment" (9). Faculty, at times, perceives first-year composition as a service course, imparting students with writing skills. This perception is usually accompanied by the expectation that first-year composition teaches all there is to know about writing, even discipline-specific writing. To overcome this perception seems impossible or out of the range of writing center work, especially since the director or coordinator may be called upon to help faculty understand the "historical moment." This

task is challenging, but some writing center directors have achieved it. However, not everyone can be a change agent. In order to be a successful change agent and affect material change within the institution, one must have some sort of power. Part-time, non-tenure-track coordinators do not have the power. Finally, the dearth of coalitions between faculty and Writing Center administrators may be because of the historical protective relationship it had with the English department.

Working with Students

Both UA and LMU's writing centers highlight the number of students served as well as the amount of consultations in their documents. LMU's Writing Centre's 2009 "Summary Report" details the philosophy behind the one-on-one tutorials:

[P]eer writing tutorials put constructivist and student-centred theories of learning into action, enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning and making them active participants in their own development. They are also cost-effective, making peer writing tutorials a sustainable way of providing high quality face-to-face learning opportunities in a blended teaching environment. (4)

Instead of detailing the specifics of a tutor/student consultation, a one-hour meeting in which the tutor asks open-ended question and leads students to their own conclusions, detailing the philosophy that supports this type of tutoring is a well thought out rhetorical move. One, it illustrates writing center pedagogy while explaining some of the discipline-specific language, making it accessible to upper administration. Also, the report uses key code words that upper administration values and aligns the Writing Centre within

institutional ideology--students taking responsibility for their own learning, students as active participants, and cost-effectiveness. In addition to the one-on-one tutorials, the 2008 "Management Report" highlights other student-facing programs: discipline specific workshops to assist student with writing in the disciplines, such as design, accounting, and economics. Doctoral students are available for advanced students working on dissertations and master's theses. Finally, the Centre offers "take away" materials writing support materials, both in hard copy and online.

Of course, student satisfaction remains a main measurement for success in writing centers. The LMU Writing Centre's 2008 "Management Report" points to a student satisfaction in a survey conducted in 2007 that asked all students who use the Centre since opening of their perception of the Centre's services. Six-hundred and twenty-two students were asked to participate, 99 students finished the survey, with generally positive results: 90% of students responded they were "very satisfied or satisfied" with the services as well as 92% of participants responded that the centre was "very helpful or fairly helpful" in their writing development (Write Now "Management Report" 2008, 4). Student feedback can be a useful tool in promoting writing center success to upper administration as well as a way to promote the writing center to the rest of the institution. The survey was not as nuanced as Jane Hirshhorn's survey of students (see earlier in this chapter), and in fact was not a large enough sample to be statistically valid. Writing centers should consider the different ways to measure what motivates students to visit the center, in what specific writing area do students most seek help in (brainstorming, drafting, revision), as well as discipline specific writing/major sends most students to the

center. By doing so, writing center research moves toward a more powerful framing of its work, one that emphasizes for upper administration the ways in which writing center work reflects institutional ideology.

The UA Writing Center reports focus heavily on students' majors, and closely measure which colleges and majors are most served by the writing center. While this may be done for a number of reasons, the most significant reason is to dispel the notion that the Writing Center is simply an appendage of the English department and thus exists mainly to serve first-year composition students. This false notion is particularly problematic in terms of funding for if the majority of faculty and upper administration feel that first-year composition students make up the large portion of students seeking writing support, then there is no need for anyone to fund the center except for the English department. The false notion also illustrates how having a disciplinary home can be disadvantageous. But surveys tell a different story. In the document "Writing Center Appointments and Student Counts 2004-2006," the majority of students served at the Writing Center came from the College of Social and Behavioral Science, followed closely by the Eller Business School, College of Science, and the Graduate College. Breaking down the students by year also assists the Writing Center in making the argument that it serves all students, not just first years. In the "Annual Report 2006/2007," University of Arizona's Writing Center Coordinators write that first-year students made up 49% of students served, with 42% of visits coming from sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The 2007 report is perhaps the most detailed report from the Writing Center to date because it also describes the type of writing (essays) for which students

seek the most assistance. But essay is a nebulous term that could be applied to writing in social science, economic, and business classes. Finally, while this data dispels some of the myths associated with the population the writing center serves, it does not show which classes send students to the writing center, i.e., general education courses or business courses. Just because a student identifies as a business major does not mean the tutorial is on a business course assignment.

While the LMU Writing Centre touts student satisfaction surveys, the UA Writing Center does not. It seems a bit murky, but a solid and reliable system of capturing student perception has not been developed or sustained at the UA Writing Center. I interviewed three former graduate coordinators and asked about a system in which the center could capture that information and all three replied that no system was in place (Fodrey, Lorette, Meyers, Personal Interview). Instead, the writing center employs a survey blitz for three weeks out of the semester wherein students offer feedback on a short, hard copy questionnaire. The graduate coordinators then must file the survey according to tutor, but nothing is captured in an online database. Moving to an online system that has the capability to collect information in a database and present surveys to students would assist the Writing Center greatly. However, they would need at least two desktop computers dedicated for students to complete surveys after tutorials in order to accomplish this goal.

Research

Each year, LMU's Writing Centre's Management Reports highlight the Centre's research agenda and detail the projects completed as well as projected research goals.

Once again, the philosophy behind the research goals figure prominently. In the 2008 “Management Report,” these goals include:

1. To produce an evidence and theory base for innovations and interventions in student writing support;
2. To produce an evidence and theory base for understandings of the effects on student learning of assessment, marking and feedback practices;
3. To build research capacity within the partner institutions to ensure the sustained impact of Write Now’s work;
4. To ensure that all research carried out under the auspices of the Write Now CETL should set standards for rigour and robustness in the field of pedagogical research;
5. To integrate theory and practice to influence policy making within higher educational institutions and across the sector;
6. To make a research impact at national and international level.

(Write Now “Management Report” 2008, 12)

Examples of specific research projects at LMU’s Writing Centre include a book co-edited by the Writing Centre’s Writing Specialist, Peter O’Neill and Mary Deane of Coventry University, titled *Writing in the Disciplines*, published in 2011. Subsequent reports feature research even more prominently than the 2007 “Management Report”, creating a research and publication trajectory that eventually includes three edited or collaboratively written books, 11 published articles, many in peer reviewed journals, and 20 papers presented at national and international conferences. The emphasis on research aligns the

Writing Centre with the institutional research agenda while also attempting to position it on equal standing with research-heavy (and thus well-respected) units on campus. Research and the ability to garner grant money go hand in hand, so it may mean the Writing Centre is positioning itself as a serious contender for grant money, which, needless to say, positions the Centre closer to the “center” of the institution as far as visibility across academia as a whole. Establishing a strong research agenda from the beginning firmly entrenches the Writing Centre staff, and thus the Writing Centre itself, within an academic frame that emphasizes research and publication. Furthermore, the size of this section in the management reports, double or even triple the size of the student or staff outreach section, positions the Writing Centre and its staff as researchers first. Perhaps that is one way to avoid or dispel the fix-it shop framing before it even begins. Emphasizing research and publication also avoids the static identity of the nurturing and supportive gendered space; instead, the Centre is positioned as dynamic, in motion, and cutting edge. Finally, the emphasis on research attempts to answer the call for more qualitative and quantitative research I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. By doing so, it also attempts to speak the same language as upper administrators, thus securing its story within the goals and mission of the institution. Of course, that was not enough. We can speculate that the Writing Centre was working against a more powerful institutional ideology that had a long tradition of not teaching writing and not providing writing support outside of classrooms. Because of the lack of tradition such as the one here in the US, the Writing Centre, while successful in so many ways, was not

able to change institutional ideology, and thus perceptions, enough to secure a permanent space.

The UA Writing Center's documents do not feature research projects or a research agenda. The Center does not employ a full-time director; instead it employs a writing center coordinator who divides her time between teaching first-year composition courses as an adjunct and running the Center. Because of the lack of time, funds, and motivation, research is not a top priority for the UA Writing Center. This may change in its new location as it has the potential to conduct collaborative research projects with other units working in the UA Think Tank, but for now this positions the Writing Center at a disadvantage within a Research I institution. Currently, the UA Think Tank does not seem to be steeped in the research culture of the institution, and this may be connected to the fact that the Writing Center serves more undergraduates than graduate students. By not conducting and presenting/publishing research on students, tutoring, professionalization of tutors, it becomes challenging to argue its significance to an institution so focused on research.

Concepts of Success

One aspect of self-identification and self-representation that keeps coming up during communication between writing centers and administration is the concept of success. In my interviews, one question I asked all 7 participants was how they define success in the writing center, and I received a variety of answers.

- Who defines success within the writing center?

- When these markers of success are met, how are they then presented to the institution when it comes time for the quarterly or annual report?
- How many times do writing centers report to someone who has never set foot inside a writing center?
- How do these measures of success align or deviate from the ways administration or the home institution defines success?

This section seeks to look at the ways the two writing centers present their perception of success to their various audiences.

Success within a writing center often implies adherence to writing center pedagogy, high morale between tutors and writing center administration, and positive feedback from students. Dr. Anne-Marie Hall, the UA Writing Program Administrator, stated in a personal interview that success means a “quality product,” which includes “strong institutional coalitions, a solid training program for tutors, and a writing center director who conducts, presents, and publishes research projects situated within the center” (Hall Personal Interview). The writing center as a product works well within a branding concept, and is a way to align with the institutional mission. But when we take the “product” apart and look at the individual components, these components align more with the story of writing centers in and of themselves rather than how and where they work within the institutional framework and its stories. Without theorizing the center as working within a specific genre informed by institutional as well as discipline-specific ideology, the opportunity for material agency does not appear. For instance, strong institutional coalitions mean academics and the community working together toward a

similar goal or outcome. And no doubt this goal is in alignment with an institutional goal of interdisciplinary research and collaboration. But the code words used are different. In the same way, a strong tutor-training program and a successful writing center research agenda needs to be couched in the code words understood by all stakeholders, but particularly those valued by the more powerful stakeholder, the institution.

Also, more institutions are moving toward a consideration of higher education that conforms more to the capitalistic model of consumer/ product. In this emerging story of higher education, the student as consumer frames the larger decision-making, especially in financial and allocation decisions. More and more, students themselves see higher education as a product, with the degree as a means to an end rather than an end itself. In other words, both students and institutions are complicit in this consumerist model, and, as a result, academic and student services units across campuses have been implicated in reconsidering their position on campus through this framework. While this model is problematic in the sense that it seems anathema to the concept of a liberal education, i.e., attaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge, it in some ways forces all participants, the institution, faculty, and students, to be as efficient as possible. In this light, writing centers can present themselves, or change their frames, as models of efficiency in the goal of student success. More and more, budgets are more closely tied with retention rates, and writing centers must be able to show their role in institutional retention goals.

Richie Wallace, a writing center tutor in London, stated in a personal interview that he equates success with boosting students' confidence in their writing ability

(Wallace Personal Interview). Once again, this concept of success remains within the story of writing centers and harkens back to the nurturing, supportive nature of writing centers and people who choose this work. The institutional conception of student success may mean something different than increasing confidence, such as retention and graduation rates. Of course, student confidence in their writing potentially leads to successful completion of their degree, but writing centers need to make that case using empirical studies, not just anecdotal data. Without longitudinal studies on the relationship between increased student writing confidence and graduation rates, the code word “confidence” can all too easily play into the institutional story of the writing center as a gendered space, assisting students with their confidence rather than contributing to the overall success of the institutional goals.

Chris Hamel, the current UA Writing Center Coordinator, in her personal interview pointed to tutor professional development as a mark of success, as well as the Writing Center as the place for faculty to come and talk about writing without feeling territorial and defensive about their disciplinary practices (Hamel). This specific marker of success that focuses on the tutor training and experience is most evident in both writing centers’ management reports, in particular the UA Writing Center reports. Tutor training and a tutor professionalization experience features first in the UA Writing Center’s annual reports, indicating it is considered the most important outcome. But it does not relate this outcome to the rest of the student population and the connections between a strong tutor training program and improved student writing.

Another document that illustrates the confluence between the LMU's Writing Centre and its institution is a document titled "Review of Learning Development at London Met: Report for DVC (Academic)," authored by Kathy Harrington, the director of the Writing Centre, in consultation with other coordinators of learning development units. The report was presented to upper administration in September 2009. The titles of the report sections include: "Contributors to Learning Development and Summary of Areas of Expertise;" "What we do and who we reach;" and most significantly, "Impact of what we do in relation to the University's strategic plan." In this last section, the authors of the report take the necessary steps to reiterate the confluence of student support services and the university's strategic plan. The report quotes sections of the university's strategic plan and then details the ways in which the student support services contribute to the goal. Examples include a university goal of successful student engagement upon entry and the first-year experience, and the wide variety of Writing Centre offerings that meet this goal. Workshops, peer tutoring, and online and printed writing resources "also provide points of contact with the institution which support engagement with study" (Harrington 6). Following the contributions, the report offers student feedback on services including the annual student conference. Other sections include international students, i.e., the institutional goal of increasing the number of international students and the ways in which the Writing Centre offers services to international students, and "Pedagogical Research and Evaluation." These two sections also show the student support services as contributing in different ways toward these institutional goals (Harrington 7-8). The rhetorical move of taking the institutional language and using it to

highlight the ways in which student support services serves not only the students but also the mission and values of the institution, illustrates a more explicit understanding of what administration values and successfully presents Writing Centre work within that frame.

Resisting and Reframing Historical Writing Center Frames

On the surface, it seems that these two writing centers are/were successful, according to the definitions of success I encountered in my interviews. And yet they both went through change regarding funding, practice, and eventually sustainability. So how can writing centers assist upper administration in seeing the success story? In trusting writing centers that the data points used do in fact illustrate success? Writing centers must enact change, not in the everyday practices, but through the way they position themselves. However, this is easier said than done. Writing center staff and administrators were probably not drawn to writing center work because they wanted to re-consider institutional (read: power) dynamics. Nor were they drawn to writing centers to explore the spatial implications of a writing center within an institution. Many are drawn to writing center work because they believe in student-centered support and improving the writer. And it is that belief in improvement--that writing centers do improve students' writing--that needs to be explained rhetorically to administration to move toward sustainability. But writing centers need to believe that administrators can be convinced that they are stakeholders in successful student writers. In other words, writing centers must believe that institutional ideology and the traditional perception of student writing as either an inherent gift or a skill to be obtained can be changed.

In this way, we can enact change in long-standing institutional beliefs. Enacting change within the institution seems daunting, for institutions by their very nature are immovable forces. Grimm states, “[u]niversities, grounded as they are in masculine epistemology and hierarchical top-down decision making and charged with the job of protecting knowledge and safeguarding traditions, are especially resistant to change” (“Good Intentions” 92). James Sosnoski articulates a similar stance regarding the seemingly unchangeable monolithic institutions that, as he states, by definition exist to maintain orthodoxy. In addition, attempting to change the perspectives of the people who sign the paychecks is a seemingly impossible and potentially self-defeating task for many in this precarious economy. However, writing centers might just be the place for change to happen. Grimm further argues that writing centers are locations where we can push for change, for they are places where “contact between individuals of different classes and allegiances” occur (92). It is the place where we can and should find moments of counter hegemony.

Perceiving the writing center as a place for change also has the potential to position writing centers as proactive in sustainability issues rather than reactive. In the chapter titled “Changing Conversations about Writers and Writing,” Adler-Kassner outlines three ways to approach this change, drawing from community organizing: interest-based, values-based, and issues-based. Interest-based approaches toward change take into account each stakeholders’ interests and looks for overlap in order to “use this as a basis for forming relationships” that can lead to action (99). Power comes from these coalitions, but the stakeholders must be convinced they share the same interests in order

to participate effectively. An example of an interest-based approach could be a writing center and upper administration focus on retention. It is in the interest of the institution to have the highest percentage of students continue until graduation. Writing centers, because they exist to support students, share this same interest. By articulating this common ground, both the institution and the writing center can see that forming interdisciplinary and inter-departmental coalitions with a shared goal of student retention is in everyone's best interest. The power that comes from coalition-making does not necessarily mean both writing centers and institutions will agree on the means toward this end, but at least they can agree on the end itself.

A values-based approach is more long-term than interest-based and may be more productive in finding a common ground between institutions and writing centers regarding the means toward an agreed upon end. A values-based approach goes further into interests in the sense that it delves into the values that inform interests. As such, it draws from linguistic theory and, as Adler-Kassner argues, "by playing with potential language, groups can explore their beliefs. At the same time, also embedded in this model is the premise that the wrong word or choice of words can activate the wrong frame" (110). The first step is to look at what writing centers value and the ways these values are framed. The next step is to look at what the institution values and the ways those values are framed. The third step is to consider "the larger metaphors to which [the frames] are connected by examining other uses of these terms in education-related contexts..." (113). Adler-Kassner's "terms" are interchangeable with "code words" I use throughout this chapter. An example of using code words could be research and the ways writing centers

and institutions use research as a code word, but also what “research” means, looks like, and how it manifests in everyday practices within writing centers and within institutions. Exploring the ways writing centers and institutions value research, and finding the commonality in these ways, has the potential to build stronger coalitions between the two and thus lead to material agency for writing centers.

While a values-based approach contributes to long-term goals, an issue-based approach works well for short-term goals because it rallies stakeholders around a specific issue wherein they work together on that issue. It appears to be a more problem-solving technique, but one where everyone sits at the table and offers their opinion on best practices to solve the problem. An example of issue-based could be funding for writing centers. Both the institution and the writing center need to work together to address ways to fund the writing center that suit both parties. Adler-Kassner argues that the important thing in an issue-based approach is that it “provide[s] a framework” that writing centers can use to “think systematically about how to work *from* [the issue], not necessarily *through* it...” (author’s emphasis, 123). So rather than see a funding crisis as something to work *through*, i.e., a quick fix that may carry the writing center through another semester or year, instead a funding crisis is something to work *from*, by gathering support and input from relationships around the institution to come to a more sustainable solution.

Each of these approaches, which should not be considered as discreet categories, can be instrumental in changing the stories around writers and writing. Adler-Kassner focuses specifically on WPA work, but her strategies can be considered in the sustainability discussion surrounding writing center work. She argues that first

stakeholders must understand that “story-changing work incorporates and proceeds from principles...” (91). Writing center staff and administrators must clearly understand and be able to articulate these principles if they want to change the story, and more importantly, if they want to “[act] locally and ahead of “crisis” (92). I explore specific strategies in Chapter 5 and the ways they can be used by writing center staff and administrators to change the story, as well as return to the concept of writing centers as a genre to explore the importance of acknowledging the connection between institutional critique and ideological critique and the ways in which that acknowledgment creates a space for writing center agency.

My final chapter builds upon this idea of alignment and articulation in writing center representation. I begin with exploring the concept of *kairos*, or taking advantage of the opportune moment, and weave that with contemporary *stasis* theory to form a rhetorical methodology for writing center administrators and staff. These concepts work from a framework of irenic rhetoric, which is based in compassion, empathy, and compromise. In many ways, writing centers act as interpreters—between students and faculty, between writing center pedagogy and upper administration, between faculty and writing assessment—and as such writing centers fluidly move in between interlocutors and stakeholders. I end with a communicative heuristic for writing center administrators and staff to provide one way toward sustainability.

CHAPTER FIVE

KAIROS AND STASIS THEORY: A PATHWAY TOWARD WRITING CENTER VITALITY

Currently, public higher education institutions face immense pressure to change. The pressure comes from within, i.e., governing boards, and from without, i.e., politicians and parents. The global conversation on public higher education revolves around funding and access. Dwindling state support, growing student loan debt, and higher tuition costs have become a national crisis in the US, while increased fees in the UK have prompted student protests and upheaval. It seems that almost everyday someone somewhere publicly questions the role of higher education in society. This is not a new crisis; in fact, as I outlined in Chapter 3, it is a reiterated crisis with a different spin. However, whether this is an old or new crisis, a manufactured or real crisis, writing centers and other student support services often see their viability under question during times of change. The constant state of surviving precariously on the edge of closing means writing centers must find ways to be proactive in a crisis and become their own change agents. Getting in front of the narrative, as I point out in chapter 4, serves as one way to stabilize writing centers during moments of institutional change. However, when faced with larger crises or catalysts for change, do writing centers have the means to get in front of the change and work proactively rather than reactively? More specifically, what do the stories of the UA Writing Center and LMU Writing Centre mean for other writing center administrators and staff who currently face financial, spatial, or pedagogical upheaval?

I do not think there is one answer because of the local and contextual nature of writing center work. Each institution is different; each writing center is different. But can there be a methodological approach to communication that can benefit writing center administrators and staff as they attempt to establish control over viability? Getting in front of the story is important in regards to writing center identity, especially concerning epistemology and perceptions of success, but is there more to it? Is there a stance writing center administrators and staff can take when communicating to the varied audiences? Finally, where can we find examples of the UA Writing Center and LMU's Writing Centre effectively (or not) communicating with stakeholders? Can rhetorical theory offer a useful methodology that informs communicative practice between writing centers and students, faculty, and upper administration?

Rhetorical theory has the potential to serve as a framework on which to build a communicative heuristic for writing center administrators and staff. For this purpose, I am drawn to irenic rhetoric because of its underlying empathetic and compromising stance. Irenic rhetoric, based on peace and goodness (or overall good), stands in contrast to agonistic rhetoric that implies a battle with a clear winner and loser. I draw from Bohn Lattin's article "Erasmus's Irenic Rhetorical System," in which he argues that Erasmus has been mistakenly categorized within the classical tradition of polemic rhetoric. Instead, Lattin argues that Erasmus worked from a definition of irenic rhetoric based in dialogue, camaraderie, and peace.³⁸

³⁸ Furthermore, Lattin claims that Erasmus, who expanded upon Cicero's concept of *sermo*, foregrounded feminist practice of nonconfrontational or cooperative discourse.

Erasmus discouraged the use of competitive forms of disputation because he thought that disputes created “strife in the guise of scholarship...” Instead of teaching students to see themselves as gladiators engaged in a battle of words, Erasmus taught students to be comrades, friends who discussed issues in a colloquy or dialogue (35). Erasmus grounds his theory of irenic rhetoric within Christian theology. Multivocality and compromise are the cornerstones of irenic rhetoric, the basis of which assumes all speakers, or stakeholders, have equal access to voice and agency, and together the interlocutors move toward a mutually agreed upon end result.

I do not wish to further feminize an already gendered space.³⁹ Writing centers tend to attract more women than men, and the work in writing centers is often portrayed as nurturing and supportive. Further, labor in the writing center is often feminized in contrast to the research-heavy work done in the rest of the academy, a gendered comparative labeling process that also occurs in the discipline of composition or writing program administration. Therefore I move forward employing irenic rhetoric in the ways Erasmus used it, which is without the dichotomy of a male/female paradigm and instead with a focus on compromise, goodness, and understanding. This is not to say that savvy, or rhetorical acumen, is not part of irenic rhetoric. Savvy or acumen incorporates a sense of the rhetorical situation, and this is where *kairos* is particularly useful. To complement *kairos*, I also draw from contemporary *stasis* theory. Employed together, *kairos* and

³⁹ I did not feel this was the space to go into Robert Connor’s problematic articulation of what he calls the feminization of rhetoric/composition, but for more information on the topic, please see his text *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997. 23-68. In addition, see Roxanne Mountford’s review of Connor’s text in “The Feminization of Rhetoric?” *JAC* 19.3 and Sharon Crowley’s review in *Rhetoric Review* 16 (1998): 340-343.

stasis inform our rhetorical practices, while the principles of irenic rhetoric form the foundation of these practices.

I first define *kairos*, drawing particularly from the Sophistic definition, then use examples of *kairotic* moments from both LMU's Writing Centre and the UA Writing Center's history to illustrate the potential in *kairos*. Within the context of writing center communication, *kairos* also extends to working both horizontally and vertically throughout the institution. I expand Muriel Harris' argument that writing center tutors act as "interpreters" to include writing center administrators and staff as they discuss and define writing center pedagogy and everyday practices to stakeholders. Writing center administrators and staff are strategically positioned to understand both how a term is defined in the field of writing center pedagogy and also how a term is defined by those outside of the field. Therefore, writing center administrators and staff are in the unique position to act as "interpreters" during communicative acts, which underscores a position of power in arguing for resources. Taking the lead in defining terms also implies compromise, which leads to the section on defining contemporary *stasis* theory. After defining contemporary *stasis* theory, I move to examples from both writing centers' struggle for viability and independence to contextualize *stasis* within writing center communication. Finally, I combine the two rhetorical concepts, *kairos* and *stasis*, to create a framework on which to build a heuristic for writing center communication. The heuristic is but one way to consider writing center communication, and serves as a potential way to improve chances of writing center sustainability.

Kairos

The Sophists argue that *kairos* implies consideration of the context surrounding the argument and adjusting the argument accordingly, or even waiting for a more opportune moment. It is the context surrounding the argument that will present the best ways forward in communication, and one must be continually aware and ready for the best ways to present themselves. In addition, in *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates argues “to choose from these elements those which should be employed for each subject, to join them together, to arrange them properly, and also, *not to miss what the occasion demands...*” (qtd in Bizzell & Herzberg, 74, italics mine). Isocrates focuses, in what could be considered a sort of warning, on awareness to the demands of the occasion.

Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard extends the sophistic definition and argues *kairos* is the “sum total” of the contexts surrounding and influencing the rhetorical situation (291). In her 1993 article “Kairos and Kenneth Burke’s Psychology of Political and Social Communication,” Sheard explains:

Kairos encompasses the occasion itself, the historical circumstances that brought it about, the generic conventions of the form (oral or written) required by that occasion, the manner of delivery the audience expects at that time and place, their attitudes toward the speaker (or writer) and the occasion, even their assumptions about the world around them, and so on.
(291-92)

Sheard’s definition addresses the dialectical nature of *kairos*, one in which contexts work in concert to provide a method for engaging or communicating. Further, Sheard’s definition highlights the connection between *kairos* and discursive practices surrounding

the rhetorical situation, which is key to writing center communication. As I discussed in chapter 2, discursive practices are bound to what Foucault describes as “the rules of formation,” and serve as ways to define knowledge, and are then supported through the knowledge created. (*Archeology of Knowledge* 38). Therefore there is a connection, a symbiotic relationship, between *kairos*, the discursive practices of a rhetorical situation, and knowledge-making. Sheard draws from Gorgias when she argues that “through *kairos*...human beings participate in the development of knowledge and thus in the “social construction,” we might say, of reality” (306). *Kairos* is much more than appropriateness or opportunity, and because of this can serve as a method for writing center communication.

Other modern definitions of *kairos* also articulate a contextual, nuanced definition. In their 1994 article “Kairos in Aristotle’s Rhetoric,” James L. Kinneavy and Catherine Eskin conflate *kairos* with the “situational context,” which they see as a more modern term (433). Further, in his 2007 article “The Ethics of Argument: Rereading Kairos and Making Sense in a Timely Fashion,” Michael Harker argues that a more nuanced definition of *kairos* “recognizes that concerns of appropriateness and timing inter-animate each other in such a way that it is almost impossible to consider *kairos* outside of the most problematic philosophical and rhetorical realm, the realm of action, the realm of ethics” (82). The more modern definitions focus on rhetorical action informed by the situation, while at the same time acknowledging the contextuality of *kairos*. Harker’s use of the term “inter-animate” also point to the actionable nature of *kairos*; that is to say that *kairos* is not just about the right time and the right place, but it

is also about what happens when the right time and right occasion arrives. *Kairos* focuses on the awareness necessary to effectively communicate, and I use awareness and savvy interchangeably because both terms are rooted in knowledge – to know – and are both connected to insight or acumen. This brings me to the larger discussion of this chapter, which is about ways toward writing center sustainability with a focus on thoughtful and well-timed persuasive communication.

Kairotic Moments: LMU's Writing Centre and the UA Writing Center

Writing centers are often created out of a *kairotic* moment; in other words, the right people who are interested and have some expertise in writing center scholarship, the right moment across the campus and community, and the right amount of funding necessary to implement a new writing center have all come together to form the perfect moment for a writing center's creation. In the case of London Metropolitan University's Writing Centre, the timing was perfect for establishing a writing center. The confluence of events that led up to the founding of LMU's Writing Centre followed an inevitable and specific path toward student writing support. As I stated earlier, until recently, higher educational institutions in the UK and in most of the EU paid scant attention to formal teaching of writing as they were elite institutions serving only 15% of the population. In "Using Peer Writing Fellows in British Universities: Complexities and Possibilities," Peter O'Neill argues that the homogenous student population combined with very little formal writing expectations of students underscored a tradition of formal writing instruction and student writing support. However, he states, larger societal shifts including a move toward a knowledge economy from a manufacturing economy

combined with a clearly stated organized goal of increasing enrollment and systemized changes to degree requirements and time to degree changed the student body, the delivery of instruction, and students' academic needs. At the same time, the concept of Academic Literacies began to grow in the UK, a concept that broadens the definition of literacy from a set of skills to a more comprehensive contextualized social act (see Street and Lea). The embrace of Academic Literacies marked a change in the approach to the teaching of writing and student support at many UK higher educational institutions. Peter O'Neill explains that the new approach.

...offers insights into the kinds of writing that students do and it has helped to generate a much richer view of the complexities of university writing, expanding a discussion that has too often focused on surface issues such as correct grammar. It has also done a good job in bringing together under the same broad umbrella existing learning and study support staff and everyone else involved in teaching writing in UK universities. ("Using Peer Writing Fellows in British Universities: Complexities and Possibilities")

Therefore, the confluence of social change in the form of a government-mandated widening participation and subsequent push for funding for student support, a theoretical shift in the perception of literacy, a vocal public articulation of students' lack of writing ability, and the growth of scholars interested in academic writing all led to the creation and implementation of LMU's Writing Centre in 2006 – at the right time and in the right place.

Taking advantage of a *kairotic* moment can also be found during a time of crisis. The UA Writing Center had long been working under funding cuts to the English Department. Cuts began with \$250,000 in 2005 and continued for the next few years totaling \$1.5 million (Hall, personal interview). Around 2008, discussions began to focus on moving the Writing Center out from under the English Department and under the umbrella of Student Services where a student fee would fund the Writing Center and other forms of student support services. Again, the confluence of events served to provide a moment of opportunity to continue the work of the Writing Center, albeit under a different program and through another form of funding. But it is important to note that administrators in both the English Department and Student Affairs came together in a *kairotic* moment. The current VP of Student Affairs agreed upon the value of supporting student learning, and also had a personal relationship with Tilly Warnock, one of the founders of the original Department of English-run Writing Center. Tapping into established relationships in order to build coalitions illustrates *kairos* in writing center sustainability.

Kairotic Moments: Working Horizontally and Vertically Across the Institution

These two examples from LMU's Writing Centre and the UA Writing Center show the importance of taking advantage of an opportune moment. But it is important to point out that these administrators and scholars were able to take advantage of the moment because of a deep knowledge of the history and context surrounding the institution, in addition to a keen understanding of cultural, social, and political events in each respective country. Cultural knowledge, institutional knowledge, and historical

knowledge all played a large role in capturing and seizing the moment of opportunity. All of this knowledge may not be immediately available to someone new to writing center administration. Therefore, I acknowledge that *kairos* takes more than a simple awareness of the conversations surrounding higher education in general or in one particular institution. However, keeping track of a writing center's history and making that history "concrete" for the next administrator or staff becomes crucial for the next generation of writing center administrators and staff to be able to stay attuned for *kairotic* moments of expansion or upcoming moments of contraction.

Another way writing center administrators and staff can sharpen their awareness or *kairotic* savvy is to articulate an awareness of upper administrator's explicit and implicit needs and goals. Articulating this awareness implies crafting coalitions across the institution as well as the surrounding community. I do not wish to reduce this important action to simply getting out there and entreating upper administration. This is not what I mean. Instead, I refer to opening the lines of communication through emails, through faculty meetings, and through outreach programs such as a writing center open house or a brown bag workshop in a Center for Teaching and Learning. Writing center administration and staff need to be diplomats for the writing center, and in many ways that means networking horizontally and vertically across home institutions. I realize stressing diplomacy and the politic nature of writing centers may at first seem problematic to some. As academics, we are drawn to the academy for a variety of reasons – we value the life of the mind, we want to work toward equality and see education as a part in that equality, we are introverted and academia offers a space for our

introvertedness to exist without judgment. To get more specific, writing center administrators and staff are drawn to the idea of literacy, or critiquing the institution, or working one on one with students. In other words, there are competing reasons why academics in general and writing center scholars in particular are drawn to the work that they do, and that list of reasons does not include rubbing elbows with the institution's president or provost. But maybe it should.

Defining the Terms on Our Own Terms

Writing center work often uses terms and definitions differently from those outside of the writing center. Grimm discusses this at length in her discussion on the “culturally-neutral” definition of literacy used throughout institutions and how that differs from the ways in which writing center work uses the term literacy. Rather than a simple teachable and measurable set of skills, a definition that strips cultural contexts away from literacy, Grimm sees literacy similarly to Mary Lea and Brian Street in their *Academic Literacies*: a complex and comprehensive social act informed through cultural identities, such as class, race, and gender. For example, the term “plagiarism,” as used by faculty, is often also stripped from its cultural context and instead is used by faculty to point to student writing and say “wrong.” But without exploring the why behind what I call unintentional plagiarism,⁴⁰ faculty allow the discussion to focus only on what they consider commonplaces without having to consider the larger contextualized space surrounding their students' writing. Grammar functions similarly in the ways faculty use

⁴⁰ I see plagiarism on a continuum, where there is intentional plagiarism from the student who knows that cutting and pasting from another's work without citation is wrong to unintentional plagiarism wherein the student does not fully understand or know the cultural and discipline-established norms of academic writing.

the term. Instead of a perspective of academic discourse as a new discourse for anyone entering higher education (a discourse most faculty long ago internalized), grammar is used to describe the challenges students face. However, it is academic and discipline-specific discourse, and with it the cultural contexts surrounding writing in English imply, that challenge students.

Another example of a term with competing meanings is the verb “to tutor.” Faculty, upper administration, and some students may perceive writing center “tutoring” as editing or proofreading rather than a complex, collaborative interaction between two people discussing writing. Within writing center scholarship, the noun “tutor” has been replaced in some cases by “consultant,” a rhetorical choice that places the definition and thus identity of the tutor within a professional context. In these cases, it is not unusual to find student or tutee replaced with “client” or “customer.” I see the choice of these terms or labels as a result of writing center scholarship and the field as a whole attempting to define terms and thus define writing centers. For example, LMU’s Writing Centre chose to offer their graduate peer tutors the title of “Peer Mentor” and did away with the tutor label altogether. Since LMU’s Writing Centre only employed graduate students, the title reflects a certain level of credentialing. It also does away with assumptions regarding the action of tutoring. Mentoring implies a holistic approach toward working in a collaborative setting. But it also implies a certain hierarchy. Traditionally, mentors are senior, established, and trusted.⁴¹ The term “peer mentor” is in some ways a contradiction in terms. However, the contradiction may be irrelevant because what is most important is

⁴¹ The *OED* cites the first usage of the word in *Odysseus*. Mentor was the name of Telemachus’ wise and trusted teacher.

that the Writing Centre administrators choose the term rather than those outside of the Writing Centre. Perhaps having a slippery and potentially contradictory term such as “peer mentor” is a rhetorical move designed to prevent assumptions about the Writing Centre’s practice. In other words, if faculty and students do not understand what “peer mentor” means, they cannot inscribe preconceived meaning to it, which is the exact opposite of the term “tutor” and its longstanding traditional meaning tied to remediation.

The lack of agreement upon working definitions may result from writing centers’ position between student and teacher discourses. Writing centers, acting as mediators or “interpreters,” must be fluent in both discourses as they assist students in understanding teacher-authored assignments or comments on essays. In her essay “Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors,” Muriel Harris argues student discourse “is both distinct and permeated by that of teachers, the dominant group,” and that it is up to tutors to not only interpret teacher discourse for students, but to help students mediate teacher discourse (36). Harris argues that “[f]ocus,” “coherence,” and “development” are not terms as readily understood by students as teachers think. As a result, a common tutorial task is helping the student understand the comments the teacher has made on a paper...” (37). Tutors, and I expand this to include writing centers as a whole, serve as translator, and thus move between discourses. As a result, writing centers have the ability to see how terms are malleable and fluid, to be interpreted within a context and according to audience. In the same way writing centers are able to translate terms used by teachers for students, writing centers should also be able to effectively translate terms used within writing center discourse for teachers.

The difference between discourses has real material effects for students and programs alike. Within teacher discourse, large-scale frustration with student writing can lead to “marking” students by sending them to the writing center for “rehabilitation.” This perception of the writing center as rehab continues to marginalize the work done in writing centers as part by not part of the academy. Students are further marginalized and punished for not internalizing teacher and discipline specific ways of writing. But more germane to this chapter are the material effects this difference in discourse has for writing center communication. In other words, writing centers can barely enter a dialogue with upper administration and faculty if the terms of the dialogue have not even been agreed upon.

Agreeing upon the terms of the argument and the definition of terms can also serve writing centers during times of expansion or contraction. As I discussed in chapter 2, differing perceptions regarding epistemology and definitions of the term “knowledge” can be at cross purposes. The tension between differing definitions and epistemological paradigms has material effects on students, writing center viability, and writing center resources. Terms such as knowledge and accompanying terms such as “literacy” play out in perceptions of writing centers as fix-it centers, and can have a pathologizing effect on students. Students who do not perform well or meet the literacy standards defined through a narrow view of literacy are labeled unable or dis-abled to perform academic writing and it is up to the writing center to rehabilitate students so they can be deemed healthy enough to enter the rest of the student population. Pathologizing students in this way also allows for larger conversations on access and funding to continue. Without

writing centers actively participating in defining terms, these conversations on why increased access should continue and how much increased access should cost repeat.

When the topics of access, funding, and literacy continue on an institutional, state, regional and national level, writing centers enter a sustained state of crisis, which I detailed in chapter 3. How a term is defined reflects ideology; writing centers can advocate for what they value through careful articulation with stakeholders. Writing center administrators and staff cannot force anyone to adhere to the ideology of writing center pedagogy (if there is one), but they can promote their specific center's mission and goals through consistent articulation of a definition and promoting connections between terms. For example, I later go into detail in the relationship between "student retention" and "student writing support services" and how defining these two terms and their relationship was significant in the UA Writing Center's move from the English Department to Student Services, a university-wide entity. By doing so, the UA Writing Center negotiated a funding crisis and maintained its services for students. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of how functioning as an interpreter can serve writing center communication and lead to *stasis*.

***Stasis* in Writing Center Communication**

Stasis finds its roots in forensic rhetoric wherein interlocutors agree upon the terms of the argument at hand. The first step is to acknowledge that there is a disagreement, conflict, or basis for an argument. Then after, and only after agreeing upon the terms of the argument, they then enter the argument. Without agreement on terms, definitions, or factual evidence used, the interlocutors cannot enter the argument. I work

from a few definitions of *stasis*, relying on more contemporary interpretations rather than classical definitions that mainly reside within the realm of forensics. One definition of contemporary *stasis* definition is from Helen Foster and her essay “Kairos and Stasis Revisited: Heuristics for the Critically Informed Composition Classroom.” In it, Foster draws from Michael Carter and Janice Lauer’s discussion on contemporary *stasis*.

Stasis, as a rational method by which rhetors identify areas of disagreement, points to be argued, and issues on which cases hinge, Carter says, consists of a set of questions posed in a particular order to establish the nature of the issue as fact, definition, quality, or procedure/policy. *Stasis* grows out of the conflict between opposing forces, occupying a space of both cause and effect, which implies action, since this is also the place where rhetoric begins. (“Kairos and Stasis Revisited: Heuristics for the Critically Informed Composition Classroom”)

Therefore, if facts, definitions, or terms of the disagreement are not agreed upon, action, or more specifically rhetoric, cannot begin. Rationally, both sides must agree that they use the terms in the same way, or I argue, come to a compromise regarding the definitions of said terms.

Sharon Crowley brings up *stasis* briefly in her text *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*. Crowley uses the argument between pro-lifers and pro-choice advocates when describing the necessary steps to be taken to enter an argument. The two sides on the abortion debate do not ever reach *stasis*, for they do not agree upon

the terms of the argument. She states: “Pro-choice advocates take as their major premise a proposition about the political rights of women; pro-life advocates, on the other hand, conduct a metaphysical or theological argument about the beginning point of life” (28). The two sides do not even agree on what they disagree about, “hence two different and incompatible arguments are being mounted” (29). According to Crowley, not reaching *stasis* leads to two specific problems:

Ethically speaking, if participants in a dispute do not formulate the position about which they disagree, the necessary respect for an other may not be in play, and neither the conduct nor the outcome of the argument may be just. Rhetorically speaking, if *stasis* is not achieved, each side may generate all the evidence in the world to support its claims and yet never engage in argument. (29)

Failure to reach *stasis* when entering in a dialogue with those outside the writing center can prove to be the main roadblock to beginning a fruitful argument or dialogue. Mainly, the definition of terms, such as “knowledge-making,” or “literacy,” is but one of the obstacles in writing center communication, for definition of terms can create parameters around writing centers’ everyday practices and identity. Because of the differences in the usage of terms, writing center administrators and staff at times cannot even begin to enter a dialogue with others unless all interlocutors agree upon a definition of the terms used.

Stasis in Action

The UA Writing Center, in its move from a single department to a university-wide entity, illustrates a coming to *stasis*, in particular in the agreement upon the terms of

student support and student retention. These two terms are fluid and contextual, and yet both the Writing Center and the VP of Student Affairs agreed that student writing support was a necessary component to student retention. Student retention and student support are interlocked and rely upon each other. Because they reached an agreement upon the definition of the terms, the interlocutors (the VP of Student Affairs and the Writing Program Administrator) were able to also agree that maintaining the Writing Center in the interest of student retention served stakeholders' needs. They then could enter the dialogue of how this was to occur, including discussions on funding, space, and staffing. If the two sides could find common terms surrounding student retention and student support services, they may not have been able to move into dialogue that resulted in action: sustaining the UA Writing Center. However, even though finding common terms allows interlocutors to move forward and settle the conflict (or disagreement), the power structure found within the traditional hierarchy does remain. The UA Writing Program Administrator had to work to articulate ideas in common terms in order to establish common ground and, most importantly, convince the VP of Student Affairs of the commonality in terms. In other words, the responsibility to convince the other party on agreed upon terms tends to fall upon the one with less power within the hierarchical structure of the university.

The responsibility to convince those in power (upper administration, policy-makers, parents) does lie with the writing center administrator or staff. However, that is what it means to be an interpreter or mediator between discourses. Writing center administrators need to be fluent in both upper administrative discourse and writing center

discourse; in fact, the ability to move fluidly between the two dictates the ability to communicate writing center needs effectively to those in power. I do not see a pressing need for upper administration to develop fluency in writing center discourse. While this is appears inherently unfair, I argue that acting as interpreter places writing center administrators and staff in a unique and effective rhetorical position. Writing center administrators are fluent in writing center terms and definitions; they also tend to be fluent in the terms and definitions used by upper administration, i.e., terms found in mission statements and definitions that include a financial component. Taking advantage of the fluid interpreter position has the potential to convince upper administration that the writing center's needs align with institutional needs through reaching *stasis* and understanding the importance of *kairos*.

It could be argued that LMU's Writing Centre was unable to reach *stasis* with interlocutors due to the nature of its funding. Because LMU's Writing Centre was funded through the HEFCE grant, there was no pressing need to work with LMU's upper administrators in agreeing upon terms in the context of funding. Discussions that could lead to strong coalitions with upper administration were perhaps unnecessary considering the outside source of funding. Therefore, when the larger UK higher education funding crisis happened, the allies necessary to support the sustainability of LMU's Writing Centre were not there. LMU's Writing Centre closed as a result of the grant ending, but the grant ended because of malfeasance on behalf of LMU's reporting numbers to HEFCE ("Statement"). At that point, LMU's Writing Centre administrators and staff had little recourse and few places to turn to in order to argue for continued existence. The

university had to pay HEFCE back once the fudged numbers were discovered, and subsequently had to cut departments and programs. This type of crisis leaves little room for debate, much less room to argue for writing center sustainability.

The story of LMU's Writing Centre can be described as what can happen when open communication and strong advocacy for writing center funding fails to occur; it can also be argued that a pressing need for reaching *stasis* never occurred for LMU's Writing Centre administrators until it was too late. By that point, interlocutors were unable to enact change or exert power over the diminished funding. Therefore, LMU's Writing Centre's story underscores the importance of reaching *stasis* between writing centers and funding sources. Just as significant is that fact that the time was not right to begin to argue for continued sustained funding from either HEFCE or the university itself. The combination of both *kairos* and *stasis* need to be considered together; how that works and what that looks like is the focus of the next section.

Bringing *Kairos* and *Stasis* Together

Writing center administrators and staff can and should consider these two concepts, *kairos* and *stasis*, as working in tangent with one another. Together, these concepts serve as one way forward in writing center communication and ultimately serve in sustainability efforts.

Helen Foster argues:

Kairos provides the impetus for the initiation of discourse in the situation and *stasis* is the situated negotiation of the situation, itself. Exigence calls into play an unaddressed dissonance that temporally exists and for which

the right word is required for negotiation of the dissonance. The right word, however, must be based on judgment and careful planning. (“Kairos and Stasis Revisited: Heuristics for the Critically Informed Composition Classroom”)

Writing center communication in general has the upper hand in deciding upon “the right word,” for as I stated earlier, writing centers move between student and teacher discourse. Writing centers already move in between, reside in a liminal space that is part of both or many discourses; therefore, writing centers know how interlocutors use the terms and define “the right word.” They have the knowledge that the other participants in the dialogue do not have. I propose that writing centers use this to their advantage and look for the ways in which the competing (or expanded upon) definitions overlap, look for the intersections between definitions and begin there. For example, if working on agreed upon definitions of “grammar,” writing centers can begin with something both sides agree upon: grammar implies established conventions. Just by starting at a beginning point in which all participants agree moves the dialogue forward to *stasis*. I imagine a conversation regarding writing centers beginning at this point and moving forward: what is the purpose of a writing center? Do we need a writing center at this institution? Why and for whom? How do we administer and fund a writing center? After these larger issues are addressed and agreed upon, then the conversation can move forward to local concerns: In what ways can writing centers supplement classroom instruction or faculty development? However, if the discussion never reaches *stasis*, at the right time I might add, then moving into the realm of action would be impossible for the interlocutors

would be talking about two different concepts. As Crowley points out, “unless stasis is reached, debate...cannot become an argument, and until argument begins, no nonviolent resolution can occur” (290).

The consideration of both *kairos* and *stasis* implies respect and goodwill toward one’s opponent and creates the space for positive action. Respect and goodwill harkens back to Erasmus’s concept of irenic rhetoric, and again I want to point out I am not using this in a gendered way. It offers a way forward that is not agonistic or combative; it allows writing centers a specific way to reject the polemic nature that is sometimes found within discussions on pedagogy, space, and funding in institutions. It more importantly serves as a way to communicate why writing centers are needed and what writing centers do in a non-threatening but effective approach. I do not deny that at times those steeped in the discourse of writing center scholarship or composition pedagogy become weary of the ubiquitous or repetitive faculty focus on surface-level concerns. But as scholars who understand the why behind what could be considered myopic perceptions of writing, literacy, and students, writing center administrators and staff must work as that interpreter for both students and teachers and between writing centers and upper administration. Writing centers, rather than approach traditional perspectives with disdain, can approach with a sense of empathy and understanding of where a perspective originates and work from hard held misguided notions of student writing by faculty. In other words, writing centers can tap into their liminality and use the interpretation skills on the other side of the equation: faculty and upper administration. Through respect, understanding, and goodwill, writing centers can move past the impasse caused by differing terms and

approaches, and move toward a space in which argument, or dialogue, can begin. Then the real work of communicating needs can begin.

Crafting a Writing Center Identity

I began this chapter with general ways for writing centers to move toward sustainability. In doing so, I acknowledge that all writing center work and identity is local and contextual; therefore, my attempts at general approaches to communication are just that: general. It is my hope that these methods may begin from a generalized point but end up in a specific point of usefulness. While this case study does not represent writing centers as a whole in any way, the changes both the UA Writing Center and LMU Writing Centre faced and still face reflect trends in some of the challenges faced by writing centers – mainly representation, agency, identity, and funding. As such, this chapter offers “new opportunities for positive reidentification,” a goal shared with Jane Nelson and Kathy Evertz, co-editors of *The Politics of Writing Centers* (xi). This dissertation also shares with Nelson and Evertz an interest in the ways in which writing center identity is formed and promulgated not just by writing center staff and administrators but also by their institutional home. Like the contributing authors, I “investigate sites of conflict” in order to open a space to discuss writing center practice and identity (xi). Furthermore, the spirit of my project aligns with the specifics of the collective authors’ argument:

Having performed the important “inside” work of establishing writing centers as sites for important intellectual work in educational institutions, the writing-center community now needs to take the next step of

communicating to and connecting with broader political and intellectual audiences. (xiii)

In the documents and interviews, both the UA Writing Center and the LMU Writing Centre administrators understood and enacted the “important intellectual work” writing centers can and should do within the institution. But I see the exigency of conflict residing in communication between the two writing centers and those who have the power and the money to sustain the writing centers. My last section details potential ways toward addressing such conflict in order to enact change regarding writing center identity.

Kairos and Stasis as Praxis

My goal in this chapter was to take these two writing center stories and articulate the implications of their story for other writing centers. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, I argue writing center administrators and staff use *kairos* and *stasis* as theoretical frameworks within the context of irenic rhetoric to inform their rhetorical action within the institution. This methodology of communication implies a sense of rhetorical savvy and institutional knowledge or acumen, a firm foundation in writing center pedagogy, and a clear view of the future of the writing center. Clear communicative goals of reaching *stasis* while taking advantage of *kairotic* moments is one way writing centers can address issues of sustainability, such as acting before writing centers face a crisis, and during moments of institutional strategic planning.

As I argued in chapter 2, knowledge-making is at the heart of writing center work. Defining and articulating writing center epistemology is key toward writing center

identity. A writing center can illustrate how its epistemological paradigms reflect and intersect with its institution's epistemological paradigm. The crises of access, literacy, and funding globally and locally have material effects on writing center sustainability; therefore, having a historical awareness of how these crises have played out in the past is a necessity, in particular how these crises have affected one's institution. By doing so, writing center administrators and staff can recognize the signs of impending crises and begin to shore up resources and mobilize coalitions.

These moves are possible after a writing center has clear control over its own narrative, which I detailed in chapter 4. Taking the lead in defining the parameters around writing center everyday practices and position in the institution allows writing centers to have what Muriel Harris refers to as a place at the "head table." In her 2000 prescient article "Preparing to Sit at the Head Table," Harris details what she sees as upcoming issues facing institutions and thus writing centers: technology and multilingual students. She too argues that writing centers need to get in front of the issues before they become crises, and encourages writing center administrators to critique their work, research student writing issues, and articulate their work more clearly for upper administration.

We just need to realize how vital it is to keep moving forward – to ask ourselves some hard questions; to explore and surface principles for some areas that we have tended to leave unarticulated because we "know" them; to seek out administrators and tell them what we've found...(21)

Her article implores writing center administrators and staff to do the work that will further writing center identity and articulate the significance of writing centers to the

success of the institutions. In this way, writing centers can argue that they are viable, but more importantly, writing centers can convince stakeholders that they are “vital” (21).

Writing centers can move past the limiting identity of a fix-it shop by plugging into campus activities and events and considering ways in which writing centers can supplement already existing programs. Sponsoring a conference among those in the writing disciplines is certainly a way to reach out beyond the campus and situate the writing center among the larger conversation surrounding writing issues. But before that begins, it would behoove writing centers to find out ways to work within already existing programs and events. For example, certain institutions already hold institution-wide conferences that are interdisciplinary in nature. These types of conferences offer an opportunity for writing centers to plug in and work with students and faculty on their presentations. This moves writing centers beyond the remedial identification and instead works to highlight how writing centers serve all disciplines, all writers.

To draw from Muriel Harris’ argument in her above-mentioned article, writing centers can insert themselves into the conversation surrounding technology and multilingual students. As the larger conversation on technology continues in the form of providing students online instruction, writing centers can serve a valuable role in that endeavor by providing online tutoring. Writing centers can also serve a valuable function in addressing multilingual students’ needs in the form of faculty workshops and student workshops, as well as trained tutors who feel confident in working with multilingual and multidialectal students. While faculty may mark these students as in need of remediation to bring them in line with standard academic English, writing centers can serve as

mediator for students as they negotiate academic discourse in an unfamiliar language. At the same time, writing centers can serve as a resource for faculty to effectively assess multilingual students' work.

In order for writing centers to center their work and identity within their institutional home, they must move out of the margins, basements, and darkened hallways to become the public face of writing center work. Writing centers can connect with their institution's public relations office or branding office to see where they fit into the larger branding image. Writing center directors and staff can pen OP-Eds for the campus and local newspapers talking about the significance of strong writing support or instruction. Another audience could be regional advisory boards so that potential donors might emerge. Writing centers directors and staff can position themselves as the expert on writing issues on campus so that they are called upon when opinions on writing are called for. These lists of suggestions all point to writing center directors and staff taking our discursive practices into the public realm. The result is that writing centers can begin to "own" their identity, their work, and their goals.

In addition, writing centers can work with journals located on campus and plug into their editors and scholars who submit work. By aligning themselves with peer-reviewed journals, writing centers can highlight the similarities between the feedback and recursive loop of writing for publication and the work done between tutors and tutees. This move can increase visibility of the writing center and the ways in which it can contribute to what is valued in institutions: publication. However, this move may take time for the journal's editorial staff may have a differing perspective on writing centers,

i.e., they are solely for undergraduates or struggling writers. It may take time to overcome these perceptions, but through thoughtful consideration of *kairos* and *stasis*, writing center administrators and staff can illustrate the varying ways writing centers can exist on campus.

All of these actions begin with a reflection and inquiry, and I have drafted a few questions writing center directors, new or experienced, can ask themselves as they begin this process. This list is by no mean exhaustive, nor will it work with every writing center on every campus. They serve as general questions that can be revised to serve the local material conditions at specific writing centers.

1. Why does my institution have a Writing Center?
2. How does the funding for the Writing Center reflect the institutional perception of writing centers in general?
3. Where do my institution's goals and my Writing Center's goals intersect?
4. Where can I form coalitions on the department level? The program level? The classroom level?
5. How can I increase my Writing Center's visibility?

Question one is important for it has the potential to lead to a writing center's origin story.

If the exigence for the writing center was for remediation, then writing center administration and staff need to work diligently to take hold of that narrative and work to change it. If the exigency lies with a particular program, then writing center administration and staff know they have an immediate ally and a potential funding source. Question two leads to another part of the origin story; how a writing center is

funded has the potential to illustrate institutional perceptions of writing centers in general. For example, the UA Writing Center was housed in the English department and part of the Writing Program's budget. This articulation between the Writing Program and the Writing Center illustrate an institutional perception that writing centers in general mainly serve the first-year composition program. Through a variety of documents, this was a perception the UA Writing Center continually worked to prove false.

Questions three and four intersect in so many ways; a careful rhetorical analysis of the institution's mission statement and departmental or programmatic mission statements has the potential to uncover ways to network and form effective coalitions throughout the community. For example, part of the institution's strategic plan may be to increase online instruction within the next five years, particularly in say the education department. Writing centers can connect with faculty and administrators in the education department to show how the writing center can be an integral part of meeting that strategic goal.

New writing center directors can survey the existing programs and events on campus and come up with effective ways to plug into these events. The more connected a writing center is to various departments, the more vocal advocates they can potentially obtain, which may become useful when facing budget cuts. To be even more specific, the more a writing center shows its inextricable value to the institution, the more woven in it is in the day to day life of the student and faculty population, the harder it will be to defund the writing center. All of this leads to a more sustainable future for vital writing centers.

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