A Bird's Eye View of Writing Centers: Institutional Infrastructure, Scope and Programmatic Issues, Reported Practices[1]

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ABSTRACT

Writing program administrators (WPAs) tasked with the responsibilities of writing center administration have complex and challenging positions that vary widely in terms of fiscal and administrative positioning, staffing, utilization of technologies, and mission yet share a common history and commitment to individualized instruction. This research report provides information that illuminates these variations in individualized writing instruction by reporting on a study of 101 US writing centers located at four-year colleges or universities identified as "top" in several categories, providing for a sample that is diversified by region, size, sector (public or private), and educational focus. Derived from a purposive sample of web-based information, the sample allows for comparison to research that is based on self-selected reporting and thus provides a broader view but also one which is from afar. Data collection was based on publicly available information and focused on writing center services, institutional and physical location, status and position of staff, use of technology, and articulated mission. Analysis reveals the persistence of variation in institutions' approaches to this long-valued component of writing instruction in higher education. Research findings affirm the centrality of writing centers and individualized writing instruction in college and university life in the US but suggest that writing centers, with a few significant exceptions, are positioned as adjunct to other educational activities on campus. We believe these findings contribute to the need for more information about the professional conditions under which all WPAs (including directors of writing centers) work and how students are taught. This article is the first part of a series on how writing is taught in a variety of settings: traditional classes, programs, and centers.

Introduction and Need for Study

Writing program administrators (WPAs) often have complex and challenging management positions, overseeing, in some cases, not only the teaching of writing through traditional classes but also support services, online initiatives, faculty development, graduate training, and other functions. One such responsibility is the design and development of writing centers, which provide an important resource for college and university communities. Writing centers are often perceived as being outside the scope of a WPA's work, even though directing them requires similar expertise. Our research on writing centers at 101 colleges and universities confirms that the trend of bifurcating writing programs and centers, a trend that has privileged the former over the latter, continues. We suggest that this bifurcation and privileging may be a result of so many writing centers being located outside of academic departments but in student or academics services departments, as was the case in our sample. At the same time, our research uncovered several centers that suggest the emergence of a new model in which a writing center can serve as the focal point for establishing a culture of writing on campus and in the larger community. Beyond these few highlights, this article provides data on the means by which individualized writing instruction is provided at a range of institutions, thereby presenting a baseline against which future trends can be measured. If WPAs are able to make a case for why particular resources are needed, and for what purpose, they need to have reliable data on existing operations.

Our study draws on data from publicly available information and is focused on writing center services, institutional and physical location, status and position of staff, use of technology, and articulated mission. We examine 101 US writing centers located at four-year "top" colleges or universities. In departure from many previous studies which have relied on self-reporting, all data for this study were gathered from college and university catalogs and bulletins, faculty and staff directories, institutional organizational charts, and direct analysis of institutional websites related to writing centers, their practices, and their roles within their institutions. Research findings affirm the centrality of writing centers and individualized writing instruction in college and university life in the US and reveal significant consensus on two values: that individualized instruction in writing is best taught as a process and that writing centers are not "fix-it shops." Beyond these areas of broad agreement, our research suggests that writing centers range significantly in their scope of activities, mission, location, staffing, and public website presentation.

In this broad research study we have asked the following questions: Do these institutions have writing centers or writing tutorial services? What kinds of writing centers are they? Who runs them? Who works in them? Where are they located? In the area of self-presentation we ask: What services do writing centers publicly announce? What are their mission statements? Through our analysis of this collected data, we have striven to present a view that acknowledges and even draws attention to the broad spectrum of writing centers in our sample. Although writing centers are without a doubt a fixture in US four-year institutions of higher education, the range of services, administrative structures, and missions present suggest that, depending on the data selected for examination or the institution in which a person works, one could reasonably come to very different conclusions about what constitutes a writing center, for the breadth of what writing centers present themselves as doing is wide.

Efforts toward answering questions about the state of writing center practices have a history of being addressed through survey reports that give data on what those most active in the field—that is, people who respond to survey solicitations—report about operations of their writing centers and institutions. In our research we took a different tact, describing writing centers not from what a self-selected population reports about themselves but from what can be seen through examination of publicly available information from a cross-section of "top" four-year schools selected across the field and nation by region and institutional type. In this approach we have acknowledged the importance of disclosing information to the public, something that has now been enshrined in federal legislation. The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008, which reauthorized the Higher Education Act of 1965, imposed new reporting and disclosure requirements linked to participation in Title IV federal student financial aid programs. While the HEOA did not specifically address writing centers, it mandated provision of transparent information about what institutions of higher education offer and how they conduct business and meet their objectives. Further, our research demonstrates that although individual writing centers vary in terms of their capacities and/or interest in building their online presence and resources, university catalogs and bulletins, faculty and staff directories and institutional organizational charts enable researchers to collect consistent, baseline data about structure, staffing, and basic services offered.

Methodologies for Assessing Writing Centers

In Writing Studies research, there is a strong tradition of surveys, several of which we discuss to both highlight the questions other researchers have been concerned with and to note the persistent and evolving findings that have been reported. This survey research typically uses familiar paths to find participants, and so we see calls for surveys on listservs (WCenter and WPA), fliers and announcements at conferences, and through distribution lists (mail or email) generated by professional organization membership. This methodology ensures that researchers primarily gain information from those who are most active in the field—that is, those who choose to join our listservs and professional organizations and those who respond to survey requests. Response rates may therefore say as much about those who participate as they do about actual trends. Nonetheless, these surveys are conducted fairly regularly and are a mainstay of writing center research. In addition, surveys of writing center directors and staff provide perspectives on insider-only knowledge, as well as insights and opinions not available from a public data methodology.

A prominent focus of survey research is the status of writing centers, frequently in comparison to writing programs. In 1999, Valerie Balester and James McDonald reported on their survey that compared writing center directors and writing program administrators and found that, "institutions tend to grant writing program directors more status than writing center directors, often significantly more" (71), echoing earlier survey work by Suzanne Diamond that similarly noted writing center directors' "hybrid," uncertain status (4). Balester and McDonald were even-keeled, emphasizing that their "survey presents an optimistic view of the working condition and working relations" (78). The final note, however, called for more respect for writing center directors: "Professional associations for composition teachers and WPAs would do well to remember that directing a writing center requires as much experience, knowledge, and professionalism as directing any other writing program" (78).

Balester and McDonald's research suggested a slow if not satisfactory upward move for writing centers and their directors. They, like Dave Healy, who also conducted survey research to ascertain writing center director status, drew on Olson and Ashton-Jones' 1988 survey research, which described the writing center director as a "'wife'—someone whose work was not valued in the 'real world,' whose influence was largely confined within four walls, whose place was in the 'home'" (26). Similarly, Suzanne Diamond described the "complicated financial derivations and reporting structures" of the writing center directors she surveyed as being similar to "fis-

cal forms of homelessness" (4), while Perkes's survey research documented lack of standardization in goal, mission, and philosophy in writing centers and thus the impossibility of "much-needed benchmarking" (3). These surveys thus draw conclusions that reflect the view expressed by writing center historian Neal Lerner who observed the bifurcation in the field between tenured faculty directors and part-time, contingent staff directors, and the realization of his fear regarding "a two-tiered system" of enfranchised directors and a disenfranchised class of people who provide services (43).

The Writing Center Research Project (2010-11), currently maintained by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and made available through a public website, represents a sustained effort (since the year 2000) toward collecting and disseminating data about the business of writing centers: hours of tutoring, tutoring practices, types of consultants, director salaries and release time, and other factors. This research is made available in raw form, and has also been used in two articles currently in print, providing data on how the writing centers of those active in the field—those who answer surveys—are administered. Neaderhiser and Wolfe used these data to assert that although there has been significant discussion of the possibilities of using new technologies, survey data suggests that writing centers have made little use of even widely available technologies, relying almost exclusively on traditional methods and, to some extent, email. These are findings that our own research confirms, as we will report later in this essay.

A 2000-01 report originally made available by the Writing Center Research Project (WCRP), compiled and analyzed by Christopher Ervin, broke down data about staffing and institutional associations. He reported that 42% of directors surveyed were in tenure-line positions, with the other 58% in non-tenurable faculty, staff (full-time or part-time), or graduate student positions. Further, he reported that 43% of the writing centers indicated the English department as their location, 28% defined themselves as independent, 13% were located in learning skills centers, and the rest were variously located in other departments, student services units, and, rather infrequently, in rhet-comp departments (3%) (Ervin 3). In an article that reported out 2003-04 data from the WCRP, findings were quite similar: 43% of directors were in tenure-lines, with the remaining 57% in non-tenured positions (Griffin et al. 9). In terms of institutional location, Griffin et al. reported similar findings with the exception of a greater reporting of affiliation to rhet-comp departments: up to 12% from 3% (9). Further, Griffin and her colleagues defined affiliation to the English department differently than Ervin did, with 10% of respondents following in the category of "English + a university-wide entity" and another 29% falling into the "English" category (9). Griffin et al. discussed institutional location at

some length, noting that writing center directors acknowledge "strong ties" to English and other departments yet strive to project a "non-departmental image" (9). Griffin and colleagues closed with a return to the discussion of status; they noted the "fluid" and varied configuration of writing centers as enabling growth, but also wondered if such fluidity "can also possibly restrict . . . growth by limiting their institutional cache" (21). This language reflects the concern that writing center researchers have about writing center status.

Other empirical research has typically focused on reporting on surveys of a particular population of writing centers or their staff. For example, Carroll, Pegg, Newmann, and Austin reported on their survey of small college writing centers, finding similarities between small college writing center directors and their larger university counterparts on such issues as education and salary, but significant differences in rank, with small college directors much more frequently occupying staff appointments (3). Karen Rowan surveyed graduate student administrators involved in writing center work to present "baseline" data on the use of graduate students to administer writing centers, finding widespread usage across institutional type.

In *WPA at Small Liberal Arts Colleges*, Jill Gladstein and Dara Regaignon draw on surveys sent to 137 school representatives, from which they yielded an 80% response rate (4), at small liberal arts colleges (SLAC) to portray writing program administration (including writing center administration) in this selected population. For the 100 schools that comprised the final data set, the authors conducted a website review of site documents (30) and individual and focus group interviews for all interested participants, and then individual interviews of participants from three different showcased schools. Although they argue that the nature of small liberal arts colleges is to resist "compartmentalizing or centralizing activities around the culture of writing" (46), in their analysis they report the following: 38 institutions had both a writing center director and writing program administrator (48), 29 had either a WPA a WCD (writing center director) or a WAC (writing across the curriculum) coordinator (51), and 16 had what they define as an "Explicit WCD Only" position in which the person defined his or her job entirely as in support of students, and not curriculum (55-56). In terms of status, they report that for SLAC writing center directors, 41% are tenure-track, 18% are non-tenure faculty positions, 22% are hybrid positions, and 20% are staff positions (79); they argue that their "sample challenges assumptions in the field about what kinds of status…are required for WPA authority" (67). In their chapter devoted to writing centers, Gladstein and Regaignon offer data on what their respondents report in terms of who staffs SLAC writing centers, how many people work in each writing cen-

ter, where these writing centers are located, and what kind of training staff are offered. They conclude by noting the strong culture of peer tutoring at SLAC schools (169) and the way that individualized writing instruction is embedded in curriculum at these types of schools.

In this review we see our enduring interest in status–of the writing centers we work in and the people who work in them. Whether at SLAC schools where writing center directors are defined as focused on student learning only, and not curriculum, or in the WCRP research that often focuses on departmental affiliation and the pull of English departments, we see in this research the driving concern to mark progress; beyond the rollercoaster rides we experience at our individual institutions where a writing center's budget may go dramatically up or down in a given year, as professionals and researchers we wish to understand the broader context for our challenges. Another way of putting it might be: Do others struggle as I do? Am I lucky? Typical? Atypical? Conference and listserv conversation is close to the ground, bumpy, and unclear; in the research tradition that we are following, we provide an aerial view that should affirm writing center practitioners' sense of wide variety in institutional infrastructure (as demonstrated through presence, nomenclature, and location), scope and programmatic approach (as demonstrated through leadership, staffing and clientele), practices (as demonstrated in mission, theoretical perspectives, use of technology, and innovation), and staffing.

State of the Field in 101 Top Schools

To produce a map of the state of the art in U. S. writing centers, we selected purposive methodologies that were not dependent on response rate.[2] We focused on the United States for several practical reasons, but we note that there are excellent models of writing centers in other countries. We based our initial pool on the annual rankings published by *U.S. News and World Report* ("America's Best Colleges 2010"), not because we endorse their methodology and approach but because of their dominance in discussions about reputation, resource allocation, and media, and because it allowed us to rely on a third-party—one on which we have no influence—for sample selection. Thus, we did not choose schools based on representativeness, but rather the degree to which they fulfilled notions of "best in kind." *U.S. News* used seven different indicators to measure "quality": assessment by administrators at peer institutions, retention, faculty resources, student selectivity, financial resources, alumni giving, and the publication's determination of graduation rate (Morse). While the "top" schools list is well known, rankings are also provided for subset categories, based on institutional type,

region, specialty area, and other categories. We derived our sample for this study from these 2010 lists: top national—ten, top public—twenty, top liberal arts—ten, top Master's—five in each region (North, South, Midwest, and West), and top BA—three in each region ("America's Best Colleges"). With this approach, we were able to include colleges and universities across a broad spectrum of highly regarded national and regional institutions. To further enhance the scope of our sample, we also selected schools from two other *U.S. News* lists: Top Historically Black" (the top five schools in the list) and the "writing in the disciplines schools" mentioned in the list of "academic programs to look for." Ten WID schools were not included in other top lists, though 13 already were. Finally, on the assumption that views specifically from Writing Studies professional organizations matter, we included all 20 US schools awarded the CCCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence from 2004, when the award was established, through spring 2010. Five of the award winners were also in one of the top lists, and 6 were recognized for WID. Many institutions thus appear on more than one list. With these methods for selection, we produced a sample of 101 schools, and our data are current as of August of 2010.

Rather than using surveys, we replicated a methodology previously used to review the impact of the WPA Outcomes Statement on writing programs (Isaacs and Knight) and which was first employed by Knight in studying professional schools. Specifically, we relied on data available from publicly accessible websites in order to determine how writing centers represent themselves to all stakeholders. This methodology, as a result, is replicable, comparable across a broad spectrum of institutional types, and it also avoids the inherent problems of response rates and individual biases. Following Haswell's call for RAD (replicable, aggregate, data-driven) research (2), we have selected this methodology while also recognizing that in our methodology selection we have excluded the direct voices of writing center directors, tutors, and others. This methodology, limitations noted, enabled us to address this question: How do writing centers represent themselves to their stakeholders?

With our focus on the "public face" of writing centers, we were able to gauge the information available for first-time writing center users who search their institution's websites for writing resources. For our methodology, we followed a modified content-analysis approach, as articulated by Thomas Huckin and Keith Grant-Davie[3], in developing units for analysis and sorting our data. As a two-person team, with support from a graduate assistant, Norman DeFilippo, we were able to confirm the reliability of emerging coding, most frequently using the presence of particular terms (e.g., "lab" or "center") so as to produce categories and ultimately an analy-

sis that other researchers can replicate. Our method was thus quantitative and qualitative, primarily "record-based analysis" derived from "formal organizational records" (Abbott 14) that higher education institutions disseminate through the web. As a team of two we developed a method for cross-checking with high rater agreement, choosing to closely focus on "the linguistic text itself" (Huckin 28)—that is, on the words and terms that writing center administrators and other university administrators used to describe their practices and approaches. Our research is primarily reportorial—we aimed to share with others what we have seen.

Categories of Analysis and Variables

We amassed data in several broad categories of analysis: (1) institutional infrastructure—how the center fit into the college or university; (2) the center's scope and related programmatic issues; and (3) writing center practices. Some of these data we have aggregated by number, whereas for other sets we derived trends and patterns after collecting and sifting through the data—coding and grouping—individually and then again after discussion. In conducting our research, we considered the variables shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Categories and Analysis and Specific Variables

1. Institutional Infrastructure
   • Presence
   • Nomenclature
   • Location

2. Scope and Related Programmatic Issues
   • Leadership
   • Staffing
   • Clientele

3. Writing Center Practices
   • Mission
   • Theoretical perspectives
   • Use of technology
   • Innovation

1. Institutional Infrastructure: Writing Center Presence, Nomenclature, and Location

Presence. To understand institutional infrastructure, we first discovered whether a writing center existed and for how long, and then looked at nomenclature and location. Four of the schools in our list of 101 showed no

evidence of having a writing center: Master's College, Morehouse College, the University of Chicago, and the United States Merchant Marine Academy. It is possible that one or more of these schools had a writing center of some sort, but it was nowhere apparent on the website. Nine of the centers were named: Hixon at Cal Tech, Ott at Marquette, Howe at Miami, Speer at Ouachita Baptist, Hume at Stanford, Hewitt at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Sweetland at Michigan, Odegaard at University of Washington, and James A. Glenn at Xavier University. Five of these naming events were the result of major gifts or endowments; one was named after a former president and another after a distinguished professor emeritus. Interestingly, the websites provided little information on the donors or the honorees (Marquette is the exception). Since completing our data collection, we discovered that the Hixon Writing Center at Caltech was "suspended" as a result of a decline in its endowment (Marzen). Historical memory was also typically absent, as only 21 of the centers indicated when they were founded; not surprisingly, the legendary center at the University of Iowa, the oldest in our subgroup, was the only one to provide a detailed history. We also found that 8 schools who do not have first-year writing requirements do have writing centers; we are reporting on the first-year writing programs and requirements for our sample of 101 schools in another article.

Nomenclature. In the early history of writing centers, two labels were prominent: lab and clinic (Moore). The term lab was used not in the sense of a laboratory where research would take place, but rather as an adjunct to a regular class of instruction. Neal Lerner, however, in *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory* (a reference to North's "Idea"), argues that when writing centers were called "*writing laboratories* they often thrived," and their lineage went "back to the 1890s when *laboratory methods* were trumpeted in a wide range of disciplines," including first-year composition (2). The word clinic, in contrast to laboratory, medicalizes the work of writing centers, with possible inferences of diagnosis and treatment. We would like to believe that "center" suggests that the activities occurring within are central to the academic enterprise.

Some 70 centers in our sample had the words *writing center* in their names, or some variation (e.g., "The Write Center" at the College of New Jersey) or the word order has been changed. Two schools included "reading" in the title, and 6 named either tutor or tutorial. We might have thought that the concept of the writing studio would have taken off (Grego and Thompson), but only 3 have called their centers studios. Reflecting past history, 3 others have maintained the word "lab" (most notably, Purdue, along with The Citadel and Georgia Tech's CommLab).

Location. We examined where a center physically resides on campus and also where it is housed within the institution's hierarchy and administrative structure. Location conveys psychological as well as physical power. Consider how faculty offices, for example, are assigned and the significance given to windows, occupancy numbers, upper floors, views, and basement level locations. We discovered only 2 centers that identified their location as in basements, for example, although it is possible that others were housed there as well. Quite a few of the centers in our survey were housed in multiple locations. A substantial number (46) had locations in academic buildings—that is, structures housing departments, classrooms, and other academic resources. Libraries represented the second most popular location, with 31 of the sample having writing centers located in them. Seventeen centers were located in buildings whose main purpose was to provide student services (student centers and the like), and 7 were in residence halls. The "commons" concept, although prominent in discussion of reconfiguring library design, appeared in only 2 schools in our sample. We read these data on location as indicating an elevation of writing centers from the "basement" days: locations were varied, but typically centrally located, whether in traditionally academic or student life spaces.

Writing centers, like writing programs, are housed in various institutional locations for purposes of reporting and administration. Some, like UNC Chapel Hill's, originated in an English Department and then became administratively housed outside an academic department. As detailed in Table 2, half of the schools that had writing centers housed them on the "academic side," while one third were housed externally, most typically in student support services, and the remaining were standalone, with no discernible connection either to academic or student services units (see Table 2).

Table 2: Writing Center Location

Academic Affairs	55% (n=53)	English/Humanities Department	18% (n=17)
		Writing Program in English Department	10% (n=10)
		Independent Writing Programs	22% (n=21)
		Centers for Writing Excellence	5% (n=5)
Student Development and Campus Life	33% (n=32)	Student Support Centers	33% (n=32)
Unknown	12% (n=12)	Standalone Units	12% (n=12)

Our data raise but cannot answer the question of the effects of writing center placement in or outside of the academic area: does placement within student development, support, or success units or initiatives reinforce a "remedial" character for centers, marking them as solely designed to help struggling writers?

2. Scope and Related Programmatic Issues: Leadership, Staffing, and Clientele

Leadership. Web sites, organizational charts, and course catalogs enabled us to document and then analyze the range of staffing configurations that were used in 94% (all but 6) of our sample's writing centers, as is detailed in the tables below. Most writing centers with an apparent organizational structure, by which we mean an indication of leadership, were led by individuals who were defined as directors, and just 8% of the schools in our sample with centers did not have a director listed at all. We wonder how the operation was managed, and we believe the absence of leadership says something about how a center is valued and perceived. In a school such as Oberlin, where the center appeared to be part of a well-established Writing Associates Program that was itself part of a separate department of Writing and Rhetoric, the lack of a director would appear not to diminish the value of a center that was housed within the entire department. At the time of data collection, Georgia Tech's CommLab was still being developed, so perhaps it includes an administrative structure not fully apparent at the time of our data collection. But standalone centers without identified leaders would appear to have diminished academic credibility. As Table 3 reveals, in our sample we see only minor representation of the "coordinator" position, though some of these were in fact students, and one had the title of "Student Director."

Table 3: Titles of Writing Center Leaders

Position	Percentage
Director	75% (n=71)
Coordinator	12% (n=11)
Administrator with Other Responsibilities	5% (n=5)
No Apparent Leader	8% (n=8)
Information Unclear	n=6

The issue of status as defined by position type is of enduring interest and, as the chart below details, researchers' findings vary—a testament to some combination of trend changes and wide variations in sample selection,

both in terms of targeted population and methods for sample selection. From this sample, only 29% (n=26) of the writing center leaders were in tenure-track positions, 25% (n=22) were faculty in non-tenure track positions, for a total of 54% (n=48) of directors being in some kind of faculty position (see Table 4). By way of comparison to writing program administrators, in our sample of 101 schools, of the 92 schools that offered first-year writing, 79% (n=73) had writing program administrators running their writing programs, and of those, 47% (n=34) were in tenure-track positions. As should be clear, status and position type in writing center directors is an area in which we see variation across studies. The findings from this study suggest that writing centers are directed by people in non-tenure-track faculty positions predominantly (71%), whereas we see significantly higher reporting of tenure-track faculty directing writing centers in these other studies, with the exception of Balester and McDonald's. We suspect that the explanation for this difference lies in the self-reporting factor: through our methodology, we were able to report on institutions that did not have a leader who was likely to be on WCenter or receive a mailing as part of a faculty group. Another interesting comparison to note is the high percentage of tenure-track faculty leading writing centers in the SLAC study: here we should consider not only the 41% reported in the faculty position, but also some percentage of the 22% in "hybrid" positions, which the authors include to represent leaders whose positions straddle categories, with at least some having a kind of faculty rank. Regardless, the clear suggestion is that SLAC schools are more likely to employ faculty as writing center leaders than the "top" universities—only 14 (11.9%) of which would be classified as small liberal arts colleges—that are included in our study.

Table 4: Position of Writing Center Leaders

	Balester & McDonald; 1999	Ervin (WCRP); 2000-01	Griffin et al (WCRP); 2006	Gladstein & Regaignon (SLACs); 2012	Isaacs & Knight (Top Universities); 2009
Tenure-Track Faculty	17%	42%	43%	41%	29% (n=26)
Non Tenure-Track Faculty	41%	58%	57%	18%	25% (n=22)
Staff	40%			20%	43% (n=38)
Graduate students	0%				3% (n=3)

	Balester & McDonald; 1999	Ervin (WCRP); 2000-01	Griffin et al (WCRP); 2006	Gladstein & Regaignon (SLACs); 2012	Isaacs & Knight (Top Universities); 2009
Hybrid				22%	
Other	2%				

A related finding of similarly enduring interest has to do with gender: the gender breakout of defined writing center administrators was 65 female and 24 male, so 73% of administrators were women, remarkably similar to Healy's 1995 finding that 74% of the writing center leaders were female. In contrast, from this same sample we find that women are more likely to work as WPAs at top universities, with 56% of the WPAs identified as female, and 44% identified as male (71 of the 73 institutions had WPAs whose gender identities we could confirm). These numbers suggest significant differences, marking writing centers as more clearly the province of women whereas this was not the case with the writing programs within this sample.

Staffing. Who provides tutoring and writing consultancy services is an important indicator of what kind of writing center a college or university has developed and the extent to which it can function as an institutional force in defining, promoting, and teaching writing on campus. Our methodology for ascertaining the "who" of this question was to closely read the websites, frequently tracking individuals listed as a tutor, consultant, or administrator to other sources of data (for example, institutional directories and department lists) that presented individuals' official roles on campus, thus determining when a role was fulfilled by undergraduate, graduate, staff, or even faculty. Despite wide variation among centers and the fact that consultants represented a diverse group within particular centers, we found that a little more than a quarter of the writing centers in this sample were staffed exclusively by undergraduate students, and another quarter by both undergraduate and graduate students; 81% (n=79) of the centers in our sample included students in the mix of consultants. Only a few centers were staffed with professional writing consultants (that is, neither faculty nor student), and only 10% (n=10) of the sample's schools included faculty as consultants. Thus, we saw students as major forces in writing center work at the four-year university, a trend readers might applaud as a sign of a capable student body or deplore as a sign of the low professional status of writing tutors.

How consultants are titled is an indication of their role and how they are perceived. Of the institutions for which data were obtainable, 64% (n=56) of the centers referred to their staff as *tutors*, and another 8% (n=7) used the

title *peer tutor*. The label *consultant* appeared at 17% (n=15) of schools, and *coach* appeared once. Other titles observed were *specialist, instructor, mentor*, and *assistant*, and 10 schools did not indicate the name of their staff at all, and so are not included in these percentages. The prevalence of *tutor* as a title suggests that all the activities that will occur in a center revolve around direct tutoring. In our data on *consultant* labels, like our data on who these consultants were, we see significant variety, suggesting institutions were still responding to local conditions—local histories, local funding possibilities, and local populations of students and staff. On the one hand, we saw a move toward professionalization through the choice of the term *consultant*, and on the other hand, we saw creative staffing—which we might read as lower priced staffing (particularly if you include service-learning students who are unpaid).

Clientele. One way a writing center becomes central to the academic enterprise is access—in other words, those it identifies on its website as its invited users. In examining mission statements and other pages on the website and in catalog material to identify who writing centers aimed to serve, we found that most writing centers were explicit, with 68% of schools defining their work as serving students. More specifically, fifty schools specified that they served students only, and, of those schools, eight restricted services to undergraduates. Six centers were open to all, including the community, and fourteen were open to all writers in the college or university. For twenty-two centers, no information was available on users, and one would presume that students were the primary market. From these numbers, it seems that the majority of centers saw themselves as resources for students and did not present themselves as having a larger mission. We note that writing centers that articulated an ambitious mission for teaching writing, promoting writing, and/or fostering a culture of writing did not limit themselves to student use but deliberately identified other users from staff to alumni to community members. For example, one of the schools we identify as a "center for writing excellence," discussed below, devoted significant website capital to its work with community writers ("Sweetland Center for Writing.").

3. Writing Center Practices: Mission, Theoretical Perspectives, Use of Technology, and Innovation

In this section we discuss various writing center practices, as exemplified in mission statements, discernible theoretical perspectives providing the basis for the work of a writing center, the use of technology, and particularly innovative approaches.

Mission. Mission statements can be valuable indicators of an institution's public face and the practices embraced. All of the 97 schools in our sample with writing centers have posted documents that are either called "mission statement" or "about us," or appear to serve the function of a mission statement. It was surprising to find how similar many were, almost as if mission statement writers were reading each other's statements, which we can imagine happening. This may reflect shared values or perhaps a need to get something up on a website that is non-controversial. That said, general programs, centers, and even simple web pages announced a purpose, if not exactly a mission. Mission statements ideally reflect what an organization perceives itself to be doing, its goals, and how it intends to achieve these goals. The majority (59) of the writing centers in the sample, however, did not broadcast a mission per se, but rather a simple description of services. For example, Purdue, well known for the global reach of its services, emphasized directly assisting writers in its mission statement:

> The Purdue University Writing Lab and Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) assist clients in their development as writers—no matter what their skill level—with on-campus consultations, online participation, and community engagement. The Purdue Writing Lab serves the Purdue, West Lafayette, campus and coordinates with local literacy initiatives. The Purdue OWL offers global support through online reference materials and services. ("Mission, Goals, and Description")

Given the far reach of Purdue's activities, and the impact it has had on centers all over the world, we are struck by the modesty of this mission statement.

The other 38 were more typical of how a mission statement functions for an organization. Consider this mission statement from Miami of Ohio's Center for Writing Excellence:

> The mission of the Howe Center for Writing Excellence is to assure that Miami fully prepares all of its graduates to excel in the writing they will do after college in their careers, roles as community and civic leaders, and personal lives. The Center's primary goals are as follows:
>
> • To foster a culture of writing in which students welcome the writing instruction they receive in their courses, seek additional opportunities to write outside of class, and strive continuously to improve their writing skills.

- To help faculty increase the amount and quality of writing instruction and practice that students receive throughout their studies at Miami.
- To help faculty tap writing's tremendous potential for assisting students in mastering the content and thinking processes their courses are designed to teach.
- To assure that all students—from the most accomplished to the most needful—have ample help outside of their classes as they strive to improve their writing. ("Our Mission")

This mission is comprehensive, covering one-to-one individualized instruction and other direct student services, in addition to faculty services aimed at strengthening classroom instruction and support of writing. For most writing centers, this fairly comprehensive list of services was not evident, with faculty support seldom appearing.

Theoretical Perspectives

For readers of WPA, the value and need for guiding, research-informed theoretical frameworks for individualized instruction and other pedagogical activities is obvious–without the benefit of theory, writing consultants become handmaids to faculty and other academics whose understanding of writing instruction may well be entirely experiential and uninformed by research and theory. A big question we must ask, therefore, is about whether or not writing centers evidence influence from the field's developed theories for writing instruction. Although, as Crusius and many others have argued, our field does not operate from a single Kuhnian paradigm, but from several theories which only allow for broad consensus on a few principles, we can nonetheless see the influence of theory through what Crusius rightly refers to as the powerful if "commonly sloganized" process approach (105). We found that reviewing the mission statements and home pages of the sample writing center web pages gave useful indication of these centers' instructional philosophies vis-a-vis the most basic distinction between viewing writing as product or process, and, additionally, through evidence of their engagement with doing research. In terms of product vs. process orientation, a quarter of the schools emphasized that their centers were not "fix-it shops," and 66 emphasized alignment with process writing methodologies through use of key terms that are readily associated with process writing theories and practices. We came to this determination after coding mission statements for process writing on the basic presence of these terms—further evidence, to our view, of how strongly basic approaches to one-on-one writing instruction has been assimilated in writing centers nationwide.

Another indicator of a writing center's perceived mission is the extent to which it serves as a site for research—that is, the degree to which it actively engages in advancing knowledge about the field. Only nine centers in our model reported research activities, and only two of these reported on outcomes, suggesting that producing research was still an atypical goal for writing centers, though we did not collect research that individuals associated with the writing center were doing—quite likely, at writing centers with faculty directors, research was being done (though not necessarily on writing centers or individualized instruction), and this research, no doubt, would have an influence on these writing centers. There are exceptions, of course. For example, Purdue, a leader in so many areas, reported on usability—how its OWL serves and can better serve its constituencies (Salvo et al.). None of this discussion is meant to imply that writing centers were not offering valuable services or to suggest that they should take on a more academic role within their respective college and university communities. Yet we would suggest that the absence of the articulation of this kind of vision on websites is significant. On one hand, one could speculate that designers of websites focused on what students most immediately needed to know; however, websites typically included information for audiences beyond students —faculty, for instance—so designers were aware of faculty audiences, but still the decision was most often made to use websites to give procedural information: who, what, and when, but not so much on why or how.

Use of Technology

Given how much national attention has been given lately to online education, we were interested in seeing the impact of technology on writing center practices, especially as a means of increasing access—a point made by Neaderhiser and Wolfe, as well as other scholars who have promoted digital innovations in writing centers (Inman and Sewell). One simple way to use technology is to make resources available online to all users, thereby providing 24/7 availability. Purdue's OWL started that trend over twenty years ago and has remained dominant ever since. In fact, many other centers simply linked to Purdue's OWL. We were interested in finding out to what extent centers have developed their own resources and so arrived at four categories to sort the schools' writing centers' use of technology in our model: robust (interactive, high quantity of original content, intended for active use and not just to convey information), original content, primarily links, and those which did not have any online resources (see Table 5). A more specific discussion of observable use of technology follows the table, but in general we note that technology use was less evident than we expected.

Table 5: Writing Centers' Use of Technology

Robust:	3% (n=3)
Included Original Content:	32% (n=31)
Primarily Links:	42% (n=41)
No on-line resources	23% (n=22)

Twenty-eight percent of our sample schools evidenced online consulting, either synchronous or asynchronous, a number that reflects an increase in technological use if compared with Neaderhiser and Wolfe's finding of 16% activity (58). In our sample, 9 schools offered synchronous consulting, and 19 had asynchronous consulting; within that group, 5 offered both. Notably, the majority of our sample schools showed no use of technology for tutorials, though we are not in a position to know whether this reflects lack of resources or a decision not to provide online consulting. Clearly, technology has not had as much impact on the ways writing centers conduct their work as one might expect from the scholarly discussion of technological possibilities in writing consultancy. This is another reminder that the view one gains from reading scholarship on what we might call "best practice" in writing center work is significantly different from the view gained from studying what is actually happening in writing center work nationwide.

Innovation

The final variable we considered is to what extent writing centers in our sample represent sites of innovation. In the past decade, a new model for writing centers emerged: what some schools have called a Center for Writing Excellence. We suspect that the word "excellence" is a deliberate choice. Our analysis of these schools suggests that a center for writing excellence (CWE) has the goal of serving all writers in the university community, not just those who could be described as "struggling." As discussed further in another article (Isaacs, "Excellence"), a CWE strives to make writing central to the academic enterprise, inseparable from scholarly activities of inquiry and research, and thus a CWE provides support for teaching and performing writing across and within disciplines, as well as for scholarship that contributes to knowledge about writing. A CWE spreads its network beyond the ivory tower campus into the larger community, and also regularly documents its activities. A CWE thus moves beyond curricular boundaries—that is, beyond services. CWEs also have a faculty director, reflecting the academic status of the unit, and are usually independent units not housed within a particular academic department, although the faculty

director has a departmental home, usually English. Using this definition and information available at institutional websites, five schools in our sample could be classified as CWEs: Miami University of Ohio, University of Michigan, University of Texas, Purdue, and Ohio State.

We classified these centers as CWEs because of their robust approach and because each of these centers fulfilled the CWE definition we have laid out, though with greater or lesser attention to individual areas. Each has its own focus. For example, Purdue's special contribution was in providing "world-class resources and services to the global community through the Purdue OWL" ("Mission, Goals, and Description"). Purdue's on-campus physical center also provided the full complement of usual writing tutorial services as well as support for teachers of writing, with particular focus on business writing, first-year writing, and second-language concerns (Bergmann and Conrad-Salvo).

The University of Michigan's Sweetland Center for Writing emphasized its instruction in writing on-campus; it had a large staff of tutors, over half a dozen coordinators and administrators, and more than twenty lecturers who taught the eight different classes, from transition classes for multilingual and other less experienced writers to courses in peer tutoring and writing in specific genre, among others. In the fall of 2010 Sweetland offered "SyncOWL," an update to the previous OWL, which drew on Google Docs and allowed communication via instant message, email, audio, or video (Khan), demonstrating its investment in finding multiple ways to reach its primary target audience—students. Sweetland also publicized its direct support and engagement with research, and presented itself as an academic unit—with faculty, courses, research, as well as "service" through workshops, tutorials, and vast academic support ("Sweetland Center for Writing").

UT Austin's Undergraduate Writing Center, under the auspices of the Department of Writing and Rhetoric, highlighted its research through hosting *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* and an intriguing, applied research in-house "White Paper Series." The center, while serving only undergraduates, engaged in significant community outreach both on and off campus (for example, Americorps VISTA and several local high schools). The focus on research put this center in the CWE category, even though it is housed within an academic department. Another innovative feature of this center was the writing studio, which "is intended to focus on a single topic with the goal of helping faculty, graduate students, and students produce professional-level writing for publication or presentation online"; the studio "continue[s] over a long period, with stable membership, extending from a

minimum of one year to as long as members want it to continue" ("Writing Studios").

In Ohio, we observed two different models of the "excellence" approach. Miami University put significant resources into faculty support, offering grants to faculty for training, independent studies of teaching writing, and support for research on teaching writing. The Roger and Joyce Howe Center for Writing Excellence sought to touch every student, to "assure that Miami fully prepares all of its graduates to excel in the writing they will do after college in their careers, roles as community and civic leaders, and personal lives" ("Our Mission"), and this mission is addressed through attention to changing the way writing was taught at Miami, as well as through direct student services. The Ohio State University's Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing (CSTW) emphasized outreach off campus through its involvement in various literacy programs, and its commitment to support for state citizenry as part of its mission:

> Beyond the university walls are the many faces of the CSTW Outreach program. Among them: Columbus grade school children and volunteer tutors from Ohio State who meet weekly to read and write; K-12 schoolteachers who devote a Saturday to learning a new teaching technology; high school students who spend an intense workshop week honing their critical thinking and writing skills; and adult learners seeking self-improvement and educational advancement. The CSTW reach is wide. ("Outreach")

Additionally, the CSTW was the home of the Professional Writing minor, the WAC program, and an initiative for Digital Media and Writing that showcased and taught digital writing and media in various ways. Finally, the CSTW positioned itself as a research center and portal, listing several projects that were initiated or supported by CSTW faculty and staff, and many of which have been publicly disseminated through conference or publication ("Center for the Study of Teaching Writing").

Some observations about these centers for writing excellence are worth noting. First, three of the centers we identified as CWEs were independent, substantial units (in people, reach, and operating budgets); they were at universities with strong faculty and programming in Writing Studies; and they were frequently working with writing faculty in traditional (most often English) departments, teaching courses, and fulfilling research and service requirements typical of other faculty in their home departments. That said, these centers were independent institutionally, and we hypothesize that part of their broadness of scope, service, and therefore impact reflects the larger budget and emphasis that is possible when a unit is focused on a writing

vision, a point that is noted by advocates of independent writing programs (O'Neill, Crow, and Burton). These centers were not distracted—nor were their budgets divided—by established majors or support for other learning areas. Additionally, these centers were striking for what appears to us as evidence of effective strategic planning and certainly a demonstration of smart public relations. For example, at Miami, board members—both internal and external—were featured, demonstrating both scholarly legitimacy and local, broad support. We saw traces of strong support for centers and their directors, all tenured faculty, from well-published, established scholars in the field, and we imagine that these scholars may have played important roles in advocating for these centers. As noted earlier, unlike most of the other centers, all of these centers also featured their research prominently, listing and describing research activities and support on their websites.

Trends and Implications in 101 Top Schools

With this review of the public face of 101 top schools' writing centers, we conclude by offering the following trends observed from our analysis of the variables of this study—institutional infrastructure (presence, nomenclature, and location), scope and programmatic approach (leadership, staffing and clientele), and practices (mission, theoretical perspectives, use of technology, and innovation).

First, writing centers were clearly alive and well, even where there were no writing programs or requirements. Thus, they had become permanent parts of the academic landscape, and while budget pressures may have forced reduction of services or technological innovation, the centers themselves were not threatened to any noticeable degree. A small number were named with gifts or to honor a member of the university community. Few centers appeared to have endowments.

Second, writing centers, with some notable exceptions, have not changed all that much from their reincarnation in the 1980s. There appears to be less emphasis on the remedial, but the primary goal appears to be serving students, and not the entire academic community; fewer still see their mission as moving beyond the ivory tower into non-academic settings. The basic model for delivering services is between a student (more likely undergraduate than graduate) and a tutor (the most common name), who is usually a peer. Although some centers offered classes, the primary approach is one-on-one tutoring. The notion of "assisting" writers was prominent.

Third, technology has not had as strong an impact as we had expected. Only 19% of our centers conducted conferences in virtual environments. Thus, the face-to-face, one-on-one model was still dominant. With Pur-

due as a groundbreaking exception, most centers did not have extensive resources online, and many simply linked to other sites.

Fourth, while most centers were not directed by tenure-line faculty (and fewer were directed by tenure-line faculty than survey research would suggest), a significant minority were. One quarter of the schools in our sample considered the director's role appropriate for a tenure-track position, and typically in these schools the writing center was housed administratively as an academic, as opposed to a service, unit. Of note, Ervin's report, drawn from self-selected survey participation, reported that 42% of the WCRP sample had writing center directors in tenure-line positions. In the next report from WCRP, Griffin et al. report that the percentage has increased to 43%. Interestingly, Gladstein and Regaignon (79), in their study of SLAC schools, which they convincingly argue are institutions with history, size and mission that set them apart from large and public universities, also reported that 42% of their faculty were on tenure-track lines. We would hypothesize that our numbers are lower than the others, which are consistently between 40 and 42%, because of the sampling method differences—survey research would, presumably, often not be able to include as many writing centers that are led by non-tenure-track faculty. Most directors in tenure-track positions were housed in English departments, even if the centers operate independently.

Fifth, and perhaps reflecting the service-oriented nature of centers which were even housed in academic units, few of the writing centers in our sample documented any research activities on the web. In other words, few publicly documented a role of advancing knowledge about writing centers or serving as advocates for their place in Writing Studies as a field, even though individuals who work in these centers might have been conducting research and reporting on it through publication. Instead, these centers defined themselves more as helpmates rather than initiators of inquiry, as adjuncts to coursework rather than as central parts of the academic enterprise. At the same time, few centers appeared to be actively engaged in assessment activities, which would seem to contribute to narratives of marginalization, given how important accountability studies have become. Our data affirm Thompson's observation: "Although discussions of assessment continue to appear in writing center journals, only a few writing centers appear to have taken up the challenge to develop measures of student learning" (40). As Brian Huot writes in Ellen Schendel and William Macauley's *Building Writing Center Assessments that Matter*, a book devoted to guiding writing center directors in developing and reporting assessments of writing center practices, "using assessment as an opportunity for research positions writing center professionals to be knowledge-givers and professionals who

not only take part in professional conversations, but assume the role of set-ting research agenda and furthering the knowledge base" (Huot and Cas-well, "Translating Assessment" 169).

Sixth, we saw little mention in the centers we included in our sample of strategies for working with second-language writers. (Purdue was an exception). In fact, the absence was so noticeable that we stopped keep-ing track of ESL as a category of analysis. This trend suggests that schools were not doing much to advertise or publicize what they were doing for heritage speakers of another language or members of what has been labeled the 1.5 generation. We also saw little evidence of writing centers articulat-ing and forwarding a vision of global English rather than standard English, as Grimm advocated when she argued that writing centers would do well to "embrace multilingualism rather than monolingualism as a conceptual norm" (17).

Finally, a small number of centers countered all these trends by promot-ing a new model for writing center work. These centers for writing excel-lence are an innovation that may serve to extend and deepen the standards for missions of writing centers. In fact, these new centers can serve as focal points for establishing a culture of writing throughout their campuses and beyond.

One potential innovation that we did not discover in our study was any impact of what has been called the "emporium model." We know anecdot-ally from our colleagues across the US that many colleges and universities are reconsidering the means by which students considered unprepared are helped to improve their skills in reading, writing, and math. The Math Emporium Model, first developed at Virginia Tech, has been adopted by a number of schools and reportedly "has consistently produced spectacular gains in student learning and impressive reductions in instructional costs" ("The Emporium Model"). In an emporium, students spend the majority of their time in a computer lab setting and receive help on demand. It is not inconceivable that the emporium model may well have an impact on the teaching of writing and writing centers, with "redesign" projects in the works experimentally across the country. At the same time, writing cen-ters have always used an "on demand" model, so there are some interesting parallels that may provide opportunities for course redesigns that draw on expertise in individualized writing instruction.

In concluding this empirical study of the public face of writing centers, following Adler-Kasner's argument in *The Activist Writing WPA,* we urge writing center leaders to take actions that will project more positive images, both in terms of their websites and other public documents. As she notes, writing program leaders need to combat stereotypes and negative perspec-

tives on student writers and those of us who teach them by becoming active story-changers" (184), to which we would add, with a long history of struggling for status and resources, writing center leaders must be especially vigilant in their work of developing a public face that projects writing centers in terms of what they do now, and also aspirationally. For example, if a writing center wishes to be a community writing center, but is not yet, it should advertise itself both within and without the institution. Another important method for increasing the capital for writing centers is through our collective research.

A review of the last two decades of scholarship on writing centers, found most frequently in *Writing Center Journal*, *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, and various book collections, reveals the persistence of two primary tropes: first, a narrative of progress—one that chronicles and forecasts a positive future for writing centers, the people who work in them, and the students who use them (for example, Ede and Lunsford; Faigley; Kail; Lunsford and Ede, Kinkead and Harris; Owens). Second, cautionary tales that document the second-class status of writing center practice and research (Balester and McDonald; Harris, "Centering"; Healy; Olson and Ashton-Jones) and which, as Gardner and Ramsey note, occasionally if paradoxically celebrates the field's marginality. In efforts we see as motivated by understandable concerns about the status of writing center scholars and their work, we find a third strand which moves toward work that is increasingly theorized and set within literary, cultural, and other theoretical frames (Boquet; Carter; Grimm, *Good Intentions*, "Rearticulating"; Welch). The theorizing of such issues as space, collaboration, and writing centers as an academic enterprise, often through use of theorists such as Foucault, Gramsci, and Lacan, functions to demonstrate that writing center scholarship is bona fide intellectual work while also making particular cases about future directions for writing center practice. This third strain is therefore an effort towards legitimizing the intellectual underpinnings of writing centers as a site of inquiry. These three primary strains, all theoretical or speculative (North) in nature, dominate the landscape of scholarship on writing centers and needs amplification and balance from empirically based scholarship, such as research that documents what it is that writing centers do. We believe a clearer understanding of what it is that writing centers do—see, for example, recent, excellent scholarship by Isabelle Thompson and Terese Thonus (among others) — provides current and future writing center practitioners and researchers with empirical scholarship to complement the field's history of narrative and theoretical scholarship. By empirical, we mean Haswell's RAD definition (replicable, aggregable, data-driven). This research, often conducted by directors of

writing centers, should be advertised, discussed and disseminated at the writing centers in which they were conducted, presented as writing center work that is accomplished alongside one-on-one tutoring, and the other more familiar work of writing centers.

We make this recommendation for writing centers to sponsor, conduct, and disseminate empirically based research, and to broadcast a broader and more ambitious agenda and scope, on the basis of our analysis of these 101 institutions which, on the whole, suggest a very modest group, one that could benefit from a more positive, even boastful—if that could be stomached— self-image. Our recommendation is reinforced by our own teaching and writing center training work, where we have observed that after new writing consultants read some of the seminal articles in writing center scholarship, they are confused and disheartened by the perceptions of low status and complaints about working conditions, and so they worry that their writing center may be ever on the brink of administrative destruction. From our research, we are firm in stating that writing centers need not be overly anxious about the road to marginalization leading to extinction, as there is no evidence that this is a likely scenario. Writing centers appear remarkably resilient, able to endure and provide writing instruction that is valued and supported, and this is cause for calm and assurance. Just as important, we urge WPAs who are not directly responsible for writing centers to find out more about how such centers on their campuses work. Given the changes in the ways which many colleges and universities are delivering basic skills courses, it is possible, in our view, that introductory and first-year writing courses may be subject to closer examination. Programs that can be seen as exemplary leaders for the teaching of writing in whatever context are likely to remain strong, but that means having the data necessary to advocate for resources.

NOTES

2. We are using "purposive" in the sense defined by H. Russell Bernard (165-67).

3. We also were informed by Stuart Blythe's cautionary directions on coding digital texts.

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