English 680:
Writing Center Theory & Administration
Fall 2017

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 10:30-11:30, 2:20-4, or by appointment

Description
This seminar on writing center administration will focus on the history, theory, practice, and politics of one-to-one and small group tutoring. We'll think about how writing centers have emerged, what theories of writing and learning guide their practices, and the role writing centers play (and contest) in larger disciplinary and institutional struggles around literacy, identity and access to education. Each of these areas of focus has implications for the everyday administration of writing centers, particularly in the context of assessment and broader inquiry-based research. How might writing centers housed in student support services have different structural needs than those situated in academic departments? What do we know about how students make use of writing centers, who they are, and to what effect, and how does that insight inform recruiting, selection and education of staff? How can writing center administrators and staff take up institutional priorities to advance social justice needs that may not be visible or accounted for beyond the space of individual instruction? How might writing centers cultivate deep knowledge about local teaching and learning and leverage that research to impact student, faculty and administrative cultures and processes? Throughout the semester, students will develop research projects that survey existing literature on questions that intrigue them, create relevant responses based on the scholarship, and imagine authentic outlets that complement or address needs in individual professional portfolios.

Learning Objectives:
• Address the history of writing centers and their institutional placement
• Discover major lines of inquiry within writing center studies and have an awareness of their existing conversations or scholarly literature
• Consider the methods, implications and limitations of writing center assessment
• Develop a philosophy and praxis for the everyday administration of writing centers or relevant aligned programs (WAC, WID, Student Support, Student Success, etc.)
• Foster a critical awareness of the politics, impact and social justice consequences of teaching writing one-to-one.

Materials Required:

Projects
1. Journaling (due weekly by 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, when we’re meeting the following day)
   As you read, share your thoughts about the individual articles and the books as we progress through the term. Use this space to turn your reading from passive consumption to active engagement. Consider what key terms and central issues are arising. These are important voices in the larger
conversation, so imagine what they’re saying entering into your own professional life as a teacher or tutor, and how you might speak into them based on what you’re learning. Throughout, consider what it might mean to join this discourse community of writing center professionals. What ideologies, assumptions, practices, tensions do these pieces share? Unlike usual discussion treads, this journal will be private and only read by me, but I’d like to use what you’re saying as fodder for class discussion each week.

2. Writing Center Director Administration Sourcebook/Eporfolio (mid-term check-in due September 28, final version due November 2)
   Too often folks make it out of graduate school not equipped to deal with/never having been exposed to the real, everyday issues that most writing center directors must contend with as administrators and managers. Sure, you get well trained in theory, pedagogy, and research (critical, interpretive, or empirical). Yet one of the most common sets of questions that people get from institutions when they’re being hired is: How would you contend with...? Or, what would guide you when making decisions about...? For this project, however you want to imagine an authentic audience, I’d like to see you grapple with common issues around WCD and WPA work for an institution where you’d like to work:
   a. Think about/over the issues with disciplinarity and institutionality and writing center administration (or by extension other WPA-like programs). What issues are most vexing to you? Intriguing to you? Consider the sort of unit you might see yourself leading. How would you take up these issues in that context? How do you imagine it translating intellectually? How about in the everyday praxis of leadership?
   b. What’s your plan for assessing the work of your writing center? What principle might guide you? What external (beyond the writing center) variables guide your thinking and planning?
   c. What philosophy of management will guide your supervision of your staff? How might managing undergraduates be different than graduate students? How might students be different from professional staff? How do you manage a staff within an academic unit versus a staff in a student support unit? What guides your evaluation of staff (what counts as success, what red-flags might require work)? How do you negotiate all that?
   d. What’s your short-term plan for staff development or education (a semester or year) versus a long-term plan (what kind of WC/WL would you like to build)?
   e. How does any of this work feed your research and teaching agendas, or how might your research and teaching dovetail with your everyday labor?
   We’ll talk as the semester gets going on how you can creatively present your ideas in ways that make most sense for you. For some of you, this labor might become an e-portfolio or blog where you think through and present your thinking on these ideas, or for others, it might make more sense to research and develop actual statements that you can include in application materials or as handouts on interviews (take a look at the rhet/comp jobs wiki for the sorts of statements people get asked to produce, or the MLA/ADF Job-list).

3. Semester-long Research: Collaborative Research Project, or Professional Development Project (Mid-term check-in due October 19th; final version due December 7th, on Blackboard [not email])
   a. The editors at Writing Center Journal have given me two insights about graduate student writers: 1) they groan every time they get an “article” submission which really reads as a term paper from an academic course (or a rehashed version of one), and 2) they’d publish, with all due diligence, a collaborative/multiauthored article that addressed an interesting, powerful, political research question, ideally in an empirical vein and that signaled an awareness of the field and the WCJ readership. I would love all of you (or a significant subgroup) to coalesce and take the WCJ editors up on their challenge and take up a research question that has legs and power and that embodies collaborative research.
   b. Think about your own needs as a graduate student entering the profession. What’s your greatest need at this point? A conference presentation at C’s? A teaching portfolio? A single-author article? A curriculum for your own tutoring training? For this project, decide and act upon any one or combination of these to advance your needs or goals. Remember, a decent C’s proposal is a genre of its own, and is almost always best done in collaboration with colleagues around the country, if not on campus.
Grading & Grades
Generally speaking, my graduate course grades run on an A-to-C continuum. A-level work generally represents sophistication and facility with course material and its presentation, while C-level work signifies seriously problematic intellectual labor. Such grades across courses can be extremely problematic. For this semester, each element of this course will receive a grade based on this sophistication-to-flawed model. Mediocre or unengaged contributions for the online and discussion portions of the course will receive, at best, B-level grades.

Breakdown
- Journaling – 30%
- Sourcebook/Eportfolio – 30%
- Semester-long Collaborative/Professional Development – 40%

Policies
1. Attendance, Participation & Conduct
   As a graduate seminar, consistent attendance and promptness along with willingness to contribute to the class are obviously critical to the success of this course. No one person ought to dominate conversation, and everyone must be willing to engage in a thoughtful, courteous, and critical discussion. From time to time, people will make comments that strike you wrong on a whole host of fronts. Our obligation as teachers and academics is to respond to these moments with collegiality and professionalism. If you take objection to anything anyone says or does, it’s your obligation to create a space and opportunity for learning to happen; likewise, you ought to couch thoughts in ways that foster conversation instead of inhibiting it. While many of us may mark our identities and beliefs through our talk and bodies, assumptions should never be made, and membership in this discourse community should be respectful of all diversity, regardless of the form it takes. Given the tight meeting times for this course, one absence will be allowed, though missing class does not absolve you of responsibility for any work that is due.

2. Academic Honesty
   All students must follow university guidelines with respect to issues of academic integrity, honesty and plagiarism. Failure to present work that is consistent with these policies can result in failure (of an assignment or the course) or ultimately, expulsion.

3. Disabilities
   If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact the appropriate university office for assistance. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

4. Incompletes
   My general policy is not to grant incompletes unless the student produces a letter in which they impose their own production deadline and expectations. Bear in mind that university policy converts incomplete grades, usually by the second week of the subsequent semester to an “F” grade.
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• Lori Salem, "Decisions… Decisions… Who chooses to Use the Writing Center." *Writing Center Journal* 37.1/2 (2016).  
| August 31| • Stephen North. “The Idea of the Writing Center.”  
• North, “Reconsidering ‘The Idea of the Writing Center.’”  
| September 7 | • Anne Ellen Geller & Harry Denny. 2013. "Of Ladybugs, Low Status, and Loving the Job: Writing Center Professionals Navigating Their Career" *Writing Center Journal* 33.1  
• Melissa Ianetta et al. "Polylog: Are Writing Center Directors Writing Program Administrators? *Composition Studies* 34.2.  
| September 14 | • Nicole Caswell et al., *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors*, first half. | ● Bb response |
| September 21 | • Nicole Caswell et al., *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors*, second half.  
• Video conference with *Working Lives Authors*. | ● Bb response |
| September 28 | • Mackiewicz and Thompson, *Talk about Writing*, first half.  
• Sourcebook check-in. | ● Bb response  
• Page-long update on sourcebook |
| October 5 | • Mackiewicz and Thompson, *Talk about Writing*, second half. | ● Bb response |
| October 12 | • Vershaun Young, “Students use They Own Language.”  
• Nancy Barron & Nancy Grimm, "Addressing Racial Diversity in a Writing Center: Stories and lessons from Beginners."  
• Jacqueline Jones Royster, "When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own." *College Composition & Communication* 47.1 (1996). | ● Bb response |
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| October 19 | • Mark Hall, *Around the Texts of Writing Center Work*, first half.  
              • Semester-long check-in/workshop.  
              • Bb response  
              • Page-long narrative on semester-long check-in/workshop |
| October 26 | • Mark Hall, *Around the Texts of Writing Center Work*, second half.  
              • Bb response |
| November 2 | • Eodice et al, *Meaningful Writing Project*, first half.  
              • Bb response |
| November 9 | • Eodice et al, *Meaningful Writing Project*, second half.  
              • Bb response  
              • Sourcebook assignment due/link(s) posted under assignments on Bb |
| November 23| – No class meeting (Thanksgiving Break) |
| November 30| • Workshop semester-long projects.  
              • Bb response |
| December 7 | • Present semester-long projects.  
              • Bring drafts to class |