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Writing Centers and Students' Experiences with Writing in College

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Education

by

Vicky Chen

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Carol B. Olson, Chair
Professor Rebecca Black
Professor Jonathan Alexander

2020

DEDICATION

To

my parents, Jerry and Mindy, and twin, Alice,

for all their support and encouragement

(and to my Seeing Eye dog Rachel, for walking the entire journey at my side)

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"Representations of Autism in Online Harry Potter Fanfiction." Rebecca Black, Jonathan Alexander, and Vicky Chen. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 2019.

"Helping English Learners Navigate the Challenges of Academic Writing." Carol B. Olson, Vicky Chen, Jenell Krishnan, and Jane S. Nazzal. Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2018.

"Seeing the World Through Words: A Student Writer's Journey toward Developing Her Own Voice." Vicky Chen. *Journal of Learning Through the Arts*, 2017.

Abstract of this Dissertation

Writing Centers and Students' Experiences with Writing in College

by

Vicky Chen

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Irvine, 2020

Professor Carol Booth Olson, Chair

Writing centers in colleges and universities provide a variety of services to support today's culturally and linguistically diverse student populations as they navigate the challenges of writing in higher education and enter new disciplinary communities(Grimm, 2009). This assistance can include everything from help on grammar and organization to support interpreting assignment prompts and instructor feedback (Harris, 1995; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014). However, even though many students report finding center services useful, tutors seldom see the final, finished versions of student work, and it is often unclear exactly what students are really taking away with them from their writing center visits (Corbett, 2015; Missakian et al., 2016).

To better understand how students respond to the assistance they receive from writing center tutors after they leave the center, why some students might choose to use the writing center more often than others, and what role the writing center might play in

the larger context of students' experiences with college writing, this study explores the following research questions:

1) What do students say they are learning from their writing center conferences, and how does it compare with what tutors say they are discussing?

2) How or to what extent does the advice and feedback students receive on an assignment influence their writing and revision processes for that specific text?

3) How do student users view the writing center, and how do they position the center within their college writing experiences?

This study took place at the writing center of a large public university in California. In addition to the exit surveys and consultation reports routinely collected by the center, conference recordings, pre and post consultation drafts, and interviews for 28 undergraduates who used the writing center at least once over the course of one academic year were collected and analyzed. Results revealed that:

- The writing topics that students reported learning about during their writing center visits were similar to what tutors reported discussing. Among these, there was a balance of both global or higher-order concerns and local or sentence-level issues, similar to what has been found in previous studies, with organization, overall structure, and flow being an area of particular emphasis.

- After leaving the writing center, students usually made some attempt to respond to all the suggestions that tutors made, although their response to suggestions that involved making complex or large-scale revisions was greatly impacted by other factors such as interpretation of tutor feedback, time constraints, note-taking, and personal likes and dislikes.

- Although students agreed that they learned transferable writing strategies from their writing center consultations and reported continuing to use those strategies independently on other writing assignments, students primarily sought out the writing center to support their writing and revising of a particular task. High-stakes writing and writing in unfamiliar genres were common reasons for students to return to the writing center, and center tutors served as especially important resources for students who wanted more or different feedback than they were receiving from class, students who especially valued feedback from professionals or experts they considered credible and trustworthy, and students who did not have other sources of writing support like skilled writer friends or family.

Implications for students, course instructors, and writing centers will be discussed.

Introduction and Study Rationale

College Writing and the Growth of Writing Centers

Effective writing plays a crucial role in higher education and is integral to the academic work students pursue both throughout their undergraduate and graduate careers (CWPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011; Monroe, 2003). Different types of writing and writing related activities such as peer review are strongly related to deep learning, and nearly all colleges include writing courses as part of their general requirements (Addison & McGee, 2010; Horowitz, 1986). Writing tasks from constructing summaries and making connections between theory and data to synthesizing multiple sources of information require students to negotiate both within and across disciplinary discourses while adhering to more general conventions of grammar and organization. However, a large number of students begin their college years ill prepared for the expectations of higher education, due in part to the gap between high school instruction, which has increasingly stressed standardized testing, and college expectations revolving around abstract analysis and critical thinking (Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010). This disparity is most visible in the area of writing where the rigidity of writing required on standardized tests fails to prepare students for the flexible, critical framework of college writing that seeks to explore and provoke further questions and reflection (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). According to the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (CWPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011), college students should be able not only to analyze and produce a variety of texts, but also to discuss their own writing processes, use feedback to make effective revisions, and make deliberate choices in their

writing appropriate to different audiences and genres. While college writing classes are geared towards addressing these problems, the challenges of handling numerous students from a variety of backgrounds can make it difficult for instructors to give each student the time and feedback they need. Because of this, writing centers have become a major resource for both students and faculty at many colleges and universities.

Although writing centers, generally referred to early on as writing labs or clinics, had already begun to appear around the early 1900s (Lerner, 2009), many writing center scholars cite the open admissions initiatives of the 1960s and 70s as a major turning point, a period in which writing centers proliferated as remedial services for rising numbers of increasingly diverse students entering colleges and universities (Carino, 1996). Even though perceptions of the center as fix-it shops where students could be sent to correct errors in grammar and spelling were—and are still—common, writing centers themselves have come, over the following years, to reframe themselves as places for collaborative learning and innovation (Lerner, 2009). Writing center tutors occupy a unique position between students and teachers where they can help students negotiate their rhetorical contexts as both peers and more experienced academic writers (Boquet, 2000). As such, centers can serve both as safe spaces where students can work together to improve their writing and as interdisciplinary and cross-cultural sites with great potential for fostering change, critical thinking, and student empowerment (Archer & Richards, 2011; Denny, 2010; Geller & Denny, 2013; Grimm, 2009; Sherwood, 1999; Vandenberg, 1999).

Theoretical Framework: The Bigger Picture Around Writing Center Tutorials

This dissertation draws from both cognitive and sociocultural theories of writing to examine the relationships between student work and students' writing center conferences.

From a cognitive perspective, the act of writing is highly recursive and involves a number of distinctive thinking processes, which are driven by goals that may change and evolve as a person writes (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes, 1996). As people develop and become more experienced as writers, the way they conceptualize a writing task becomes more complex so that we can see important differences between the composing and revision processes of writers with differing amounts of experience. Flower and Hayes (1980) found, for example, that while experienced writers generally construct complex images of the audiences that might read their texts, fleshing these out with their own experiences and understanding of writing conventions, novice writers tend to have only sketchy or stereotypical mental representations of their readers. Such differences are influenced by the goals that writers set for themselves, with expert writers creating extensive plans to affect their audiences over the course of their writing, while novice writers are often more tied to the topic. A similar contrast can be seen in studies on writers' revision processes. For instance, where experienced writers tend to make many more structural and meaning-based changes—what writing center scholars often refer to as higher-order or global revisions—during the writing process, the changes novice writers make tend to be on a more surface, lexical level—or lower-order, local revisions (Sommers, 1980).

Although these studies refer to these differences between writers in the context of experienced or expert versus novice writers, it is important to remember that all of these

aspects of writing can be important. Simply because novice writers often focus primarily on sentence-level changes does not automatically mean that such changes are always less significant when revising a text than larger-scale, structural changes. Just as how direct and indirect tutoring strategies lie on a continuum and are more or less suitable depending on the situation, whether a writer should concentrate on global or local concerns during revision varies, and it is the ability to recognize, prioritize, and decide *when* to focus on *what* that leads to students becoming strong, independent writers. It is because experienced writers perceive the writing task in complex ways that the revisions they make become more complex as they work to build and refine both the meaning and appearance of their texts (Sommers, 1980). Supporting this growth is where services like those offered by writing centers come into play by providing assistance and scaffolding that encourage students' development as writers.

Often referenced in writing center research is Vygotsky's (1986) theory of learning and his idea of a zone of proximal development, which suggests that a novice can work together with a more experienced individual—whether a peer, a caregiver, a teacher, etc—so that she can accomplish tasks she could not otherwise accomplish on her own. This lens, which views learning from a sociocultural perspective, has been used frequently to describe writing center tutoring where the tutor, as a more experienced writer, uses strategies such as modeling to scaffold and help students develop their own writing skills (Babcock, 2012; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014; Nordlof, 2014). Additionally, sociocultural theory stresses not only the interactions between individuals but amongst individuals, cultures, and activities such as writing, shifting the focus from individual cognitive processes to the interplay between individuals and contexts that

might shape not only the development of those cognitive processes but when and how students use them (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006). Knowledge, in this view, is not something that resides only within the individual or the external environment, but instead arises from negotiations across these different individual and social elements. The importance—in this theory—of guided practice and the way discursive interactions with others play an important role in developing complex skills are fundamental to writing center pedagogy, and the idea that novices eventually internalize and make new skills and practices their own directly relates to the goal of developing better writers and not just better writing (North, 1984).

Both cognitive and sociocultural theories offer valuable insights into how writers develop, and Graham (2018) weaves them together in his writer(s)-within-community model of writing. In this model, "the community in which writing takes place and the cognitive capabilities and resources of those who create writing simultaneously shape and constrain the creation of written text" (p. 272), where a community is a group of people who share a basic set of assumptions and goals (i.e. an English class). Individuals and social contexts both influence and are influenced by one another, and the act of writing is affected by both individual and social characteristics and resources. Additionally, this model acknowledges the significance of factors such as emotion, personality, past experience, and motivation in understanding how someone approaches a writing task, an elaboration that meshes well with Hayes' (2000) revised version of Flower and Hayes' (1981) earlier cognitive model of writing, which adds to the old model aspects such as motivation and prior experience. From these perspectives, a writer's choices may be affected by how much she values the particular writing task in relation to other activities

she could be doing, how good she believes she is at writing, or even how stressed she is feeling overall at the time (Graham, 2018). These factors and their relationships are fluid, and writers learn as they engage in writing and other writing-related tasks such as reading, observe other community members, and experience the consequences of their actions—processes which are all shaped in turn by both the writing communities to which writers belong and the writers' own personal characteristics. This complex relationship between cognition and community is of particular interest to this dissertation study as I seek to examine not only what happens between tutors and students during a writing center conference but the choices students subsequently make in regards to their writing.

One-on-One Tutoring and Changing Understandings of Writing Center Work

In 1984, North published his influential essay "The Idea of a Writing Center" which would go on to form the foundation of much of writing center philosophy, especially philosophies around one-on-one writing tutorials, and become the single most frequently cited text in writing center scholarship (Lerner, 2014). He argued that the work of writing centers was not to help students revise one particular paper, but to help students themselves become better writers, able to tackle future writing tasks on their own. This meant focusing more on larger issues like developing a paper's ideas and less on local issues like spelling and grammar. The successfulness of a writing center conference and a tutor's effectiveness were related, not to the student's grades or to the immediate improvement of a specific text, but to the amount and quality of writing talk that occurred during the writing conference (North, 1982; 1984), talk about the writing

process, for example, and talk that encouraged students to think more deeply about the content and organization of their papers. This emphasis on assisting students to become more skilled and independent helped to create an image of writing centers as legitimate sites for student learning rather than rote editing services for the grammatically challenged.

At the same time, concerns from faculty about tutors usurping student papers and about plagiarism led to an emphasis on indirect methods of tutoring such as asking questions to draw on students' existing knowledge rather than direct writing instruction (Clark, 1988; Clark & Healy, 2001). Good tutoring was tutoring that focused on improving students' composing processes rather than on improving a single composition (Harris, 1992; North, 1982; 1984). This injunction against tutor directiveness in writing center conferences and the contrasts and conflicts presented by direct and indirect tutoring strategies shape much of early writing center scholarship (Corbett, 2015). However, research has since found this dichotomous view of writing center tutoring to be overly simplistic and inadequate for understanding what actually happens during a writing center conference, evaluating a conference's effectiveness, or providing recommendations for tutor training and center services.

Many empirical studies have demonstrated, for example, that tutors often do not adhere strictly to the prescription against direct instruction, even in sessions rated highly satisfactory by both tutors and students, and that such instruction, as well as tutor directiveness, can be beneficial (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014). This is especially easy to see in the experiences of English learners (ELs) working with writing center tutors. These students often come to the writing center looking for someone to edit their writing

and give sentence-level help, which tutors often see as contradicting their mission of improving the writer and not just the text (Boquet, 2000; Myers, 2003; Rafoth, 2015). Providing EL students with more appropriate word choices and correct grammar can be perceived as interfering with students' authorship and is thought to violate a text's integrity, and also conflicts with common writing center ideologies that ask tutors to prioritize global issues such as text organization over local issues such as punctuation. As Myers (2002), Grimm (2009), Phillips (2013), and others point out, however, such sentence-level concerns can be extremely important to students learning English as a second language, especially since the structure of a language is as much a result of culture as it is of linguistic mechanics, meaning that relying upon indirect methods of tutoring that seek to invoke students' prior knowledge is to ask ELs to access knowledge that they often do not yet have. Thus for these students, it is often frustrating and confusing when tutors rely too heavily on indirect suggestions and questions (Thonus, 2003), and a tutor's reluctance to give explicit advice can be seen as a refusal to acknowledge EL students' individual concerns (Rafoth, 2015).

Conflicts regarding direct and indirect tutoring methods can also be seen in writing center research regarding other student populations and different tutoring situations. Students with learning disabilities, for instance, often need tutors to be more direct and precise with their suggestions (Daniels, Babcock, & Daniels, 2016). Not only that, but how directive tutors are—as well as whether that directiveness helps or hinders the effectiveness of a tutoring conference—can also be affected by a tutor's disciplinary expertise, with expertise sometimes allowing for better support while at other times causing tutors to be too insistent on their own interpretations (Dinitz & Harrington,

2014). It can also be unclear what actually constitutes a direct or indirect move on the part of the tutor. Questions, for instance, are generally referred to as a form of indirect tutoring, but a closer examination of questions and question cycles reveals that not all questions are open-ended and indirect, and that restrictive questions can nonetheless provide important scaffolds to guide student thinking (O'Sullivan & Cleary, 2014; Thompson & Mackiewicz, 2014). In other words, while it is still an ongoing debate whether tutors can or should provide actual writing instruction, research has made it clear that tutoring often can and should involve a variety of learning strategies and scaffolding that balance both directness and indirectness according to each student's particular needs at different points in the writing process (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014)

For these reasons, a number of researchers in the last two decades have begun to develop alternative frameworks for examining writing center work that move away from the direct/indirect continuum and build a more nuanced and holistic picture (Babcock et al., 2012). Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014) , for instance, divide strategies in tutor talk during writing center conferences into three general categories—instruction (telling, explaining and giving examples, etc), cognitive scaffolding (responding as a reader, demonstrating how to do something, prompting, etc), and motivational scaffolding (i.e. praise, showing sympathy or empathy, etc)—that can help researchers better understand the different moves that tutors make in each stage of a conference that might affect the conference's outcomes. The emphasis is not on whether a particular strategy is good or bad, but on when, how, and why different strategies might be used, and how that relates to, for instance, student learning or participant attitudes towards the writing task. This shift is important both because it opens up space for more complex discussions of what

actually occurs during a writing center conference, focusing less on evaluation and more on understanding, and because it acknowledges the influence and significance of factors outside of the writing center on conference proceedings and outcomes.

Focusing on Students

Writing centers are complex spaces that involve more than the encounter between tutor and student in writing conferences (Lerner, 2014), and both the process and outcome of each conference are influenced by multiple factors both in and out of the tutor's control (Archer & Richards, 2011; Babcock et al., 2012). Tutors, students, and even instructors who are not physically present during a writing conference can each play an important role in how a visit to the center turns out (Babcock et al., 2012). Mismatches in reported use of writing center services by students, tutors, and faculty, as well as discrepancies between what each of these stakeholders believes students receive assistance on (Missakian et al., 2016) create grounds for questions about how the work that takes place during writing center conferences interacts with students' experiences beyond writing center walls. For example, the way an instructor scores a paper may signal to students that grammatical correctness is more important than content (Missakian et al., 2016). Grades remain an important aspect of students' academic lives and, despite the attempt of writing center tutors to emphasize the value of process over product, grades can shape student perceptions of academic writing and of center effectiveness beyond what is actually said or done during a conference (Archer & Richards, 2011; Boscolo & Hidi, 2007; Missakian et al., 2016). Students may also resist or reject a tutor's advice (Williams, 2004) for reasons such as a tutor's lack of relevant, subject matter

knowledge (Waring, 2005) or simply their own lack of time, energy, and desire to carry out a suggested revision (Porter, 1991). What tutors and students discuss during conferences and what they write in the margins of student papers do not always translate into changes in the text (Mackiewicz, 2016), and when changes are made, they do not always align with tutors' actual suggestions (Williams, 2004).

Because of studies such as those conducted by DeFeo and Caparas (2014) and Hughes and colleagues (2010), which analyzed the reflective narratives of tutors and tutor alumni, we know that writing center conferences do, indeed, have long-reaching impacts on those who facilitate them. Not only do tutors learn more about writing and their own composing processes through their work as tutors, they are able to build social and professional skills that serve them well in other careers, including improved communication skills and a greater acceptance of diversity. Some tutors report an increased appreciation for feedback and for the importance of revision, and developing the habit of asking their peers for critiques on written drafts. Such experiences speak to the power of writing centers to make tutors better writers, but they tell us little about the students who come to the center for help.

In contrast, studies on students have mostly focused specifically on their during-conference experiences—how satisfied they are with the conference, for instance—rather than on what they take away with them and how their writing center visits might relate to experiences of learning to write. Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014) state that the collaborative learning and tutor scaffolding that occur during writing center consultations can continue to affect students' growth as writers outside of the tutoring conference by way of mechanisms such as conference notes and students' recall of tutors' spoken

advice. However, only a few studies have specifically examined if or when this happens. One such study was conducted by Williams (2004) as part of a larger research project examining writing centers and student revision. Noting the lack of research that actually seeks to connect writing center sessions to changes and improvements in students' subsequent drafts, Williams analyzed five writing center conferences with English learners, along with students' written drafts before and after a writing center session, and student and tutor interviews based upon session recordings. Sessions were coded for problem episodes, such as when students asked for help on a sentence or when tutors addressed a particular writing topic, and these were compared to the different types of revisions that students made in their second drafts. Williams found that while these students all revised their papers, it was difficult to identify direct connections between the suggestions that tutors made and students' subsequent changes. She concluded that although students may gain valuable skills and changes in attitude from their writing center visits, these changes did not necessarily result in changes in students' written work. Also, though changes were more likely to be implemented when students wrote down notes and when tutors gave direct and explicit advice, such changes did not necessarily lead to improvement in text quality. Similar results were found in an unpublished study by Archer and Klein (2001) that sought to link students' writing center consultations to concrete improvements in their course writing (discussed in Archer & Richards, 2011). Information such as student drafts, final papers, course grades, and writing center surveys was collected and analyzed qualitatively for improvement in elements such as organization and academic register. While writing center help did not always ensure that students passed their courses, the researchers found that students

tended to leave the center better able to articulate what their own writing processes entail and with a heightened awareness of their own writing.

It is interesting to note here that Mackiewicz (2016) found in a corpus analysis of tutor and student talk during writing center conferences that students often referred back to previous papers and situated their current writing task in relation to past writing experiences and strategies. Unfortunately, studies such as the one on revision conducted by Williams (2004) do not take into account sources of writing feedback and advice outside of the writing center—from friends, for instance, and course instructors—something the author notes as a limitation of the study when trying to understand how writing center help fits into students' later writing performance and writing development as a whole.

Different students will react or respond differently to a tutor's comments and questions during a writing conference based upon his or her own interpretations of what is said (Kjesrud, 2015) and his or her own background, personality, and beliefs. For example, in a questionnaire study of student and tutor perceptions of directiveness in conferences, Clark (2001) found that students who considered themselves to be good writers tended to perceive less influence from their tutors than students who considered themselves poor writers, and that these perceptions did not always coincide with the tutors' own perceptions. At the same time, in an eight-year longitudinal study of 671 undergraduate students examining help-seeking behavior, writing self-efficacy, and composition class outcomes, Williams and Takaku (2011) found that students with low self-efficacy tended to use services like the writing center more frequently, and that frequent use tended to correlate with better writing performance. Even though these

studies do not specifically examine what students learn from the writing center, they highlight the need to look not only at student and tutor conference interactions, but also at the larger contexts in which these interactions occur in order to better understand how students respond to the assistance that tutors offer.

The Role of Writing Centers in Students' Academic Lives

Today, writing centers are widespread and can be found in a wide range of contexts. In addition to providing one-on-one tutoring, they reach out to faculty and collaborate with other campus departments to improve tutor training (Cannon & Jarson, 2009), offer courses in multimedia and multimodal communication (Balester et al., 2012), and develop resources for both students and staff (Corbett, 2015). The Writing Center Directory lists more than 1,720 centers in the United States alone (Mackiewicz, 2016), and they have become increasingly common in other countries as well (Archer & Richards, 2011). These writing centers serve students from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds at all levels of development in their writing, and help to support both access to and retention in higher education (Thonus, 2003). Center tutors model for students both the practices of experienced writers and the potential reactions of experienced readers (Mackiewicz, 2016), and they provide assistance with a variety of tasks from deciphering writing prompts and revising research papers (Missakian et al., 2016) to developing multimedia projects and understanding new, multimodal methods of communication (Balester et al., 2012). In a large-scale study of writing in high school and college, Addison and McGee (2010) note that 58% of college faculty report sending students to campus support services for writing such as writing centers. In addition,

although expectations and perceptions differ in terms of what writing centers should do, how effective they are, and how services might be improved, a year-long study of four community college writing centers found that, on average, tutors, students, and instructors shared positive views towards writing centers in general (Missakian et al., 2016). Taken together, this shows that, even though writing center work still faces challenges as people attempt to establish its value and professional status (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Geller & Denny, 2013; Vandenberg, 1999), writing centers can be—and often are—an important feature on university campuses.

Writing involves more than the act of putting words down on paper, and it both shapes and is shaped by the nuances of cultural and social contexts (Archer & Richards, 2011; Graham, 2018). Students engage in a wide range of writing tasks across different classes, read a variety of texts, and receive feedback from multiple sources, so it can be difficult to determine the exact impact of a few writing center visits on a student's writing development (Archer, 2008). However, it is possible to show how the writing center can make the process of writing less stressful and solitary, and how it can provide a safe space for students to develop their own academic voices (Archer, 2008). Kjesrud (2015) notes a trend towards evaluative studies of writing centers and calls for more exploratory and descriptive research that builds a more comprehensive picture and puts more emphasis on students' perspectives.

Responding to this need, my study aims to explore what students might take with them from the writing center and to situate their writing center experiences within the broader context of their experiences of learning to write in college so as to gain a more holistic understanding of both how and why students respond to the feedback they

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receive during center conferences the way they do. To accomplish this, I will focus on the following research questions:

1) What do students say they are learning from their writing center conferences, and how does it compare with what tutors say they are discussing?

2) How or to what extent does the advice and feedback students receive on an assignment influence their writing and revision processes for that specific text?

3) How do student users view the writing center, and how do they position the center within their college writing experiences?

1. Overview of Research Design & Methodology

Study Context

This study took place over the course of the 2018-2019 academic year at the writing center of the University of California, Irvine (UCI), a large, public university in Southern California with an ethnically and linguistically diverse student population. The UCI writing center, also called the Center for Excellence in Writing and Communication, provides both drop-in peer tutoring and one-on-one tutoring by appointment with full-time, professional tutors—referred to at the center as writing specialists—to all UCI undergraduate students. The center takes a discussion and process-oriented approach to developing students' writing skills with the goal of assisting them to become more confident and independent writers. According to the center website, students' learning outcomes after a writing center consultation should include being able to identify the genre and audience called for by an assignment prompt, develop self-guided revision strategies that allow them to both articulate and execute their own plans for revising their writing, and build a flexible understanding of writing processes, habits, and strategies that will allow them to write effectively in different contexts (UCI Center for Excellence in Writing & Communication, 2017).

Typically, this writing center serves large numbers of international students and students for whom English is a second language (see Table 1 for a breakdown of the students who used UCI writing center services over the 2018-2019 academic year).

Table 1: UCI Writing Center Student Demographics (2018-2019)

Race/Ethnicity		Student Year	
Chinese/Chinese-American	42.26%	1st Year	18.17%
Chicano/Mexican-American	14.94%	2nd Year	27.81%
White/Caucasian	8.75%	3rd Year	19.10%
Vietnamese	7.77%	4th Year $\leq$	34.49%
Decline to State	4.40%		
Korean	4.34%		
East Indian/Pakistani	3.83%	**Student Population**	
Black/African-American	3.17%		
Filipino/Filipino American	3.51%		
Latino/Other Spanish-American	2.88%		
Japanese/Japanese-American	1.34%	International students	40.10%
Thai/Other Asian	2.49%	First-generation students	43.04%
American Indian	0.09%	Transfer students	18.98%
Polynesian	0.17%	Veteran/military students	0.42%

10 Most Common Majors		Reason for Seeking Consultation	
Biological Sciences	11.04%	Course Assignments	84.18%
Business Economics	8.80%	Application Materials	10.96%
Mathematics	6.29%	Other	3.67%
Computer Science	5.46%	Statement of Purpose	1.19%
Undeclared	4.20%		
Psychology and Social Behavior	4.17%		
Economics	3.83%		
Education Sciences	3.56%		
Criminology, Law & Society	3.25%		
International Studies	3.04%		

Total tutoring sessions (appointment, drop-in, and online) = 9,681

Generally, use of center services is voluntary. However, some instructors strongly encourage or require their students to schedule a consultation with a writing specialist (full-time tutor). When booking an appointment, if students have never been to the writing center or have not been there for a long time, the online system assigns them randomly to a writing specialist depending on availability. If students have recently been to the center, then the system prioritizes specialists they have seen before. Some students will also schedule follow-up appointments directly with specialists they have previously consulted via email.

Participants

Since the goal of this study was to enrich our understanding of student perspectives on the writing center and the way writing center conferences might affect students' learning to write in college, I recruited participants from the undergraduate students who used writing center services at least once during the 2018-2019 academic year. I focused only on by-appointment consultations with writing specialists, because 1) all students would have the same amount of time with a tutor per conference and 2) tutoring with full-time, professional tutors (writing specialists) is a service that is not currently offered at many writing centers and so has not been extensively studied.

A total of 28 students participated in this study. Participation was voluntary, and students could withdraw at any time. The two writing specialists I collaborated with for this research introduced this study and its goals to each of the students who came in to see them. If the student agreed to participate, then the specialist audio-recorded that consultation. Afterwards, I followed up with those students to obtain copies of their

rough and final drafts and to schedule subsequent interviews throughout the year. Please

see Table 2 for an overview of study participants.

Table 2: Overview of Study Participants			
Language Background		**Student Year**	
English Only	6	1st Year	16
English & Chinese	8	2nd Year	4
English & Spanish	10	3rd Year	5
English & Tagalog	1	4th Year	2
English & Vietnamese	1	5th Year	1
Other	2		
Major (at first interview)		**Status**	
Biological Science	2	International Students	7
Business Econ	1	Transfer Students	2
Chemistry	1	**Used Peer Tutoring & Specialist Appointments**	
Criminology	2		
Economics	1		
Education	2	Yes, also used peer tutoring	11
Engineering	1	No, did not use peer tutoring	17
English	1		
Film & Media Studies	2	**Came Back to Writing Center in Following Quarters**	
Literary Journalism	1		
Math	2		
Micro Bio Engineering	1		
Pharm Sci	3	Yes, came back to writing center	7
Political Science	2	No, did not come back to writing center	13
Psychology & Social Behavior	3	Unable to confirm	8
Undeclared	3		
Total participants = 28 students			

Data Sources, Collection, and Analysis

This is a case study that examines the experiences of students who have used the tutoring services at the UCI writing center at least once over the 2018-2019 academic year. Data includes students' post-conference surveys from the 2018-2019 academic year for by-appointment consultations, writing specialists' post-consultation visit notes, students' post-consultation surveys for drop-in peer tutoring from the 2018 fall quarter, audio recordings and transcripts of 28 writing center student-specialist conferences, writing samples for each of the 28 student participants, and 1-3 follow-up interviews with each participant over the course of the academic year (see Table 3 for breakdown of data sources by research question).

Table 3: Data Sources and Analysis by Research Question		
Research Question	**Data Sources**	**Analytic Approach**
What do students say they are learning from their writing center conferences, and how does it compare with what tutors say they are discussing?	• All student exit surveys for specialist appointments from 2018-2019 • All post-consultation specialist visit notes from 2018-2019 • Student exit surveys for drop-in peer tutoring from fall quarter 2018-2019 • Student interviews (28 students, 1-3 interviews per, 56 interviews total)	• Student surveys and specialist visit notes were coded and compared for topics as they emerge from the data (i.e. if a student wrote he learned about sentence structure, then sentence structure was added to the topic list). • Student interviews were used to elaborate upon students' survey answers and to examine whether what they said they learned impacted their choices and understanding of writing later on.

How or to what extent does the advice/feedback students receive on an assignment at the writing center influence their writing and revision processes for that specific text?	• Writing conference transcripts (28 conferences) • Student writing samples (draft from conference and final draft) • Student interviews	• Conference transcripts were coded for topic episodes and specific revision suggestions. • Pre and post conference written drafts were compared to identify revisions and then analyzed—focusing on writing topics and suggestions from conference transcripts and how each topic was discussed. • Student interviews using stimulated recall after they complete their final drafts were used to elaborate upon why changes were or were not made and to help link student revisions with either certain conference interactions or other sources of writing feedback.
How do student users view the writing center, and how do they position the center within their college writing experiences?	• Student interviews (28 students, 1-3 interviews per student over academic year, 56 interviews total)	• Open-coding was used to analyze student interviews in order to identify themes and patterns in how students talked about and used the writing center over the course of one year as an undergraduate.

For research question 1. In order to examine student perspectives on what they are learning about or receiving assistance with at the writing center during their consultations with specialists, I analyzed students' post-consultation exit surveys. At the UCI writing center, all students are asked to complete a survey after their writing conferences that is submitted anonymously to the center database. These surveys included a free-response question that asks, "What did you learn about writing during your consultation?" (see Appendix B for full survey). This gave students a chance to explain in their own words what they felt like they learned from their meetings. I compiled and coded all of these responses for specialist appointments from the 2018-

2019 academic year ($n = 1,152$) in order to determine broad patterns in what students believed they were taking away with them about writing when they left the writing center.

Responses were coded using open-coding to identify different topics related to writing as they emerged from the data. For example, if a student wrote that she learned how to organize her essay, then "organization" was added to the coding framework if it was not already part of it. Language used for labeling each topic in the coding framework was drawn primarily from student responses in order to stay as faithful as possible to students' intended meanings. For this reason, I also decided to code a response as considering audience or reader perspectives only when an audience or readers were mentioned in explicit terms, even though considerations of audience can influence all areas of writing in some way. For example, when a student wrote that she learned how to write a personal statement for graduate school, it was coded only as "genre" for learning about a specific type of writing—graduate school personal statements. However, if she added that she learned how to make the statement more attractive to graduate schools, then the response would also be coded as discussing "audience and reader's perspectives," because it clearly states learning to appeal to a specific audience. My goal was to avoid reading more into a response than could reasonably be concluded from the specific words that a student wrote down.

Also, each response could contain several topics. For example, one student wrote, "I learn how to organize my ideas and integrate my artifact into my research paper." This statement contains references to two different aspects of writing—organizing ideas and also integrating an artifact into a research paper. So this was coded both as learning about

"organization, overall structure, and flow" and about "using evidence," which included how to integrate an outside source into an essay and how to connect a piece of evidence to a claim. In other words, each response was coded for the different ideas present within it. By the same token, a single idea could not be coded more than once. For instance, if a student wrote about learning to organize paragraphs, that response would be coded as addressing either "paragraph structure" or "organization and overall structure" depending on the rest of the statement, but it could not be coded as both despite the fact that organizing a single paragraph is part of organization in general. These distinctions helped to create both a more nuanced and comprehensive overview of all the writing topics that students said they learned about (see Appendix C for a complete list of topics and examples).

I developed and refined this coding framework through a preliminary round of coding where I coded all the student exit surveys from the 2018 fall quarter. During this process, I took a bottom-up approach to identify different topics and clarify their definitions (Erickson, 2004). Decisions such as what to code as "audience" and whether or not to separate "overall organization" and "paragraph structure" into two different topics were made at this time. The finalized list of topics consisted of 40 distinct codes, including "no answer" for blank responses and responses that did not relate to writing and "not specified" for vague responses like "I learned a lot" (see Appendix C for complete list). Then, using this finalized framework, I recoded the survey responses from the fall quarter and then coded the remaining surveys from the winter and spring quarters.

Next, in order to compare what students said about their meetings with specialists with what specialists said, I applied the coding framework to what specialists wrote in the

"visit notes" section of their post-consultation reports from the 2018-2019 academic year (n = 2,439).

For easier comparison, results for both student by-appointment exit surveys and specialist visit notes were calculated in terms of the percentage of responses that mentioned a particular topic, not including "no answer" responses (i.e. "organization, overall structure, and flow" appeared in 20.54% of students' appointment exit surveys and 29.32% of specialists' visit notes). "No answer" responses, however, were not included in these calculations. Due to the large number of blank responses, it was easier to see general patterns in writing topics discussed when "no answer" responses were excluded.

Then, in order to see whether student responses about what they learned were different when they worked with a writing specialist as opposed to a peer tutor, I coded an additional sample of student post-consultation exit surveys from peer tutor drop-in consultations (n = 919). These responses were then compared with the student exit surveys from specialist appointments. Since most writing centers do not employ full-time, professional tutors (i.e. writing specialists), this analysis helped determine what similarities or differences there might be for students when centers offer consultations with professional tutors in addition to the peer tutors that typically make up a majority of writing center staff (for a full list of topics and percentages across these three groups, see Appendix C).

Lastly, data from subsequent interviews conducted with 28 students over the course of the year was used to corroborate and expand upon the results of the student surveys. Although exact matches between student participants and their specific exit

surveys was not possible, these interviews helped to provide additional insight into the different aspects of writing that were mentioned in student surveys. More importantly, these follow-up interviews highlighted some of the lessons learned about writing that actually stayed with these students months after their consultation—things about writing that they not only remembered, but still thought about when they wrote.

For research question 2. In order to better understand how and to what extent students' writing center conferences affect the way they write and revise their papers, I analyzed the writing center conferences of 28 undergraduates alongside their pre and post conference written drafts, and conducted follow-up interviews with each student to discuss the changes that they made. Student participants' writing center consultations with their specialists were recorded with their permission, and I contacted students to confirm due dates for their papers, collect their revised drafts, and set up follow-up interviews.

Prior to each interview, I reviewed the conference recording and took notes on the different topics that were discussed, similar to what Williams (2004) did in a similar study of writing centers and student revision. Then I compared that student's pre and post conference drafts line by line and recorded any changes that the student made. I used these notes about each student's revisions along with notes from their conferences to assist in my analysis of students' revision processes, examining, for instance, how a suggestion on reorganizing a paper might be related to differences in organization between the pre and post conference drafts. I also provided these notes—minus any notes to myself on whether a change was discussed during the conference—to students during our interviews to help them find the changes they made in their drafts in order to talk

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about them. This was helpful for some students, because these papers were often quite long, some running up to 15 pages double-spaced, and sifting through all these pages between two drafts to find their own revisions could be challenging in the limited time frame of an interview.

I scheduled follow-up interviews with students after they finished and turned in the final drafts of whichever paper they worked on in the writing conference that was recorded. At the interview, I provided students with copies of their rough draft, their revised final draft, and my notes on the differences I observed in order to help stimulate students' recall of the choices they made during revision and their reasons for making those choices. I asked them to compare their drafts and explain what they could remember of their reasons for each change—whether, for instance, they added a hook because they found an example online or because a classmate suggested it. I encouraged students to talk about their approach to working on their papers as a whole, going beyond just what they did or talked about with their writing center specialists. While I prepared some questions before each interview that were specific to a particular student and his or her paper, my other questions included queries about students' past writing experiences— such as whether students had written similar texts in the past and learned how to approach similar types of writing prior to the current assignment—and what other sources of feedback or assistance they sought or received for the paper in question—peer feedback from class activities, for instance, or discussions with their professors (see Appendix A for semi-structured interview protocol).

As mentioned previously, the goal of this study was not to evaluate whether students' improved their papers, but to create a more comprehensive picture of how

students responded to the feedback they received from their specialists and why they subsequently made the choices that they made. By meeting with students face to face and allowing them the chance to explain their revisions in their own words, these interviews and analysis also provided insights into the types of feedback from specialists that were more likely to lead to revisions, as well as how other factors like students' own preferences and interpretation affected how revisions were carried out.

For research question 3. Finally, in order to explore the ways in which students who have used the writing center view the center in relation to themselves and their writing, as well as how the writing center might fit into their broader experiences of learning to write in college, I conducted 1-3 semi-structured interviews with each of the 28 participants over the course of the academic year. Initial interviews included questions about why they decided to go to the writing center, what their expectations were, whether their expectations were met, whether they feel like they learned anything about writing that they could apply to future work, what they found most and least helpful about their writing conferences, and what kinds of writing assistance they received from other sources such as teachers, family, and friends. Subsequent interviews included questions about the courses students were taking, any writing that they were doing in the current quarter, whether they continued to use writing center services, who they have asked for writing assistance, anything they still think about from their writing center visits when they write, and what circumstances might cause them to return to the writing center in the future (see Appendix A for semi-structured interview protocol).

I analyzed transcripts of these interviews ($n = 56$) using open-coding to determine themes in how students talked about and used the writing center. For example, students

often talked about seeking writing center help because their paper was worth a large portion of their course grades, and having a high-stakes assignment was a situation often cited by students as one that might cause them to make a writing center appointment in the future. At the same time, students who did not continue to use writing center services often explained that it was because they had very little writing to do for their classes that quarter or the writing they had was short, easy, and not graded in a strict manner. By identifying these themes and examining them in the broader context of students' other experiences with college writing, this analysis helps to improve our understanding of how students both see and use the writing center as they navigate the challenges of learning to write in higher education.

2. Key Terms

Writing Specialist (Specialist): a professional, full-time tutor employed by the UCI writing center who generally provides by-appointment consultations with students

Peer Tutor (Tutor): a part-time tutor who is also a UCI student and who generally provides drop-in consultations for their fellow undergraduates

In the following three chapters, the word "tutor" will be used exclusively to refer to peer tutors. The full-time tutors employed by the writing center will be called specialists.

3. After the Conference, What Students Said

Research Question 1: What do students say they are learning from their writing center conferences, and how does it compare with what writing specialists [full time tutors] say they are discussing? Additionally, is what students say they learn about writing from their writing specialist appointments different from what they say about peer tutor consultations?

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a preliminary exploration of what students are working on and learning about writing when they visit the writing center, as well as whether students and writing specialists in particular see the focus of their consultations in similar ways . Before sharing the results of my analysis of students' writing center exit surveys and writing specialists' visit notes, however, it is important to remember the contextual differences between the data sources used to examine student perspectives versus writing specialist perspectives. For students, this study focused on an open-ended question that appeared near the end of their writing center exit surveys that asked, "What did you learn about writing during your consultation?" In contrast, specialists simply had a "visit notes" section in their post consultation reports, which they could fill out after each appointment. Due to these differences, it is difficult to make concrete claims about the similarities or differences across these two groups. However, that being said, all of this information is routinely collected by the writing center throughout the year, and it provides us with a descriptive picture of broad patterns in what students and specialists are saying about their consultations.

The following chapter is divided into two parts. First, I will compare the post-conference responses of students and specialists for by-appointment writing specialist consultations. Second, I will examine students' post-consultation responses after appointments with writing specialists as opposed to after drop-in consultations with peer tutors—two services offered by the UCI writing center. Similarities and differences will be discussed across these two sections, and I will end with some general conclusions.

Comparing What Students and Specialists Say About Their Writing Center Consultations

In response to the exit survey question, "What did you learn about writing during your consultation?" students gave a wide variety of answers. The top ten writing-related topics that students reported learning about are listed in the table below, along with the top ten writing-related topics that specialists wrote about in their post-consultation visit notes (see Table 4; see Appendix C for a complete list of topics and example responses).

Table 4: Top 10 Topics in Student Exit Surveys vs Writing Specialist Post-Visit Notes			
From Student Exit Surveys for Specialist Consultations		From Specialist Post Visit Notes	
Organization, Overall Structure, and Flow	20.54%	Organization, Overall Structure, and Flow	29.32%
Genre	10.33%	Planning, Outlining, and Brainstorming	18.39%
Grammar and Punctuation	10.11%	Genre	16.20%

Not Specified (i.e. I learned "a lot" or I learned to "improve my writing")	8.80%	Grammar and Punctuation	16.00%
Expand, Develop, Elaborate On, Relate, and Clarify Ideas	8.70%	Expand, Develop, Elaborate On, Relate, and Clarify Ideas	15.21%
General Beliefs, Philosophies, Rules, and Truisms about Writing	8.70%	Understanding and Addressing a Prompt	13.02%
Self Editing and Revision Strategies	8.04%	Self Editing and Revision Strategies	11.73%
Using Evidence	6.52%	Audience and Reader Response	10.04%
Understanding and Addressing a Prompt	6.41%	Being Specific	9.84%
Being Specific	6.30%	Using Evidence	9.15%

Note: Responses were coded for the 2018-2019 academic year. Total student survey responses = 920. Total specialist responses = 1006.

Figure 1: Top Tpoics Discussed in Writing Center Consultations, Students vs. Specialists
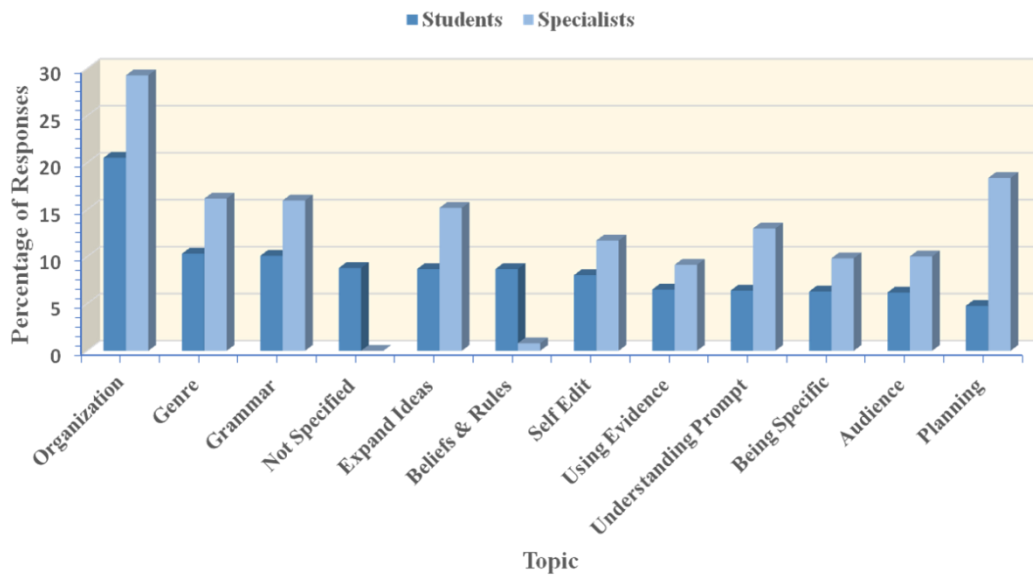
As we can see from Table 4, although the order of the topics vary, the top ten for

students and specialists overlapped a great deal, sharing seven out of ten topics. Also,

with the exception of grammar and punctuation, the top ten aspects of writing mentioned

by both students and specialists generally related to global writing issues as opposed to local or sentence-level concerns.

Organization, overall structure, and flow was the most common aspect of writing mentioned by both students (20.54%) and specialists (29.32%; see Table 4). It also ranked highly in students' exit surveys for peer tutor drop-in consultations, appearing in 13.69% of students' survey responses (see Table 5), making it the most common topic of discussion in both appointment and drop-in writing center consultations. This result echoes the findings of two other writing center studies, which found organization and structure to be among students' top concerns entering into a consultation, as well as in their during-consultation discussions and post-consultation revision plans (Cross & Catchings, 2018; Winder et al., 2016).

For students, organization was generally about learning different ways to present their ideas that would make the pieces of their paper fit together in a logical manner. For example, one student wrote that "I learned to have a parallel structure between paragraphs and to break a paragraph into two if it has two ideas in it." Organization was not about learning one specific structure. Instead, it was about learning that different structures exist and that conscious consideration of structure mattered when writing—that the way a paper is organized can influence its quality. As another student wrote, "Paragraph organization can be a useful tool for simplifying flow in a paper." In other words, students like this one learned that organization is a tool that they can use to affect their writing in different ways, to influence how readers read their work.

Similarly, specialists reported assisting students in translating their ideas into a coherent structure. For instance, one specialist wrote, "We talked through her audience

and purpose, and then used those ideas to draft an organization for the paper." Here, the role of the specialist was to assist students in the process of developing a structure for the student's ideas by discussing with the student what her goals were, what she wanted to write about, and who she was writing to.

Additionally, analysis of follow-up interviews with students throughout the year showed that the work they did with specialists on organization was frequently cited by students as something that they still thought about from their writing center consultations when they wrote. Sometimes, this happened in straightforward ways, such as when one student re-used a paper structure that she discussed with a specialist for a different paper the previous quarter—taking a phrase from her paper, such as a metaphor, and breaking it up into subtitles to form the sections of her essay (Student 01A). In the same way, another student explained that she still thought about how her specialist impressed upon her the importance of writing down her main thesis at the start of her essay and using it to outline the rest of her paper so that there would be a logical flow in her presentation of ideas (Student 06K). Other students talked about how their work with their specialists continued to influence the way they approached organization. As one student put it, her specialist taught her to "think from a reader's perspective" when choosing and organizing the information in her paper so as to ensure that it would be clear and that she included explanations of her ideas in the appropriate places so readers could follow her thinking (Student 03K). From these responses, it appears that writing center discussions about how to organize one's writing were not only common but also had lasting impacts upon students' development as writers.

General beliefs, philosophies, rules, and truisms about writing appeared in 8.70%
of student surveys, making it the sixth most commonly referenced aspect of writing in
student responses about what they learned about writing from specialist consultations. It
was also the most commonly referenced topic in student responses that did not appear in
the top ten topics discussed by specialists. These beliefs, rules, and philosophies included
general statements about writing such as "writing doesn't have any boundaries" and
"sometimes less means more," as well as personal realizations like "I can incorporate my
major into my writing, thus making me passionate about what I'm going to write about."
In contrast, only 0.80% of specialist visit notes explicitly mentioned discussing such
writing beliefs or attitudes, one example being a specialist who wrote "I tried to impress
upon him the importance of engaging in very close analysis of the passages he quoted."
The phrasing of this statement, which mentions a desire to make students realize the
"importance" of doing something, implies a desire to change the student's attitude
towards a certain writing task. The low percentage of such sentiments in specialist notes
is not surprising, as specialists probably do not set out to teach writing philosophies
during their consultations. Regardless, student survey responses suggest that, in addition
to general knowledge and skills, students' writing center discussions can and do influence
their attitudes and beliefs about writing. This applied both to specialist and peer tutor
consultations, despite the fact that some students reported in subsequent interviews
feeling that writing specialists knew more about writing and were more "professional"
than peer tutors (see Appendix C).

Planning and brainstorming ranked in the top ten in specialist visit notes at
18.39%, but not in student surveys where it was only mentioned in 4.78% of responses

(see Figure 1). It is possible that this reflects a tendency to focus more on the product rather than the process when talking about writing on the part of students, and that what specialists see as planning and brainstorming might differ from what students perceive as planning and brainstorming. In follow-up interviews, for example, students generally said that even though they believed the writing center could be a place for brainstorming, they would prefer to come to a specialist appointment with a complete rough draft. This seems to suggest that students think about planning and brainstorming as something that comes before writing rather than a part of the revision process. Whereas, in comparison, specialists may see discussing what changes to make to a draft as another part of planning and brainstorming. It is also possible that this difference is due to the fact that students were asked what they learned whereas specialists were making notes about the consultation. Even if what specialists did with students was plan students' next steps, what students actually learned about writing could have been something entirely different that emerged from the planning session, such as how they could expand their ideas.

Like planning, audience ranked in the top ten in specialist visit notes but not in student surveys. The fact that only 6.20% of student exit surveys mention audience as opposed to 10.04% of specialist visit notes could be due to the fact that responses were only coded as relating to audience or reader response when students specifically mentioned learning about responding to a reader or an audience. In many ways, almost all aspects of writing are influenced by considerations of audience, so I decided to code responses as referring to audience only when it was mentioned explicitly, such as when one student wrote about learning "how to give a specific direction to audience" (see Appendix C). This response was coded both as referring to audience and as learning to be

specific. If the student had simply written "how to give a specific direction" and stopped there, it would have been counted only as talking about being specific—even though one major reason a writer should give a specific direction when writing is to help guide a reader. It seems likely, therefore, that the lower percentage of student responses versus specialist notes that mention audience could be because students simply are not as articulate about how audience relates to the moves they make in writing, not that students do not feel they are learning about how to take audience into account.

Lastly, "not specified" was in the top ten for student responses, but did not apply to specialist visit notes. Responses were coded as not specified when they were vague—for example, when students wrote that they learned "a lot" about writing or stated simply that they found the specialist to be very helpful. This was not applicable to specialist notes as specialists were always more specific when they wrote about what they did during their meetings. As for why these ambiguous responses were so common amongst student responses, comprising 8.80% of their answers, it is possible that students found it difficult to identify or articulate specific things that they learned about writing. It is also possible that students simply did not want to write a long or detailed response, especially since the open-ended question about what they learned was optional and came near the end of the survey (see Appendix B for the exit survey).

Comparing What Students Say After Specialist Appointments and Peer Tutor Drop-Ins

Before examining what students said they learned about writing from their meetings with writing specialists as opposed to peer tutors, it is important to note that the

consultation format for peer tutors was different from that for specialists. Where specialist consultations were by appointment and lasted 45-60 minutes, the peer tutor consultations were drop-in consultations and typically only lasted about 15-30 minutes. It is reasonable to assume that these differences, especially in terms of time allotment, influenced what was discussed during each consultation. Also, data on what the peer tutors themselves thought about each drop-in consultation was not available. That said, subsequent interviews with students highlighted some interesting differences in the way students who used both services perceived writing specialists and peer tutors, which may help to explain some of the differences in what students report learning about writing from these two different groups.

As we can see from Table 5, the top ten writing-related topics that students report learning about from specialists and from peer tutors have a number of similarities and differences.

Table 5: Top 10 Topics in
Student Exit Surveys for Specialist Appointments vs Peer Tutor Drop-Ins

From Student Exit Surveys for Specialist Appointment Consultations		From Student Exit Surveys for Peer Drop-In Tutoring	
Organization, Overall Structure, and Flow	20.54%	Grammar and Punctuation	14.96%
Genre	10.33%	Organization, Overall Structure, and Flow	13.69%
Grammar and Punctuation	10.11%	Expand, Develop, Elaborate On, Relate, and Clarify Ideas	10.58%
Not Specified	8.80%	Thesis and Claims	9.31%

Expand, Develop, Elaborate On, Relate, and Clarify Ideas	8.70%	Not Specified	8.21%
General Beliefs, Philosophies, Rules, and Truisms about Writing	8.70%	Sentence Structures	8.03%
Self Editing and Revision Strategies	8.04%	Being Specific	6.57%
Using Evidence	6.52%	Using Evidence	6.39%
Understanding and Addressing a Prompt	6.41%	Vocabulary and Word Choice	6.39%
Being Specific	6.30%	Paragraph Structure / General Beliefs, Philosophies, Rules, and Truisms about Writing	6.02%
Note: Total by-appointment student survey responses = 920 (2018-2019 academic year). Total peer tutor drop-in student survey responses = 548 (Fall quarter, 2018).			

Figure 2: Top Topics Discussed in Writing Center Consultations, Student Answers from Appointment vs. Drop-Ins
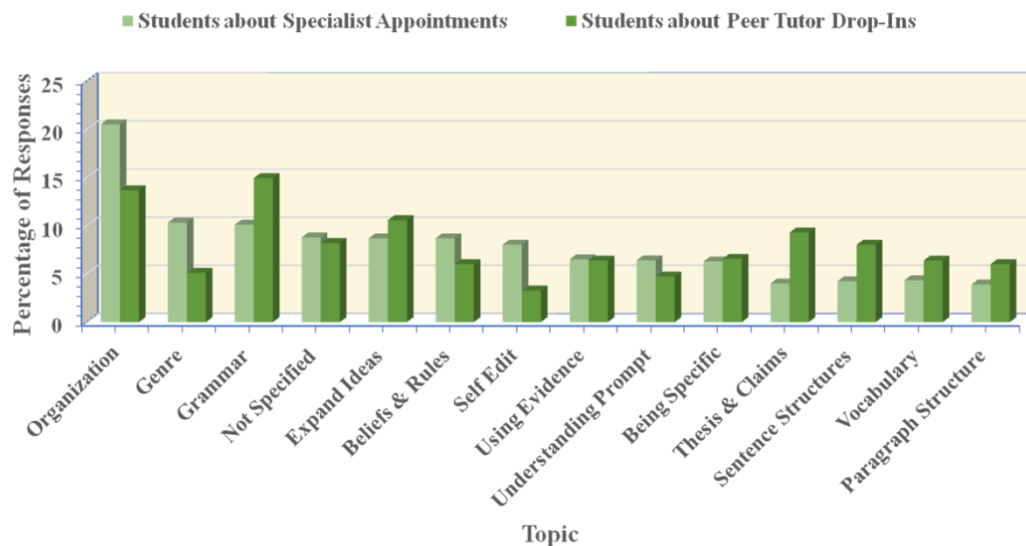
Genre appears in the top ten for student exit surveys for specialists, but not for

peer tutor drop-ins (see Table 5). Responses were coded as talking about genre when they

mentioned learning about specific types of writing or rhetorical techniques used in

different disciplines. For example, when students wrote statements like they learned "how to compose a personal statement for graduate school" or "how to think more like a philosopher," they were coded as referring to genre (for more examples, see Appendix C). Where genre appeared in 10.33% of specialist appointment exit surveys, it only appeared in 5.11% of the exit surveys for peer tutor drop-in consultations. This could be because students are more likely to book a longer appointment when faced with an unfamiliar genre. In follow-up interviews, many students said that having to write in a new genre was one reason they initially sought out writing center services. Other students noted that they were planning to schedule an appointment later in the quarter when they knew they would be starting a writing assignment in a genre they were unfamiliar with. In other words, students tended to know early on when they received assignments in genres they knew less about, and this meant they were able to schedule appointments at the writing center ahead of time accordingly. They were more able to plan ahead for how to tackle such assignments rather than relying on drop-in consultations.

Self-editing and revision strategies was another topic that appeared in the top ten for specialist appointments, but not for peer tutor drop-ins. Where 8.04% of specialist appointment exit surveys mentioned learning strategies for students to edit and revise their writing on their own—for instance, when one student wrote that "I learned to ask myself questions that will help improve my argument," similar mentions appeared in only 3.28% of the exit surveys for drop-in peer tutors. In subsequent student interviews, students who had used both types of services often expressed the opinion that peer tutors were more tentative in their suggestions whereas specialists tended to be more clear and assertive about the steps that students could—and maybe should—take to improve their

writing. It is possible that this perceived difference in clarity made it easier for students to identify specific strategies from their consultations with specialists. It is also possible that specialists took a more strategy-based approach when working with students to improve their writing. For example, one student explained that she found it extremely helpful how the specialist helped her narrow down areas of grammar that she could focus on to improve her writing, "summarizing" the mistakes she made most often (Student 03K). Not only that, but these would be areas of grammar she could work on specific to her own writing, which she found more useful than her regular class grammar instruction, as those were not necessarily mistakes that she would make. In contrast, she felt that with peer tutors, oftentimes, they knew something was wrong with her sentences and she knew something was wrong with her sentences, but neither of them could articulate what the exact problem was. In her words, "I know this is a problem, and she knows, or he knows, but both of us cannot explain why it is a problem" (Student 03K). For her, this meant she felt more able to learn and apply what she learned about writing from specialist appointments. These perceived differences between writing specialist and peer tutors on the part of students will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Understanding and addressing a prompt was also in the top ten for specialist appointments, but not for peer tutor drop-ins, appearing in 6.41% and 4.74% of student exit surveys from appointments and drop-ins respectively (see Figure 5). This could be due to the fact that students often preferred to take more challenging or confusing assignments to specialists as opposed to peer tutors, as a few students stated in follow-up interviews. As one student put it, she felt that peer tutors were great resources for "casual" or easy writing assignments where she simply wanted a second opinion. On the

other hand, specialists were her preferred option if the writing assignment was serious or high-stakes—or if she was completely stuck and did not know what to do.

A number of topics ranked in the top ten for drop-in tutoring that did not do so for specialist appointments. These included thesis and claims, sentence structures, paragraph structures, and vocabulary and word choice (see Table 5). One thing that all of these have in common is that they can be worked on even when looking only at a small part of an essay—a single paragraph, for instance. This aligns with what students who used both types of services said in follow-up interviews—namely that they would use drop-in tutoring if they only had something short like a blog entry to work on or simply wanted to double check something like grammar, but would make an appointment if they had a long draft or wanted more holistic writing feedback. Students often expressed the opinion that to take full advantage of a specialist appointment, it would be important for them to have a complete rough draft, whereas peer tutor drop-ins were effective if they were looking for quick help or just wanted someone to look over their sentences and check for mistakes. This could also explain why grammar was the most commonly mentioned aspect of writing that students felt they learned about during drop-in consultations, as several students cited grammar as something they would choose to see a peer tutor for rather than making an appointment with a specialist (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of students' writing center use).

Similarly, there was more of a balance between global concerns and local or sentence-level writing concerns in the top ten aspects of writing that students reported learning about in the exit surveys from peer tutor drop-ins than specialist appointments, including grammar and sentence structure. Vocabulary and word choice, which can be

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classified as either a global or a local concern depending on the specific nature of the issue discussed (Cross & Catchings, 2018), was also prevalent in peer tutor exit surveys. These results complement the findings of a study by Cross and Catchings (2018), which examined students' post-consultation revision plans from this same writing center and found a balance between students' addressing of global and local writing issues with a slightly higher proportion of student responses expressing the desire to make global or higher-order revisions. They also found a greater emphasis on global revisions in the plans of students after specialist appointments as opposed to peer tutor consultations. It is possible that more global concerns rank higher in specialist appointment exit surveys, because writing specialists focus more on higher-order, global concerns than peer tutors. However, it is also possible, as Cross and her colleague suggest, that this difference is because specialists have more time with their students, and so are more able to look at an entire draft and address each student's writing as a whole—as well as providing students with more time to grapple with complex ideas. In turn, these time constraints are likely one reason that students in my interviews preferred to take longer papers to specialists and expected specialists to review more of their drafts than they expected drop-in peer tutors to.

Conclusions and Implications

Overall, two broad patterns emerged from this analysis of writing specialist appointment consultation student exit surveys, drop-in tutoring student exit surveys, and writing specialist visit notes.

First, many of the most common writing-related topics that students reported learning about from their appointment consultations overlapped with what specialists commonly reported discussing. This suggests that, for the most part, students and specialists are on the same page in regards to what knowledge and skills they are developing in their consultations. Additionally, these often related to more global writing issues such as organization, genre, and idea development, which aligns with common writing center pedagogy that asks tutors to prioritize global or higher-order concerns over lower-order or sentence-level concerns (Cross & Catchings, 2018). Organization and overall structure, in particular, turned out to be an important topic and entailed not only talking about how writing might be structured in order to demonstrate a logical flow, but also learning the importance of structure as a tool for conveying meaning.

Second, students' most common takeaways from drop-in peer tutoring differed in comparison to their most common takeaways from specialist by-appointment consultations. Rather than being higher-order or lower-order, for peer tutor drop-in consultations, the shared trait that seems to best describe the aspects of writing students most frequently report learning about is that they are nearly all things that can easily be discussed while looking only at a short piece of writing like a single statement or paragraph—sentence structure, thesis, and word choice, for example. This was complemented by what students said in follow-up interviews, where they cited drop-in peer tutoring as a good resource for short or easy writing assignments and specialist appointments as the better option for long, complex, or high-stakes work (I will discuss this difference in more detail in Chapter 5).

In addition to these broad patterns, it is interesting to note, considering the writing center's goal of creating more independent writers (Hoon, 2007), that students more often reported learning specific self-editing and revision strategies from appointment consultations as opposed to peer tutor drop-ins. In other words, survey responses suggest that students feel that they learn skills and strategies that they can apply on their own to edit and revise their writing more often from specialist appointments than from consultations with peer tutors. Even when working on grammar, students often wrote not only about correcting grammar errors with their specialists but developing their ability to identify and fix errors independently. There could be a number of reasons for this. The difference in time constraints for these two consultation formats may play a role in students' development of writing strategies, peer tutors and writing specialists could have different approaches to tutoring or different focuses due to varying degrees of expertise, or students could be affecting their consultations by bringing different personal agendas to specialist versus peer tutor consultations. Further research would need to be done to determine which, if any, of these play a more important role. More detailed comparisons of peer tutoring and specialist appointments are beyond the scope of this study.

Lastly, although it did not make it into the top ten topics discussed during by-appointment or drop-in consultations, a number of students felt that what they learned about writing was what their own strengths and weaknesses were as writers (3.37% from specialist appointments, and 1.09% from peer tutor drop-ins; see Appendix C). This is worth noting, because it highlights the writing center as a place where students can potentially find assistance figuring out not only what they could or should work on but what skills they already possess. A clear and accurate understanding of one's own

knowledge, abilities, and tendencies plays an important role in one's learning and performance (Azizi et al., 2017; Negretti, 2012). By developing a deeper understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, students are better positioned to leverage their resources, to focus their time and energy in an efficient manner, and to direct future discussions when seeking writing feedback.

In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at what actually happens with their writing after students leave the writing center and begin working to revise their drafts based upon the discussions that they had.

4. How Students Responded to Writing Center Feedback

Research Question 2: How or to what extent does the advice and feedback students receive on an assignment influence their writing and revision processes for that specific text?

Unlike the feedback that they receive from their classroom instructors, there is little pressure for students to follow through on the feedback and advice that they receive during writing center consultations—a fact that some students in this study noted as a major selling point of seeking assistance from the writing center. So then, how or to what extent does the feedback and suggestions students receive during their writing center consultations influence their subsequent revisions? To answer this question, I compared the writing center consultation transcripts and pre and post consultation drafts of 28 undergraduate students and conducted follow-up interviews with each student to discuss the revisions that she or he chose to make.

In this chapter, I will start with a discussion of broad patterns in the different ways students responded to feedback while making their post-writing center visit revisions. I will follow that by illustrating two student examples, in which I will present 1) what was discussed during their writing center consultations, 2) what changes were present in their final drafts, and 3) how they talked about the revisions that they made during our interviews. The chapter will end with some of the implications of these student responses and my concluding thoughts as a former peer writing tutor.

A Discussion of Students' Revisions After Leaving the Writing Center

The process of writing and learning to write is influenced by many internal and external factors (Graham, 2018), and the same was true of the revisions that students made to their papers after they left their writing center consultations. How easy students believed it was to implement a suggestion, for instance, as well as students' personal likes and interests played important roles in not only what revisions they attempted but also how those attempts were carried out. This was more true, however, for large-scale or complex revisions than it was for minor, sentence-level changes like adding a word or removing an extra citation. In other words, the larger the revision, the more it was impacted by outside factors such as:

- How easy or challenging a revision was to carry out

- How students interpreted the feedback they received

- How much time students and specialists spent in a consultation discussing and developing a shared understanding of a possible revision and the reasons behind it

- Students' assessment of their own capabilities, goals, and resources

- How much time students had to revise before an assignment was due

- How students managed and prioritized their coursework

- Whether students liked or disliked a suggested revision

- Whether and how students took notes during their consultations

- How much work students already put into revising, and how much of that work might have to be thrown out to make another revision

Minor or Sentence-Level Revisions

Generally, students made all or most of the minor or simple changes that their specialists suggested to them. These could include editing small grammar mistakes, italicizing a title that was supposed to be italicized, or changing the name of an author that was cited incorrectly. It could also include minor changes beyond what one might typically think of as editing—changes that influenced the larger meaning of the paper, but did not involve rewriting or reorganizing large portions of the text. One instance of this was in the introductory paragraph of a student's paper, which was focused on issues of anti-feminism in books and movies. In her early draft, the student included the quote "Tommy treated Juliette more like a daughter than a colleague" as an example of descriptions that the author uses to criticize Tommy's treatment of women (Student 32A). Although the student chose this quote to show Tommy's discrimination towards a female colleague, the specialist pointed out during their consultation that being treated like a daughter, while unprofessional, could be considered a good thing. In other words, the quote could be interpreted in a different way and was not an obvious example of discrimination. Therefore, in her later draft, the student replaced the quote with a different quote that stated, "serial humiliation became another obstacle to smash through." This new quote, the student explained in our follow-up interview, was more obviously negative than her previous one, which made it a better example for the larger issues she would be addressing in her essay. This was a minor revision, because the sentences both before and after this revision remained unchanged; all the student did was swap out one quote for another. However, by choosing a different quote, the student was able to focus her introduction more on her intended argument. Again, this was just one

example of the many small-scale changes that students tended to carry out exactly as suggested.

Large-Scale or Complex Revisions

In contrast to suggestions for minor changes and sentence-level edits, students' responses to feedback involving more complex revisions were more subject to other factors such as students' interpretation of the suggested revision and students' evaluations of their own resources and capabilities. Although students generally attempted to respond to such feedback in some way, the relationship between specialists' suggestions and students' revisions was often less straightforward, and students did occasionally decide not to act on certain pieces of advice.

Interpretation of feedback. The way students interpret and understand feedback impacts how they respond to it (Lee & Street, 2000; Price et al, 2010). This was especially evident in the way students approached more large-scale or complex revisions after their writing center consultations.

When students and specialists took time to discuss and develop a shared understanding of the suggested revision and the reasons behind it, the revisions students actually made were more likely to reflect what they discussed during their consultation. One student, for example, was asked to write a museum ethnography paper for her art history class where she had to visit a museum and write about how visitors engaged with the various museum exhibits. In her early draft, the student was extremely critical of museum visitors and included a great deal of her own feelings and opinions about her

visit, including a note about how she looked forward to visiting other museums in the Los

Angeles county. In her introduction, for instance, she wrote:

> After taking both tours that are offered, the architecture and garden, I have come
> to the realization that the lack of people's engagement in this museum is due to
> social media, consequently causing a more ignorant and careless society that
> doesn't seem to realize the importance of history. (Student 42A)

Here, the student makes broad and somewhat harsh claims about both the impact of

social media and how society is today, describing society as "ignorant" and "careless,"

and she continued to make similar moves through the rest of her draft. During her

consultation, the specialist pointed these things out several times, explaining how the

student might seem "unreliable" to a reader because she made such strong claims without

providing factual evidence from her observations to support her conclusions. They

discussed how the purpose of this paper was to report on and analyze her observations,

not her opinions. As the specialist said, "As a researcher, you're just observing" as

opposed to passing judgment. In other words, it was important to be more objective in

both what she argued and the language she used to make that argument, as well as to

include more details and supporting evidence. By constantly asking her to explain how

she knew that the claims she was making were true and asking her to elaborate on what

she actually saw that caused her to make such claims, the specialist pushed the student to

think about what appreciating an art exhibit might actually look like and to examine in

more detail how she saw people using social media and what that might mean. As a

result, in her revised draft, the student grounded her paper more in her observations and

less in her own feelings, qualifying her claims so that they were better supported by the

evidence she had. For instance, that same passage from the introduction quoted above

was revised to read:

> After taking both tours that are offered, the architecture and garden, I was able to observe the difference in appreciation and how pictures played an important role in people's experience at the museum. (Student 42A)

Rather than simply denouncing museum visitors, social media, and society as a whole, the student softened her claim to acknowledge that there might be different ways for people to appreciate art and that taking pictures—or sharing pictures on social media, as she writes later in the paper—could play a role in people's interactions with art. She made similar revisions throughout her revised draft, adjusting both her argument and the language she used—as well as adding more details on her observation process, like how she was able to track the social media posts of her tour group on her own phone—to make her paper, in her own words, less "biased" (Student 42A). She was too judgmental in her old draft, she explained during our interview, something that the specialist had also said during their consultation, and that was why she made these changes, in order to place herself in the role of an observer as the assignment had asked her to do.

It seems important to note that the student and specialist discussed these revisions throughout their consultation, returning to the idea of being objective and anchoring her claims in her observations several times over the course of reviewing the student's paper. The fact that it was a recurring theme—in the questions that the specialist asked the student to consider and in the suggestions that the specialist gave on what to omit or elaborate upon—was likely a major reason why the student was able to implement the revisions they discussed in this way. There were other instances where this was not the case, and there were apparent discrepancies between a student's revisions and the specialist's advice.

In another consultation, for example, the specialist pointed out the student's argument structure and said, "As we continue reading, I'm really wondering about the

order of your paragraphs" (Student 26A). She explained that the student should arrange her paragraphs so that "your points build on each other instead of being six points," and gave the example of how the student could talk about how many different pieces of artwork were created during the Spanish conquest and then move from there to singling out and talking about one specific painting. From this example, it can be inferred that by building upon previous points and having an order to her paragraphs, the specialist meant for the student to think about making the ideas connect in a way that her readers can easily follow. As the specialist explained, the relationship between the six points the student made should not only be "revealed" at the end of the paper. This talk about organization did not, however, translate into the student's revised draft in quite the same way as the specialist suggested. Yes, the student altered the order of her paragraphs, but rather than choosing that order based upon the relationship between her ideas, she chose it based upon what points she felt she had better evidence for. The points in her argument that she felt she had more to say about went at the beginning and the end, whereas the point she felt was weakest went in the middle where a reader might be more likely to gloss over it. Although this was clearly not what the specialist meant by building "momentum" through her paragraphs, when asked, the student said that yes, she believed that she had addressed the specialist's advice.

One possible reason for this discrepancy was how little discussion actually occurred around the subject of organization during the consultation. The specialist gave examples and explained how the order of the paragraphs might help or hinder a reader's understanding once in the middle of their meeting and once near the end when they were reviewing what the student needed to do, but the student spoke very little in response.

The student asked only one question on the topic, and that was whether what the specialist said meant that she should make her third paragraph into her second paragraph (Student 26A). It is unclear from this single question whether the student actually understood what the specialist was saying, or whether she was simply trying to pin down one paragraph order in the potential structures that the specialist was suggesting. Whatever the case, these examples support the idea that how students interpret feedback affects how they implement that feedback during revisions, and that students and specialists are more likely to develop a shared understanding of suggested revisions when they take more time to discuss them. Such discussions not only help to ameliorate a common problem with writing feedback where vague and confusing language make it difficult for students to respond (Ferris, 1995; Nelson & Schunn, 2009; Price et al., 2010; Weaver, 2006), it speaks to one of the advantages of seeking feedback at a writing center where one-on-one discussions about writing are commonplace.

Assessment of one's own capabilities, goals, and resources. Students' knowledge and beliefs about their own abilities influence the choices that they make when approaching a particular task (Negretti, 2012), and this could be seen in the decisions some students made in regards to complex revisions after their writing center consultations. For instance, in the case of one student who was working on a poem for a class on Beowulf where she had to introduce herself like a Viking, her belief about her own abilities was one of several reasons she chose *not* to attempt a revision suggested by her specialist that would have involved re-conceptualizing her entire poem (Student 35A). The student had originally written a straightforward fantasy piece, relaying a purely fictional story about slaying monsters meant to make her look "badass" for her

audience, which she explained to me in our interview was what it meant to introduce

herself like a Viking. The specialist, on the other hand, suggested that she consider taking

a more metaphorical approach. They talked about some of the challenges that the student

had faced when she first came to school in the United States, and the specialist explained

how maybe she could write her story about monster slaying to reflect that journey.

Recalling the suggestion in our interview, the student said:

> She said something about my strength could be learning English and able to combat English, and so my final boss would be Beowulf [being able to read the book]... It makes sense, it really does, but I can't imagine how to make it look badass. That's the thing. So I was like, okay, no I don't think that's going to work out for me... I feel like it's more difficult. I mean, I want to challenge myself, but at that time, I was under time crunch so I just wanted to do something that is straightforward and you can see it. (Student 35A)

Her decision went beyond whether she felt she could or could not make the change. It

involved assessing a number of her own abilities and resources—whether she could

actually envision what the poem would look like if she were to implement the specialist's

suggestion, how challenging the revision would be, and also whether she would be able

to make such complex changes in the time that she had. After considering these factors

and deciding that no, she could not imagine how to make her journey to learn English

feel "badass" no matter how good a suggestion it had seemed, and the process would be

more difficult than she had the time for even if she did want to try it, the student chose to,

as she put it, "leave that on the side" and focus on finishing what she had already started.

Time was one resource that influenced students' revision choices in multiple

ways. In addition to the time constraints of writing center consultations and assignment

deadlines, there was how students juggled the time—and energy—they needed to

complete all the work they had for each of their classes. This meant that sometimes,

revising simply seemed like more trouble than it was worth. One student, for example, explained to me:

> I was able to edit intensely with the first two pages. And then by the time I got to the third page, I was like... I didn't know what to do anymore. I was on a time crunch. So honestly, I'm hoping the first two pages will at least pull through with a B, but the other half of it is pretty much the same to the previous draft. (Student 09A)

She was tired, she told me, and juggling 19.5 units in her first term at a college with a quarter system, paced very differently from the semester system she had transferred from. After working hard on revising the first two pages of her paper, she felt she did not have the time or energy to finish revising the rest of it and would simply accept whatever grade she received. The result was that the argument in the first two pages, adjusted after discussions with her writing specialist, was somewhat different from the argument in the rest of her paper, but her desire not to spend any more time and energy on the paper outweighed her original goal of improving the score she had received on her earlier draft—which was actually what motivated her to bring this particular paper to the writing center in the first place.

Unsurprisingly, such considerations influenced complex revisions more than they did minor revisions, because minor revisions tended to be much easier to make and took a great deal less time and effort in comparison.

Likes and dislikes. Just as understanding a piece of feedback and having the ability to implement it are important factors in students' revision choices, so is the student's willingness to address that feedback (Price et al., 2010). For the students in this study, whether students liked or disliked a particular suggested revision, although not generally the sole reason for a revision decision, could also influence whether students chose to act upon a certain suggestion or piece of feedback. In particular, when there was

a balance between how difficult a suggestion was to follow, how much the student liked the idea of the change, and a clear understanding of the purpose for a revision came together to make those changes happen. Two different students, for example, both chose to add a narrative-style hook to their papers when making revisions, one based upon her specialist's suggestion (Student 06K) and the other based upon a suggestion from a classmate (Student 01K). Both students said they did so, because when they heard the suggestion, they felt it was a good idea and they could see how having a bit of a story at the beginning of their essays could make the essays more interesting. The classmate who made the suggestion told the student that it could help the reader really visualize and experience what he was talking about, whereas the specialist told the student how such an opening scene could help draw people into her writing in the same way that she, as someone studying media and films, might start a video. True, writing an extra paragraph or two and then integrating the new opening into the paper might be more work than swapping out a single word or changing one sentence, but both students declared that they were pleased with how their new hooks turned out and believed it improved their papers.

Simply liking or disliking a suggestion was not usually enough by itself to cause students to attempt or reject a revision, just like simply believing one was or was not able to make a change was not the only reason the student revising her poem chose not to alter the direction of her writing. However, when students were on the fence about whether or not to take a piece of advice, likes and dislikes added to other considerations to sway them one way or another. Generally, however, it is interesting to note that students did not simply ignore any of their specialist's suggestions. When they chose not to act, it was,

for the most part, a conscious decision except in the cases when students either forgot the suggestion or remembered it too late.

The Effects of Note-Taking

Note-taking was something that students did to help them remember what they discussed with their specialists, and it was also something that affected both minor and complex revisions. Although note-taking is not always allowed during a consultation depending on the specific philosophies of the writing center, previous studies have found note-taking to be helpful for students' subsequent revisions (Williams, 2004). Almost all the students in this study took notes during their consultations. All of those who did told me that it was beneficial for them when they began to work on their papers on their own, and many of those who did not take notes said that they wished they had done so.

Furthermore, the way in which students took those notes affected the revisions that they made—beyond simply helping them remember what they discussed. Sometimes, this was because students focused their revisions only on the specific points in their drafts that had been singled out during their consultations. For instance, when going through her paper to capitalize the proper names of school departments, one undergraduate corrected only the proper names that appeared after the first name that the specialist had pointed out such as the "School of Humanities" and did not correct earlier occurrences such as the "school of physical sciences" (Student 20A). Then there was the order in which suggestions were written down. Most notably, one student explained to me how she went systematically through the notes she had taken, starting with the first item and then working her way through. Unfortunately, the larger, structural comments

had been written at the end, which meant that by the time she saw and remembered them, she had already made so many changes that she did not want to rearrange everything and possibly have to throw out a lot of that work.

As we can see from this example and the others discussed previously, how students revise their papers and the ways in which their revisions are affected by the feedback they received during their writing center consultations is complicated. Especially in regards to large-scale changes, students' decisions and implementation were shaped by multiple factors that sometimes shifted as they moved through the revision process. In the following sections, I will discuss the post-consultation revisions of two students who took slightly different approaches in how they responded to their specialists' feedback in order to illustrate how multiple factors can simultaneously influence students' revision choices.

Two Students, Two Approaches to Revision

Amelia

Like many students, Amelia's revision process was largely influenced by how she interpreted the feedback she received from the writing center, how much time she had before her paper was due, and how easy she felt it was to implement a particular suggestion. She was a first-year science major taking her first official writing course as an undergraduate, and she came to the writing center with an assignment for that class called the Historical Conversations Project (HCP), because the paper was worth one-third of her grade. The assignment asked students to examine the historical development of a particular issue. Since the focus of the book she was reading in the writing class was

Global Women, Amelia decided to write about the problem of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) perpetrated on Pakistani women, which she wrote was facilitated by religious misconceptions, a weak legal department that fails to enforce laws protecting women, cultural expectations, and a patriarchal environment.

Although she had had writing assignments earlier that year in a public health course, Amelia considered those assignments comparatively minor and easy to handle. Consequently, she saw this current paper as her first "real" college writing assignment, and she had never written a paper on history before. Unfortunately, she was unable to schedule a writing center consultation before the actual due date of her final, so she met with a writing specialist mere hours before she had to submit her final draft.

Amelia had already received feedback on her draft from her instructor and begun making changes, and she brought those teacher comments with her to the conference. She also had notes to herself on what she wanted to discuss, namely checking over her thesis—something her instructor had said she needed to improve—and adding transitions. During the consultation, the writing specialist and Amelia discussed a number of topics related to these concerns, as well as the requirements of the writing prompt. The need to situate her topic within a historical timeline, for example, was one thing the specialist emphasized, and they discussed how Amelia might accomplish this by referencing specific dates and historical events. Based upon these discussions, Amelia made a number of revisions in the hours after her writing center consultation. Table 6 provides a summary of the topics discussed during the consultation, the revisions Amelia made between her pre and post consultation drafts, and Amelia's explanations during our follow-up interview of why she made those changes.

Table 6: Revision Choices (Amelia)		
Main topics discussed during specialist writing center consultation	Revisions made after the consultation	Reason for making those revisions
Strengthening and clarifying the thesis/problem statement (for instance, defining Intimate Partner Violence, specifying potential solutions, etc)	Changed the thesis, added some details like about controlling behavior also being IPV, specified who needed to learn what	From discussion with writing center specialist, recalls specialist asking her things like who needed to do what, etc
Contextualizing the historical issue by establishing a timeline (when things happened and what was happening at the time, which are important parts of the prompt)—for instance, looking at when the first woman got a position in the Pakistan government	Added reference to a woman recently chosen to hold a high office in government, adds date for that as well as the date for a graph she used, also added date on most recent law regarding child marriage	Because specialist pointed to the need for dates and a timeline, just looking for some recent event to show that issue is going on now (she also got peer review suggestion in class on adding a timeline, but dismissed it then since peer suggested doing so in a multimodal format, graphic)
Choosing words and phrases that are more clear	A few word choice changes like "while" instead of "whereas", and using the word "ignorance"	Discussed with specialist
Using sources to back up the claims that she makes, making sure her evidence aligns with her claims (referencing existing laws, for instance, to show how legal policies are not doing enough to prevent mistreatment of women)		
Adding transitions to help her sections fit together (specialist explains how reader should have coherent idea of why certain ideas are coming next)	Added transition sentences to make sections flow better, connect to each other	Because of her discussion with specialist, talked about how all paragraphs should have transitions, even across sections with subheads

Narrowing down the populations that her paper is discussing, being specific (for instance, who is her message for—young people? Old people? Men? Women?)	More detailed references to who is being discussed are made in a number of places in the paper, although overall focus is unchanged	Because specialist said that she should be more specific (so for instance, adding that, for short and long term goals, she is talking about goals for young and middle-aged women)
Formatting conventions for numbers (write out nine and under, use numbers for above, etc)		
	Moved footnotes around	Because of changes in the length and organization of her paper
	Added introduction in a paragraph	Because of her work introducing evidence with peer tutors
	Completed a hitherto incomplete paragraph and incorporated comments about women being less likely to become decision makers when their own decision making is restricted	From student's own notes to herself

As we can see from the table above, Amelia made most of her post-consultation revisions based upon the writing specialist's feedback and suggestions. Minor changes such as adding a "who" to short and long term goals and changing her use of the word "ignorance" were simple and straightforward. More interesting was the way she addressed more complex revisions involving the addition of transitions and elaborations upon her topic's historical context.

First, while Amelia did indeed add transitions to several places in her paper, these did not always do the work that transitions are meant to do. One example of this was the two sentences she added at the end of a paragraph about steps people can take to prevent

misinterpretations of the Quran as condoning Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) on the part

of men. In order to connect this paragraph to the next section, which she titled "A Home

or a Prison," Amelia wrote:

> The actions taken by men not only affect their intimate partner, but also the rest of the family. A cycle of violence is present because the children grow to learn that the environment of their home is an acceptable way of living.

The reference that Amelia makes in this transition to the home does appear to connect

with the idea of the home possibly being more like a prison to women subject to IPV.

However, a closer examination of the first paragraph of the home and prison section

shows that it actually opens with the idea that gender inequity not only facilitates IPV,

but is also hindering the country's academic growth. Amelia wrote:

> Gender inequality is widely present in Pakistan in numerous forms. It is not only facilitating IPV, but also hurting the country from growing academically. A successful Pakistani engineer, Erum, states in one of her articles, "In my experience as a female engineering student in Pakistan, I have found that the gender bias still exists in the discouraging attitudes towards girls in engineering" (Irfan). Erum has been told on many accounts that she is wasting her time because "all she will ever be is a housewife" (Irfan). Pakistan is not advancing to its fullest potential academically because many women are turned away from careers of high positions by public opinion. This recent story that Erum shares illustrates that the traditional gender roles are still practiced today. Rather than having the chance to pursue an education, women are obliged to remain controlled in their home.

It is not until the conclusion of this paragraph that the idea of "home" is returned to when

Amelia writes that women are obliged to stay at home rather than pursue careers in

academia. In other words, although the transition that Amelia added does touch upon the

idea of home and home life for Pakistani women, it does not actually provide a smooth

bridge from the ideas of the previous section into the ideas of the following one. Instead,

the transition appears to function more as a lead into the subhead than a lead into the

opening content of the section. If she had, for example, reversed the order of ideas in the

paragraph and started with the idea of women being forced to stay at home and being

controlled before progressing towards how this impacts not only women and home life but also the country's academic progress, her earlier transition could have been quite strong.

It is possible that this slight disconnect is a result of the limited time frame within which the student conducted these revisions. However, in our interview, she pointed out this transition and explained to me that she was pleased with how it had turned out and felt she had done what the specialist said she ought to do when constructing transitions— namely, that it should give the reader an idea of what is coming next and why. This seems to indicate more that, in addition to perhaps needing to take more time to reread her writing and choose clearer subheads, Amelia's concept of writing transitions was still developing, and although the specialist's explanation of transitions did not quite translate into Amelia's final revisions, it still had an impact on her writing. Amelia was also still able to describe what transitions were and why they were important in our follow-up interview the next quarter. It was something about writing from her writing center visit that really stuck with her.

Second, the fact that Amelia responded to the specialist's feedback about having to contextualize her discussion within history by providing some kind of timeline as per the writing assignment's requirements was interesting, because Amelia admitted in our interview that she had actually received the same feedback from a classmate during mandatory peer review activities in class. However, at that time, she chose to ignore the comment, because her classmate suggested addressing the issue by creating or finding some kind of graphical representation. In retrospect, Amelia noted that the specialist's advice and the peer's advice were meant to address the same problem. However, "the

student didn't say to include dates in my text, they said to include the multi-modality image. And that was just a straight no." She had searched before for graphics and not found anything, and she did not feel she had the information to create a suitable graphic herself. In other words, even though Amelia acknowledged that not having a clear timeline within which to situate her topic was a problem, it was not until she received a suggestion that she felt she could easily carry out that she acted to address it.

While Amelia's revisions were greatly affected by her perceptions of the feasibility of a certain change and what her instructor and specialist said she needed to work on , Jane's revisions were largely shaped by her personal interests and preferences.

Jane

Jane was a first-year English major interested in pursuing a degree in Literary Journalism. This was her second quarter as a college student, so it had been a long time since her high school writing classes and the writing she had to do took her a little off guard. As she put it, her high school teacher liked writing to be more "emotional," whereas college writing turned out to be more straight and to the point—not a bad thing, she said, but definitely very different from what she had done before. The reason she came to the writing center, however, was because her writing class section leader made appointments with the writing center for all of her new students for their first essay assignment, and as she worked through her revisions after visiting the writing center, her choices were greatly influenced by whether she liked or disliked a suggestion, what parts of her paper she liked best, and how she interpreted her specialist's feedback.

The paper in question was written to a prompt that asked students to choose and examine an artifact created in the Andes before 1800 during the Inca Empire or Spanish colonial period. The focus of the class was the dynamics of empire, and students had to analyze their chosen artifacts in terms of how it reflected power differentials in the context of the Andes during that period of history. In her case, Jane chose a painting of the Virgin Mary produced during the Spanish conquest called the *Virgin of the Mountain of Potosi.* She wanted, she told the specialist, to talk about issues of religious power and how the art piece helped to create or maintain such power.

This was Jane's first time at the UCI writing center, and although it was not her decision to make an appointment, she was interested in getting feedback on how she could revise and improve her paper. When her specialist asked what her main concerns were with the paper, Jane explained that she was unsure how to end her paper, whether she was doing her citations the right way, and whether she strongly connected her evidence with her arguments. As they went through Jane's paper together, they discussed her analysis of the painting, the points she intended to make, and some of the evidence that she presented, as well as the importance of qualifying her statements and being careful with pronouns so that readers are not confused. Table 7 presents a summary of the topics they discussed during the consultation, the revisions Jane made between the pre and post conference drafts, and Jane's explanation during our interview of what she remembers of why she made some of those changes.

Table 7: Revision Choices (Jane)		
Main topics discussed during specialist writing center consultation	Revisions made after the consultation	Reason for making those revisions
Being more specific or being careful with pronouns so reader knows who "they" are (it's important to "say what you mean" or who)	Student specifies who she is talking about more, like writing "the Spanish" instead of "they"	
Grammar corrections such as tenses and subject-verb agreement	Made changes in parts that were not completely rewritten (i.e. changing "This specific piece of religious artwork also express" to "This specific piece of religious artwork also expresses"	
The word "portrait" and its actual definition, specialist suggests "portrayal" instead due to where student is using it		
The word "scriptures," which does not mean what student used it for, specialist explains and suggests "inscription"	Student changes "scripture" to "inscription" in the parts of the old draft that remain, but in a section that student added, she returns to using the word "scriptures"	
Need to add sources to support some of her claims		
Using more serious, academic language (i.e. change a "generous amount of joy" to something else)	Student changes some word choices to reflect more serious and negative conditions, more descriptive language	
Giving more background when referencing a source and when making claims based on those sources so that it is more clear what student is discussing	Student added more details and analysis on the sources and facts she talks about	

Rephrase to remove things like "I agree" since it is not relevant to this writing assignment	The reference was removed, other uses of "I" later in the paper were also taken out	
That student does not need to cite the English label discussing the Spanish inscription in the painting, since student speaks Spanish and can translate it herself	Student uses her own translation	Student enjoyed translating and going more in depth into the analysis of the Spanish inscription, because she feels connected to her Spanish roots, enjoyed being able to bring that into her writing and gave her more to say
How to cite, when she needs or does not need to have names or titles, etc	Changed some references	She changed those based upon the notes she took during the writing center consultation
Reorganizing paper so that the relationship between the students six points is more clear, so that her paper builds upon itself instead of presenting ideas separately and only coming together at the end—the order of her paragraphs should build "momentum" for the argument so readers can follow and understand student's point of view	The organization of the paragraphs is different, and some information was removed or elaborated upon	She went through and took the parts of her old draft that she really liked and gave them an order—her old draft was more random, whereas now she has an order, which she based upon what she had more information on, she put the sections she had the most to say on at the beginning and end, and placed section she had least to say on in the middle
Specialist suggests that it might be beneficial for student to add a description of the painting where she describes what she notices and sees in it—so that the reader can picture the painting she is talking about (for instance, she can include who the people are in the painting, what they are doing that might show power differences or varying "levels of power"		Student said she tried to do it, but ended up just giving some really brief tidbits here and there—overall, student's not really sure why she decided not to do it (she says she mostly forgot about it)

as student discusses in her paper)—specialist notes that student could accomplish a lot of the work for this paper by describing the painting		
Expanding on and clarifying the power dynamics and relationships amongst the people involved in the Spanish conquest of the Incas and Andeans, which is a major part of the student's argument (for instance, why did the Spanish want to keep the mines running (where they made those they conquered work)—because it was a huge moneymaker for the empire)	Students adds discussion that more strongly describes things like the suffering of the miners under the Spanish, the idea of trauma was related to this as well,	When revising, she tried to focus on picking out the points that she felt she could elaborate more on, for instance, she enjoyed or found it interesting to expand on diction and word meanings across the three populations involved (also part of adding to context)
Student references a myth that a scholar noted was untrue (people never actually told such a myth historically), specialist notes that since it was shown to be untrue, it makes more sense to remove it (student originally built a whole argument around the myth),	The myth is still in the paper, but student altered her argument so as not to rely on it so much, she also changes it so she is not saying that the Spanish believed something (a claim she had no evidence for)	Student wanted to keep the myth, so tried to make it work in a different way, using the advice about reorganizing to help things fit together
Specialist notes that student made a great point about the "trauma of conquest" and how she thinks student could maybe even have it in her thesis and expand on how the trauma of conquest affected the three groups involved	Student adds the idea of trauma in her thesis, as well as in a body paragraph, but specifies it in relation to the Andeans	

Qualify/hedge statements more, because a writer needs to be careful about making blanket statements that may not be true	Student qualifies her claims more so they are less definite	
	Student rewrote her thesis to be more specific and include the three main things she ends up talking about in her final	
	Student concludes the paper and reiterates some of what she discussed, also relating it back to the painting and how the power the Spanish had over others was shown in it (the part on why historians study history is here too)	Student thought that having why historians study historical artifacts in the conclusion would be a nice way to end, the idea comes from a class she took last quarter, what that professor said about history really struck a chord with her and was quite interesting

Like Amelia, Jane made almost all of the minor revisions that the specialist suggested to her such as including qualifiers to soften her claims and being more specific with her pronouns. However, her response to more major or complex revisions—also the revisions she focused on explaining in our interview—were often influenced by more personal factors.

One example of this was how she dealt with a myth that she originally used to support her analysis of the relationships amongst the Spanish, the Incas, and the Andeans during the Spanish conquest. After some discussion with the specialist, Jane explained to the specialist that the myth, which was that the Spanish were seen as gods, was proven to be untrue by a historian. In other words, the Spanish were never seen as gods. Therefore, the specialist observed that perhaps that made it unsuitable to use as evidence for her claims. In our interview, Jane reflected that she agreed the myth was not working the way

she was using it. However, she liked the idea of the myth and wanted to keep it. So instead of removing the myth entirely, she revised the way it was incorporated, making her arguments less dependent upon it and changing where it was located within her paper so that she felt it fit more logically with what she wanted to convey.

Similarly, what parts of her paper she liked and what parts she felt she had more to say about shaped how Jane chose to reorganize her paragraphs. The specialist had explained during the consultation that the way she structured her paper should help her readers see how her ideas connect and should help her ideas build upon one another rather than simply presenting each idea as a separate point. Jane interpreted this as meaning that she needed a purposeful order to her paragraphs, which she told me that she did not originally have as she started by simply writing down her ideas as they came to her. To address this issue, Jane started by choosing the parts of her old draft that she liked best and placing them into a different document on her computer. Then she rearranged her main ideas. Her final draft had an order, she said, and she chose that order based upon what she had more evidence for and what she had more to say about. She placed the weightier ideas at the beginning and the end and left the idea she was least able to elaborate upon in the middle so that readers would focus more on the two stronger ideas. This new organization, while perhaps not quite aligning with the specialist's point of building momentum for her argument, was still, in its way, very purposeful on Jane's part.

Overall, Jane altered her early draft a great deal after her writing center visit, adding analysis, reorganizing her overall paper structure, revising her thesis, and more, and the final version of her paper looked quite different from its predecessor. Although

she did not necessarily implement all of her specialist's suggestions, she nonetheless responded to most of what they discussed in her own way. Where Amelia's revision choices were largely shaped by how easy it was for her to make a certain change, likely in part because she had only a few hours before her paper was due, Jane focused many of her decisions around her own personal preferences, responding to the feedback she received in a way that combined the specialist's suggestions with her own likes and dislikes. At the same time, especially in regards to more complex changes like reorganizing a paper and writing transitions, the decisions made by both students demonstrated the impact of how they interpreted their specialists' advice.

Conclusions and Implications

On the whole, all the students in this study did their best to respond to the feedback and suggestions they received during their consultations. Minor edits and revisions suggested by specialists tended to be carried out whereas students' response to complex revisions was less straightforward and often more influenced by other factors like their interpretation of the feedback and their personal goals and preferences. Jane was a prime example of this.

Time was also always a concern for students, even when they wanted to improve their grade. It is a limited resource and is affected by numerous circumstances like when students are able to schedule writing center appointments, what classes students are taking, and even whether their teachers are prone to altering their syllabus partway through the quarter. In addition to how this shapes the amount of time students allot to revising, there was also how the limited time available during a writing consultation

could constrain the amount of discussion devoted towards exploring and working through more complex revisions. In Amelia's case, for example, in the interest of reviewing as much of her paper as possible, the specialist advised that Amelia make notes for herself on changes to think about later rather than working out the exact phrase or sentence on the spot. For major changes like adding transitions, this left Amelia to figure out on her own how to word new sentences so that they connected the different sections of her paper, and although she remembered exactly what the specialist had told her a transition should do, some of the transitions she ended up writing only partially accomplished the work of proper transitions. In our interview, Amelia said that she wished she could have actually written out some sentences together with the specialist. She told me about how she had worked on introducing her quotes properly and integrating them into her draft with a peer tutor the day before. She appreciated how the peer tutor went through a few examples from her paper on the spot with her. She even pointed out one of these and explained, "I wrote that sentence with her." Before this, Amelia had been used to writing things like "according to this study," but using these introductions to highlight the credibility of the source by referencing specific details like the author's background was new to her. Working through these examples together allowed her to finish making similar revisions throughout the rest of her paper on her own after leaving the writing center, and she felt that if she had been able to do the same with the writing specialist, it would have helped her when she was finalizing her draft. However, again, such decisions would be subject to the time constraints of a consultation, and both students and specialists would have to be clear about the student's priorities in order to ensure spending more time on a single writing topic at the cost of reviewing a student's draft in

its entirety does not cause students to feel as though they are not receiving the assistance that they want.

Note-taking, as discussed previously, had an interesting relationship with students' post-conference revisions. Although it generally helped students to remember what had been discussed and to focus their revision efforts, details like the order in which suggestions were written down and when such notes appeared in the draft affected both whether and what kinds of revisions were carried out. Examples such as these suggest that it may be helpful to encourage students to organize their own notes during a consultation in a different way—for instance, to return to the beginning of a paper to write down notes about organizational changes rather than leaving those comments at the end of the draft or sheet of notes. It could also be beneficial during consultations to discuss the potential impact of different revisions, or to help students prioritize the changes that they wish to make.

All that being said, it could be that the extent to which students in this study made revisions was influenced by the fact that they agreed to participate in this study and knew that someone would be following up with them to see if they made any changes to their drafts. However, as a former tutor myself, what I found most striking from these follow-up interviews and discussions about students' revisions was how much students actually remembered from their writing center visits. Even after more than a quarter, students could often tell me what their writing specialists had said to them. Tips about writing transitions, the idea that there should be a logical reason or purpose in how one organizes a piece of writing, and even strategies for how to be more concise—these were all elements of writing that students continued to tell me about throughout the year. Perhaps

even more importantly, these were elements of writing that students believed they could—and did—apply to other writing assignments as they moved from class to class, something I will discuss further in the next chapter.

Even though sometimes, the things that students were learning about writing did not translate into the types of revisions that one might expect as a tutor or writing instructor, the fact that much of what their tutors and writing specialists tell them stays with them is encouraging. Not only do these students often remember these tidbits of knowledge, they acted upon them and attempted to put them into practice in their own ways. In other words, they really were building and practicing, with the support of the writing center, knowledge and skills that would help them become better, more independent writers.

5. The Place of the Writing Center in Students' College Lives

Research Question 3: How do student users view the writing center, and how do they position the center within their college writing experiences?

Annie is a third-year transfer student in her first year at UCI. At the start of her community college career, she considered herself an extremely poor writer and struggled with writing in general. However, her experiences with the writing center at her community college changed that for her—so much so, in fact, that she chose to major in English and then, after transferring, in Literary Journalism. For Annie, the writing center at her community college and one particular tutor that she met there became a safe space for her to practice and experiment with her writing, and she attributes her development as a writer to that support. Because of these prior experiences, when she wanted help with a paper at her new university, Annie once again sought out the campus writing center.

In contrast, first-year student Sara had little idea what to expect when she arrived at the writing center. She has, as she describes it, a love-hate relationship with writing, and although she took AP English in high school, she has found writing in college to be both more challenging and time-consuming. In her quest to pass her first undergraduate writing class, she pulled from various resources—listening to audiobooks of her course texts, talking with her instructor, and soliciting feedback from her friends online through Google Docs. One thing Sara especially struggled with when writing was organization, and the difficulty she experienced trying to organize her thoughts into a coherent written

draft was what brought her to the writing center for the first time, following the advice of her discussion section leader.

First-year student Ella's section leader not only recommended students use the university writing center, she had everyone in her class make an appointment. Although, due to the encouragement of a particularly passionate high school composition teacher, Ella no longer disliked writing at the time she entered college, she remained uncomfortable sharing her work with others and generally refrained from doing so unless required. She found the atmosphere of the writing center to be extremely welcoming, however, and the writing specialist she saw never made her feel as though she were being looked down upon. Later in the year, as she grew more comfortable with asking for feedback, Ella would return to the writing center of her own volition to discuss her writing.

Annie, Sara, and Ella all came to the writing center with different expectations, and they each brought with them a unique set of experiences that shaped their relationships with writing and approaches towards learning to write in college. As we can see from these glimpses into their stories, learning to write is a complex journey that is influenced by many factors from students' prior writing experiences to the types of writing tasks that students have encountered and the kinds of feedback that students receive. So how exactly might the writing center fit into the mosaic of these experiences? How do student users view the writing center, and how do they position the center within their college writing experiences?

To explore these questions, I will draw from 56 semi-structured interviews conducted with 28 undergraduate students over the course of the 2018-2019 academic

year, all of whom had at least one by-appointment consultation with a writing center

writing specialist during that time period. During these interviews, I encouraged students

to talk about their writing center experiences as well as their language backgrounds,

views on writing in general, current and past coursework, and other sources of writing

feedback and assistance (for a list of interview and follow-up interview questions, see

Appendix A).

In the following chapter, I will start by highlighting the various themes that

emerged from these interviews. Although many of these themes are interconnected and

overlap, they can be grouped loosely into two primary categories: 1) themes that relate to

the writing center as a place to become a better writer, and 2) themes that focus on the

writing center as a place to develop and improve a piece of writing. I will follow that with

a discussion of how students' use of the writing center changed over time as influenced

by other factors in their lives. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of implications

moving forward for students, teachers, and writing centers.

Themes in Students' Perceptions of the Writing Center

A Place to Become Better Writers

As one might expect, several common threads in the way students talked about

and used writing center services involved improving their skills as writers. Broadly, these

could be grouped into four different subthemes:

- The writing center as a place to acquire new writing strategies and knowledge

- The writing center as a place to refresh their memories, develop writing skills students already had, and ease the transition into college

- The writing center as a place for learning about new genres of writing that students were unfamiliar with

- The writing center as a place where students are encouraged to challenge themselves as writers.

A place to acquire new writing strategies and knowledge. For many of the undergraduates in this study, their writing center consultations provided them with new knowledge about and strategies for approaching their writing, often referred to by these students as writing tips and tricks. These included, for example, the importance of transitions and how to structure transitions in an academic paper, a topic that came up frequently in my interviews. As one student put it, during her writing conference, "We talked about how to make sure the paragraphs connect with each other. Making sure the end of the first paragraph flows into the next" (Student 29A). What made these tips and tricks especially helpful was that they often involved specific steps or suggestions that students could consider. For instance, another student explained that to make sure her sentences and paragraphs connected logically to one another, an aspect of writing she reported struggling with, her writing specialist told her that "you can summarize it... You write a sentence, you could summarize the points in two words, or in three words... So, that makes your sentences more related to each other" (Student 01A). Not only did this transition-writing strategy stand out to this student during the academic quarter where she visited the writing center, she referred to it again in a follow-up interview later in the year

as something from her past writing center experience that she still thought about when she wrote despite not having returned to the writing center since.

General knowledge or advice about writing often included not only academic conventions like not ending a paragraph with a quote but also tidbits of writing beliefs or philosophies about approaching a writing task. For example, more than one student stated that they learned from their writing conference that changing their thesis after they write their paper is an okay thing to do. "When I came to my writing center appointment," one student told me, "they were like, 'Yeah, you need to write another thesis because I think you're struggling with this one,' and that it's okay because if you develop new ideas, that show that you're growing as a writer" (Student 10A). It is not always clear to students how much control they have—or are allowed to give themselves—over their own writing processes. For these students, the writing center can be a place where they learn to make the writing process work for them instead of feeling trapped by their own previous decisions or assumptions.

A place to refresh their memories, develop writing skills students already have, and ease the transition into college. For first year college students or students taking their first college writing course, the writing center often played an important role in their transition from high school into college level writing. This occurred in a number of different ways ranging from refreshing their memories on what they knew about writing to bolstering their confidence in previously acquired writing skills and elaborating upon that prior knowledge. Some students emphasized, for instance, the time gap between their last high school essay and the start of their undergraduate careers and how this gap made starting to write again difficult. When asked about her initial reason

for seeking out the writing center, one student said, "I haven't written anything in five months, so it's been very long and I literally just understood AP lit the day or the week before the AP exam... So I came with the writing center because... It's one on one help, so they can have these conversations about your ideas, and it's not just you having to do everything by yourself" (Student 10A). For this first-year student, the writing center meant she didn't have to struggle on her own to figure out her first college writing assignments when things didn't make sense, and even after the fall quarter, she continued to return to the center in winter and spring to clarify and organize her ideas.

Other students expressed doubts upon entering college that what they learned in high school would actually be of use to them in college writing. As one undergraduate put it, "I thought going in that, oh is my experience from high school really going to be helpful in college" (Student 20A)? Although for this student, her writing center visit "reassured me that my writing is sufficient enough, that I have a good basis" (Student 20A), others found the writing center to be helpful in providing them with writing instruction that they either did not receive in high school or have since found to contradict college expectations. One student noted that, for instance, "In my high school, we didn't really learn about how to transition from paragraph to paragraph. It's as if we saw each paragraph as its own entity without any relationship to another paragraph" (Student 21A). For him, it wasn't until he came to the writing center that he felt he really learned about transitions and how to build his paragraphs in what he describes as an "effective" manner. Another student explained that she's found "not every advice in high school, I should take it so literal," and when it comes to many aspects about writing, "everyone tells me in high school ... everyone told me, oh well you're going to learn

more about that in college, and then in college, oh you should have learned that already"

(Student 02K). This disconnect between what students learned in high school and what

college instructors believe students should have learned, which echoes previous research

on the differences between writing in high school and writing in college (Addison &

McGee, 2010; Crank, 2012; Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010), means that students

sometimes have to find other avenues to bridge the gap, and so the writing center

becomes an important resource for students working to meet these new expectations.

The expectations for student writing and the types of writing students have been

asked to do often vary a great deal between their high school and college experiences

(Crank, 2012). Research papers, for example, were new to many incoming students who

participated in this study. As one undergraduate put it, "The writing I have been asked to

do so far in college are large research papers, which I did not do regularly in high school.

Source evaluation was not largely emphasized in high school either, which is a new

concept in writing these papers that I have had to learn to do" (Student 18A). However,

even more common than the feeling that college writing entailed entirely new writing

concepts and genres, was the opinion that college writing was more challenging than high

school writing because college papers tended to be much longer and require writers to

engage more deeply in different topics and materials. In other words, many students

expressed the idea that college writing, while similar in type to writing they have done

before, is more complex and asks students to delve more deeply into a subject than

they've previously been asked to do, a sentiment that seems to align with the expectations

for college writers laid out in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*

((CWPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011).

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There is the sense that "the grading standard is a lot harder," that teachers want "more in-depth analysis," and "also the length of the argument is longer" (Student 14A). One student explained that writing did not become a difficult activity for her until she began college. Although she was able to get As just writing last minute in high school, she found quickly that she could not do the same if she wanted to do well in college. Her reason for coming to the writing center was that she felt she could not pass the course without help. Not only that, but simply having the writing center available "gives me a sense of ease, knowing that I have someone who can look at something possibly last minute" (Student 19A). Writing, for her, became a much more involved process in college, and the writing center served as a support to ease her into these new expectations so that she could still achieve the grades that she wanted.

Another example of how college writing was more complex involved students' increased freedom in how to structure their papers, new understandings of how they need to develop their own logic for organizing their ideas, and the need to break away from the five-paragraph format commonly used in high school English classes and for standardized testing. Several students shared that "in high school, I think all of our teachers just give us the basic five paragraphs" (Student 11A) with an introduction that has a good thesis, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion—that their high school teachers asked them to write "in this kind of structure" (Student 06K), whereas writing in their college classes has allowed students to write in a "more creative way" (Student 06K).One student said simply that in high school, "it usually was just a five paragraph essay. But in college... there's not really paragraphs. There's just the page amount" (Student 14A). For these students, the writing center was often a place where they could

work with someone to rethink their approaches to organizing their writing and to discuss suggestions on alternative structures that might make their writing more clear. One international student, for instance, received a suggestion from her writing specialist during the fall quarter that she could restructure her personal narrative by breaking the story apart into sections organized around a Chinese metaphor that she wrote about in her first draft. She had never considered structuring a piece of writing this way, and the idea really resonated with her. Not only did she end up taking this advice and applying it to that personal essay assignment, she used a similar structure on another paper for a different class during the winter (Student 01A).

While this freedom to be more creative with one's writing was one aspect of college writing that made it challenging, it also appeared to be a quality that gave students more of a sense of ownership over their work. Many students shared the feeling that they have been able to put more of themselves into their writing as undergraduates. One student observed that she has "found that I can bring more of myself into the process and the execution of each paper. In high school there were certain rules to follow; sentences should read like this, "x" amount of paragraphs should be written, and other requirements or expectations that at times felt more like limitations" (Student 23A). Another student stated simply that, as a high school student, "it almost felt like I was writing, but it wasn't me who was writing. It wasn't my voice. And now, I learned a little bit to include myself and add more of my personality in my essay" (Student 02K). These remarks echo the observations of writing scholars who have noted that high school teachers tend to discourage "voice" in academic writing like research papers, seeing it as more the property of personal narratives and opinion pieces, in contrast to college

professors who often encourage students to develop voice in all of their writing assignments (Acker & Halasek, 2008). Such feelings of ownership and control can play an important role in students' motivation to write and learn (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Conley & French, 2014). In this case, these feelings motivated students to work harder at becoming better writers so that their writing would express what they wanted it to express.

A few students talked, for instance, about using the writing center to refresh their memory on writing concepts they learned but did not pay attention to in high school, because they had only recently, as undergraduates, begun to see the value in writing. One student explained that he felt one major difference between college and high school writing was "being able to have your own opinion for once rather than having to agree with someone else's opinion" (Student 21A). As a political science and anthropology major with an interest in pursuing a degree in law, this student valued being able to share his own opinions—one reason he agreed to participate in this study. The fact that the assignments he has had in college allow him to do this made the act of writing more meaningful to him than it was in high school where he felt "you're never writing about what you may feel within your own mind about what you're writing about" (Student 21A). He shared an example of a poem he had to write about in high school that was supposed to represent the African American experience. However, as someone who grew up in the African American community, he disagreed with the perspective given in the poem and asked for by the writing prompt. He felt that the assignment "was created to emphasize a specific point of view, and that was supposed to be represented in your writing, and that was obviously a negative because if you don't agree with your writing, I

don't think you can actually write a perfect answer. Something that speaks to you as a writer." Due to these restrictions, "in high school, I always thought there was no purpose to [writing]... But now, with my own writing, I think you defend it more" (Student 21A). In other words, in college, he discovered that writing really could be a valuable tool for meaningful communication, and this new perspective has made him put more effort into improving his writing and seeking out feedback from others, including teachers and the writing center. "Whenever I come to the writing center," he said, "it feels like I'm getting skills that I know I have had before, but with time they kind of just go away just because you don't write as much, you don't write about things you care about." It was not so much that he was acquiring new writing skills as that he was building up old skills that he now saw the point of using.

Of course, although it was a more commonly expressed view, not all students in this study found college writing to be more free. One psychology student stated that, while she liked writing in general before high school, essay writing in high school and college have been extremely stressful. She said:

> It's scary, because when you're writing, you think you're doing good, and you think your ideas are good, but then once your professor or your teacher or somebody else is reading it... it's like, 'oh no, this isn't good' or 'you should do this' or 'you should do that.' And I'm like, 'I thought that was good.' And I remember middle school, they would always be like, 'oh, you should write what you think, and there's no right or wrong answer.' But then when it comes to essays [in high school and now], they're telling you like no, this is wrong, this is wrong and this is wrong. (Student 28A)

This student went on to describe her experiences with college writing as "confusing," due in large part to conflicts between her confidence in her own ideas and the kind of feedback that she was receiving. Because of these conflicts, she felt that she perhaps

needed to improve her writing, and she was directed towards the writing center by her teacher as a resource for helping her achieve this.

A place to learn about new genres. Having to write in a genre students were encountering for the first time or with which students had had limited experience was commonly cited as a reason students sought out the writing center in the past. One student explained that she did not bother coming to the writing center for most of her writing assignments, but that she "was new to research writing," so "I definitely thought that coming here would be beneficial." (Student 20A). Learning about new genres was also often mentioned as something that might cause students to return to the writing center in the future. As another student stated, she planned on making a writing center appointment for her final paper, which was a research paper, because "I actually want to learn how to write one since it's the first time. I feel like if you learned something the correct way, I feel like you're never going to be able to forget it if you learned it correctly" (Student 26A). So essentially, for these students, the writing center could serve as a starting point for learning the ropes of an unfamiliar type of writing, a place where they could work closely with an expert to ensure that they were approaching these new tasks appropriately.

There were, however, important exceptions to this view of the writing center. Some students reported not bringing writing assignments to the writing center even when they were struggling, because some aspect of the assignment made them feel that writing center specialists and tutors would not be able to help them. Generally, this occurred when students had writing assignments that they felt were too specific to a discipline or a class for a general audience to understand without extensive clarification. For instance,

one student taking a gender and sexuality class talked about a paper she had to write on representations of gender in advertisement that she found exceptionally challenging. Although there were required sections in the paper that she did not understand, she found it difficult to ask for help because there were things she had to do in the paper—terms she had to use, for instance, and sections she had to include such as an imaginary story to explain the images in the ad—that other people might be confused by. This student felt as though for this teacher and class, "it felt very like you should analyze it this way. And that was a little bit tricky because people don't always analyze something the same way" (Student 20A). Even though the student had taken another class in the field of gender studies before, she commented that, even in that class, "We definitely were not writing that way" (Student 20A). In other words, there were specific requirements for this paper that the student saw as unique, not to advertisement analysis papers in general, but to this particular advertisement analysis paper for this particular gender and sexuality class. It was this specificity that deterred her from seeking help outside of the classroom.

Instances such as these were rare, because students mostly did not have writing assignments in non-writing classes, but this concern speaks to a broader debate about whether or not a tutor needs disciplinary expertise to assist students in revising their work. Research has found mixed results for this question (see, for example, Dinitz & Harrington, 2014) and it is not the focus of this study, but it is interesting to note that this is a concern that some students share and can actively prevent students from using writing center services even when they feel they need additional support.

A place where students are encouraged to challenge themselves. Reflecting upon the feedback and advice that they received during their writing center consultations,

a number of students commented upon how their writing specialists really pushed them to have and develop their own ideas and opinions. In describing her writing center visits her first year at this university, one transfer student said:

> Basically the process was, I came in, sat down, and we had a conversation, but the tutor focuses more on asking me questions than actually editing... I don't know, providing me my thesis, if that makes sense. If they see my thesis doesn't work, the tutors at [my previous school] would just say, 'Here's a way you could write it.' Whereas here, they're really pushing me to have my own thoughts... which is not bad at all. I want to grow in that sense, but it kind of made me take a step back. (Student 09A)

For her, the conversations she had with writing specialists helped push her to find her own solutions to problems in her writing, and although she was not always happy with how specialists attempted to do this, she acknowledged that it was beneficial to her own development as a writer. A similar perspective was expressed by a first year, international student who stated that "from writing center, I expected advisors to give me like substantial information about what I need to write," but his session turned out to be "totally different from what I thought" (Student 01K). He explained that before college, when he asked for teacher feedback, his instructors would often simply tell him what he could write. In contrast, at the writing center, the writing specialist "gave me a path," and it was really more about helping him develop and deepen his own ideas. Although more difficult, he found writing this way to be both more meaningful and more enjoyable.

There were times, however, when students were not prepared for, and thus found it difficult to benefit from, this push from their writing specialist. As mentioned previously, a student who was working on an imitation poem for Beowulf discussed with her specialist the possibility of revising her purely fictional poem into a more metaphorical piece that would draw from the student's own experiences struggling to learn English. Although they spent nearly half of the consultation on this, the student

ultimately chose not to implement the specialist's suggestions. "It makes sense, it really does, but I can't imagine how to make it look badass," she explained (Student 35A). "Badass" was how she described the style and tone of a Beowulf poem, and she found it difficult to envision learning English, no matter how tough it was, as something badass. Even though she understood the specialist's suggestion and agreed that it was a good idea for this assignment, she felt both that she couldn't implement it in the style that she wanted and that she didn't have the time to try an approach that she found much more difficult. As she put it, "I want to challenge myself, but at that time, I was under time crunch, so I just wanted to do something that is straightforward" (Student 35A). It wasn't that this student was unwilling to tackle a more challenging task. It was that, at that point in time and with her own views about her experiences and goals for her paper, this was a challenge she wasn't ready—and didn't particularly want—to face.

Cases such as these suggest that, although the writing center can definitely be a place where students can, with help, push themselves to think more deeply and attempt new things, it is also important to be sensitive to when and how students are encouraged to do this.

A Place to Develop and Improve a Piece of Writing

Another common thread in students' perspectives on the writing center related to each student's own approaches to the writing process and his/her views or use of feedback. These, in turn, tended to revolve around improving a specific piece of writing and could be grouped loosely into five subthemes:

- The writing center as a place to ask for an audience perspective on their writing

- The writing center as a place with trusted experts who can double check their work

- The writing center as a place where students can share their ideas and unfreeze their writing process

- The writing center as a place to clarify teacher feedback and assignment expectations

- The writing center as a place to get additional feedback when students are dissatisfied with the feedback they have already received

A place to ask for an audience perspective. Almost every student who participated in this study mentioned how important and valuable it was to have someone else read their work. In discussing his reasons for coming to the writing center, one student said, "I wanted to come to just get another set of eyes on my paper and help me better structure it. Because before coming in, it was done but I wasn't feeling really confident about it" (Student 14A). This idea of "another set of eyes" or a second opinion on one's writing came up frequently. Sometimes, it was because students like this one felt unsure about what they had written. At other times, it was because students acknowledged that there was always something to be gained by hearing what a reader had to say about their work. For example, a student explained that "I'm confident in my writing skills, but there's always benefits to getting a fresh pair of eyes on whatever you're writing... So coming here to sit down with someone is really helpful" (Student 20A). This student and others understood and took into account the fact that writing is, essentially, a form of communication, and what they believe they are conveying through their words may not be the same as what an audience actually perceives. Ideas can be, as

another student phrased it, "lost in translation" (Student 21A), and so the process of working through a piece of writing with a writing specialist can help students figure out what they actually want to say, because their interactions with a reader help them notice things in their own writing that are missing or misconstrued, scaffolding their transition from writing writer-based prose to reader-based prose that address the needs of their audiences (Flower, 1981).

Of course, the writing center was not the only place where students could get this second pair of eyes, but it was a resource many students found helpful, especially when they had few other options or wanted that reader feedback specifically from someone they perceived as being more experienced than they in the field of writing.

A place with trusted experts who can double check their work. Oftentimes, in describing their writing process, students mentioned that they preferred, when possible, to have someone double check their writing one last time before they finalized it. In the words of one student, "I always just want one trusted person. That's why I kind of prefer the specialist too. That's just a trusted person to read over my essay at the end before I turn it in" (Student 07A). For this student, it was important that this last review came from someone whose opinion she considered credible, someone she "trusted" to give her good advice or whom she believed knew what they were talking about. This made the writing specialists at the writing center a good option for her as individuals that she felt had a great deal of writing experience and expertise. Another student explained how, although she will sometimes ask her friends to review her paper, "sometimes they're not as good writers as you think they are, or they don't have time to read over your long essay, so coming here [to the writing center] to sit down with someone is really helpful"

(Student 20A). In addition to the concept of trustworthiness and expertise, it was also important that this trusted reviewer had time to actually read one's writing. Sentiments like that expressed by this student—where some of the people they might want assistance from may not have the time or are too busy with their own work to take on the time-consuming task of reading over a long, college paper—were not uncommon, whereas, in contrast, students commented that it was the job of writing center specialists to provide exactly that kind of service. In other words, writing center specialists could be trusted to give a good, final overview of their final drafts, and students did not have to feel guilty about taking up specialists' time.

Using the writing center as a place to double check and finalize their work was also greatly influenced by how high-stakes the writing assignment was. For example, one student explained how for one of her classes, despite having a decent amount of writing, she did not bother coming to the writing center with any of it because the assignments were fairly short and easy, like "a long text message almost... So I didn't bother coming for those ones, just because that would be a lot of hassle just to come all over here, just for a hundred word thing, that it was mostly just for participation" (Student 20A). Basically, assignments that were not difficult and did not greatly influence outcomes students cared about like their final course grades often did not warrant the extra effort it would take to make time for something like a writing center visit. On the other hand, as a different student put it, "Something that's worth 30% of my grade will definitely get me hustling to the writing center" (Student 21A). Time is a limited resource, and with all the other demands on students' time, they have to prioritize, and it's generally the high-

stakes assignments that will motivate students to take a piece of writing through the entire writing process, including additional feedback and revision.

Lastly, this use of the writing center changed as students progressed in their undergraduate careers and began to develop their own way to navigate the expectations of college writing. Essentially, different students settled into the habit of approaching different trusted individuals for feedback when they felt it necessary. Some students reported specific friends that they acknowledged to be good writers from whom they would get advice (Student 02K). Others reported forcing themselves to approach their teachers more (Student 11A), or asking specific family members for a review of their final drafts (Student 07A). As students built their own networks, they often sought out the writing center less, except when those other trusted individuals were unavailable or when assignments had especially high stakes, such as in the case of graduate school applications.

A place where students can share their ideas and unfreeze their writing process. Several students highlighted the importance of having someone to talk to as a part of their own writing process. This could happen at any point while drafting, from brainstorming how to start a paper to trying to decide how to respond to instructor's feedback. For example, after being told by her course instructor that she needed to add more self-reflection into her paper, one student decided to make a writing center appointment, because "sometimes, if I only think on my own, I just can't think of any" (Student 01A). This idea of having someone to think with was echoed by other students in sentiments like having someone to help them step outside of their own heads or give suggestions that can inspire new ideas. As another student put it, at the writing center,

people asked her a lot of questions, and "sometimes asking you those questions like what about this? What is this? How would you do this? And just by them asking you that question it sparks something in your head that you can go and continue writing about... That's how it was for me" (Student 10A). This student elaborated further upon her own thoughts about and approach to writing by stating that:

> I feel as sometimes prompts and structures, they paralyze me in a way. When you don't have structure, you're all over the place, but as we go through school we're conditioned to write with a certain structure in a certain way. I think the other outside help helps me become unfrozen with my writing. There's no way I can possibly do my writing by myself... I have to talk to other people, because if I don't, I'm going to keep second guessing myself and second guessing myself. (Student 10A)

It seems as though, for her, coming to the writing center wasn't necessarily about getting an outside perspective on her work or seeking out any particular kinds of advice. Instead, it was valuable in that she was able to have a discussion with someone who asked her questions that could help her start thinking. Additionally, this interaction gave her a certain degree of confidence in the choices she made so that she could move forward with her writing.

Lastly, the writing center was sometimes a place where students could find encouragement to keep on writing when stressed or disheartened. Describing her experience when she came to the writing center for a paper from a course she found extremely challenging, one student recounted how her writing specialist "gave me that outline that I had to do, and she was just super positive about everything. In a way it made me feel like, okay, you know what? I can still change things. I can still do good" (Student 19A). This was close to finals week, a stressful time for many students, and so the positive attitude of her specialist helped make the task of writing her paper feel less daunting. "I think that really talks about the center as a whole," she told me during our

interview, "because if you have people like that welcoming you in, and doing this, and doing that, that cheers you up a bit too" (Student 19A). Sometimes, the atmosphere of a place and the attitudes of the people offering assistance can make a big difference, especially when it comes to writing and other tasks that students may find especially difficult.

A place to clarify teacher feedback and assignment expectations. Sometimes, the feedback that students receive on their papers is ambiguous or difficult for them to understand (Ferris, 1995; Price et al., 2010). As a result, students often came to the writing center for assistance unpacking and responding to the feedback given them by their course instructors. For example, one student explained that, while some of the written comments she received from her professor were helpful, other times, "I'm like, I don't know what that means. Especially when he would use stuff like, you're using passive voice. And I was like, I don't know what that means. And so, people here at the writing center help me kind of decipher what that meant" (Student 20A). After her writing specialist went through the distinctions of passive and active voice with her, she was better able to understand what her professor wanted her to change with that comment and make the requested revisions. Another student stated simply that she made a writing center appointment after getting feedback from her professor, because "he said my paper's lacking a lot of stuff" and "I didn't know what else to do" (Student 33A). It was difficult for this student to decide, based upon the feedback she had received, how to actually remedy the problem. She was not the only student who shared this feeling. A fellow undergraduate noted that for her first college writing class, "my previous two assignments, I thought I did pretty well, but the teacher commented something is

missing" (Student 35A). So she decided to book a writing center appointment to "talk to an expert" in order to figure out what was missing and how she could improve.

It was not always clear to students what their instructors expected or wanted them to change in their writing, and so the writing center became a tool for them to work through teacher comments with, as some students put it, an "expert" (Student 35A), an experienced writer whose opinions they find credible. This was especially beneficial for students who were uncomfortable approaching their professors for clarification or felt their instructors had limited time to work with them one-on-one.

A place to get additional feedback. Several students reported seeking out writing center services when they wanted more feedback on their writing than they were getting elsewhere or when they wanted feedback that involved more face-to-face interaction. One example of this came from a student who took one of her required writing courses online. She explained that, because it was an online class, "I haven't had that in-person experience," and so "I definitely wanted to reach out to more people to read my essay and everything, just because there wasn't someone I could immediately go to to ask for advice" (Student 20A). Due to the format of the course, she never actually saw her classmates face-to-face, and when she visited the professor during office hours, he told her that his online students rarely sought him out in person. Since she had less contact with people in this course that could give her feedback on her writing, she decided to make a writing center appointment, since she found that she generally still liked having that in-person interaction when it came to feedback. In other words, she used the writing center to supplement her online course in order to increase the amount of face-to-face discussion she had about her writing and paper ideas. There was also the fact

that she did not find the peer feedback she received through the class's online system to be particularly helpful. "Sometimes," she said, "they [my classmates] would just kind of restate the things I had said, and I'm like, okay yeah that's what I meant. And so I was not really getting super great feedback" (Student 20A). This added additional motivation for her to make an appointment at the writing center, so that she could get feedback that she could actually use to make revisions and improve her work.

Dissatisfaction with peer feedback, generally from required, classroom activities, was fairly common among the students I interviewed for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, it was because of the way classes were divided into feedback groups. For instance, one student mentioned that her peer editing group in class consisted of only two people, including herself, because only two students chose to write on that particular topic. She commented that maybe she would have found the peer review activity more helpful with more input, but as things stood, the other student in her group "just kind of writes on my paper, "It's good." And I'm like, oh, I kind of need help, but okay" (Student 33A). With a larger group, this might have been different, since she would probably have had more variety in the types of comments that she received. However, since this was not the case, the writing center became the place where she could get those additional opinions, especially as she felt like she needed the help and did not, in fact, agree with her peer that what she had was okay. Other students expressed skepticism towards how helpful their peers could be, since they were in the same class and, therefore, at the same level as the student. One undergraduate explained, for instance, that she did not like showing her paper to her classmates and asking them for help, because "we are at the same level... So the normal mistake we have is common mistakes" (Student 03K). Although this student

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acknowledged that a few of her classmates could give helpful, holistic feedback—feedback related to an essay's ideas and making connections, which goes beyond just grammar—she stated also that there were "only like three or four in the whole class," so the chances of being partnered with these people were low (Student 03K). It was for this holistic feedback that she came to the writing center. Additionally, peer feedback activities did not always match the student's own writing timeline, where students either wanted to finish their papers more quickly (Student 03K) or changed the focus of their entire paper very late in the process (Student 39A). For these students, peer feedback was unhelpful because it did not occur at the best time during their writing process for them to actually use the feedback in their revisions, whereas they could schedule feedback sessions at the writing center at their own discretion.

Students often seemed to have a sense of how much and what kind of feedback they felt they needed in order to succeed. For instance, one student, in describing one of her writing class professors, stated that, "he provided me with good enough feedback for me to better my paper... His feedback was enough for me to understand what I had to do" (Student 38A). Because of that, she did not use the writing center for papers in that class. However, for a major writing assignment in a different class, "although she [the professor] clarified the prompt" when the student saw her during office hours, "she didn't give me feedback like my writing professors. So that's why I was like, okay, I need to go to the writing center. Like get feedback on my writing" (Student 38A). Similar to how students have different expectations and needs when it comes to writing feedback, different teachers handle writing feedback in different ways, and so the writing center is one resource to help students manage mismatches between the two.

Lastly, in terms of additional feedback, there was one student who chose to use the writing center because she felt that she had more control over her response to the feedback she received there. She recounted how, for one of her earlier papers, she went to her professor for help. As a result, "I had to change the whole essay, and I only had two days to do it. I had to change the whole essay, start from scratch and everything" (Student 28A). The student felt that if she went to her professor for feedback, she would have to do whatever the professor said, since it would be awkward to get feedback from the person grading her work and then not implement it. However, since she had had this experience where the professor's comments forced her to rewrite her entire paper, she decided the next time she wanted feedback that "I'm not going to go with her, because I don't want her to be telling me two days before, no, you should probably rewrite your whole essay" (Student 28A). For this student, as long as the feedback came from someone else, whether it was a writing specialist or simply one of her friends, she had the ability to choose whether or not to accept it. In other words, she could treat it as advice instead of as an instruction, and she would have the benefits of a second opinion without the imperative to carry out changes she did not want to make or felt she did not have the time to attempt.

Some Additional Findings

Lastly, while not pervasive enough among the students who participated in this study to constitute a theme, I found it interesting how a few students discussed the writing center as a tool for helping them further their goal of representing themselves as a particular kind of student in the eyes of their teachers or peers. On the whole, this use of

the writing center served to help students maintain their image as good students, although their definitions of what made a good student varied. Or rather, the way they talked about the image they wanted to portray varied depending on whether it was in relation to their teachers or to their classmates.

In regards to teachers, for example, one student explained that she would prefer to work on a paper with the writing center before showing her professor and soliciting the professor's feedback. "I just want her [my professor] to look at my very best work," she said, "so I can see what she doesn't like after I tried my hardest" (Student 29A). For this student, using the writing center was part of what it meant to work hard on a piece of writing, and she wanted her efforts to be reflected in the draft that she took to her professor for critique. Basically, she didn't want her professor to see her rough draft before she had done everything she could to make sure it was presentable, especially as someone who identified herself as "more of a math and science person" and someone who hates writing (Student 29A). Another student, one for whom English was a second language, expressed the opinion that working with people at the writing center would help ensure that "my paper will give out more like a native speaker," mostly so that "the professor can understand what I'm talking about" (Student 22A). As an international student, this undergraduate felt keenly that "sometimes, my ideas are good, but writing errors hurt my clarity" errors that she felt "working with a specialist can avoid" (Student 22A). In part, this was similar to the use of the writing center for a second pair of eyes to provide an audience perspective of her writing, but there was an additional desire to organize her ideas and use words specifically like a native English speaker—someone whose writing she felt her professor would understand better.

Only one student talked extensively about how she wanted to be perceived by her classmates in relation to her use of the writing center. She explained that she preferred to finish her assignments early, and because of this, disliked turning to her peers for feedback on her writing. She stated that "I don't want to show people, like, oh, I finished this paper before you finished it" (Student 03K). According to her, back when she was in middle and high school, she was ridiculed by her classmates for things like answering more of the teacher's questions in class or doing more work than was required. They accused her of wanting to stand out or show off. Because of this, she preferred coming to the writing center for assistance on her writing so that she could stay on top of her own writing schedule and do well on her assignments without appearing to be the kind of student who made other students look bad.

A Brief Discussion on Themes

So do students see the writing center as a place that helps them become better and more independent writers? For many students, the answer to this question was definitely yes, as they reported acquiring new writing skills and refining old skills that they could apply to future papers. In fact, it surprised me how many students could recount specific strategies or writing-related knowledge that they had picked up from their writing center consultations even after almost an entire school year had elapsed. Things like the importance and construction of transitions, the need to consider an audience's needs, or strategies for being concise were all elements of writing that students felt they took away with them from their writing center experiences. However, becoming a better writer was usually not the reason students sought out the writing center, and even though students

acknowledged the usefulness of the writing center in this regard, they stated also that time constraints meant they would likely not return to the center simply to work on their writing skills. Instead, students' actual motivation to return to the writing center related exclusively to working on specific assignments that were either new to them or extremely important to their success.

Using the writing center for assistance on specific papers was, however, not the same as seeing the writing center as an editing service. Although many students did hope that tutors and writing specialists would help them with editing their work for grammar, word choice, and punctuation, equally as common was the desire for holistic feedback, discussion of ideas, and a reader's perspective of their writing. What one student said about her thoughts often being "lost in translation" when she writes encapsulates the feelings expressed by several of her fellow undergraduates, and working with someone at the writing center was one way of bridging the gap between what she wanted to express and what actually ended up on the page. It was only by interacting with a real, flesh and blood reader that these students were able to gauge how their ideas might be perceived by an audience. This, in turn, made seeking feedback from others a stable part of many students' writing processes for high-stakes assignments, and even though such discussion cannot technically be considered a transferable skill, it is every bit as valuable.

Over time, some students were able to build their own support networks beyond the writing center with other individuals like friends or teachers who could provide them with reader feedback and general critique, but not all students were that fortunate. Sometimes, the other people in their lives did not have the time or expertise to give advice, or they simply were not in the habit of discussing writing. As one student said

when asked if she ever requested feedback from her friends, "It just never comes up. They don't really ask like, 'Oh can you look at mine?' So why would I ask them" (Student 29A)? For students like these, the writing center continues to play an important role in their approaches to writing even as they settle into college life.

Students' Use of the Writing Center Over Time

As the students in this study progressed through the academic year, their use of the writing center often changed. These shifts were influenced by a variety of factors including what classes students were taking and their perceived need of additional writing support, time and scheduling constraints, prior experience of conflicts between teacher and writing center feedback, and increased experience with different center services such as peer tutoring as opposed to writing specialist appointments.

Writing Center Use as Effected by Students' Coursework and Perceived Need

Generally speaking, students saw the writing center as a resource associated with writing-related classes. That is to say, students in this study who continued to use writing center services throughout the year were predominantly students who enrolled in writing courses for all three academic quarters. Many of the students who did not return to the writing center stated simply that it was "because I didn't take any writing courses this quarter" (Student 12A). Another student noted that when she first learned of the writing center from a campus tour guide, she made a mental note to herself that "I will see how that goes when I do have writing class" (Student 35A). In part, this was because students

reported having very little writing in their other classes, but it was also because the writing they were asked to do in classes that were not specifically about writing were generally lower stakes or less challenging. As one student said, describing the writing required for lab in her science classes, "Lab isn't very... there is writing, but you don't get graded based on the quality of your writing skills," and so "I didn't feel a need to come in for that" (Student 29A). This particular student had her own system for approaching lab work and reports that included occasionally rewriting the lab instruction manual for herself. However, while this process of preparing for and then conducting her lab work included a good deal of writing, it was either writing to help herself think or writing to demonstrate her knowledge of course content—in other words, not writing where how it was written seemed particularly important. Another student elaborated on this idea of writing assignments that were not graded for "quality" by explaining that "I think right now, professors, at least the ones I've taken, are looking for if you're... able to relay what they've told you so that at least you have that basic information that you're able to use and apply critically in future classes" (Student 21A). He further explained that for him, quality writing meant writing that could be understood by a general audience, and writing where such aspects as organization and clarity actually mattered.

This feeling that professors or graders of non-writing classes did not care about writing quality was fairly common. One student from the sciences even shared an experience from one of her few science, non-lab report writing assignments where the written feedback she received included a comment that read "this is great, and then in parenthesis like, you don't have to try this hard" (Student 18A). Since "they [the graders] were like, you tried way too hard for this. So then I was like, okay, I'm not going to try

that hard anymore" (Student 18A). Although this example was more extreme, related sentiments were shared by many other students who found their assignments in non-writing courses to be both shorter and much less challenging, and thus easier to complete on their own without other assistance.

Use of Writing Center as Shaped by Time Constraints

Time constraints were another important factor in whether students used or continued to use the writing center over the course of the academic year. The more classes students took and the busier they became with class work and college life, the less time they had to use services like writing center consultations. Making appointments was often made difficult by scheduling conflicts on the part of students, as well as limited availability on the part of center writing specialists. One student said, for example, that although she would have liked to come to the writing center spring quarter, her writing class that quarter had assignments that were "due so often" that she couldn't make the time (Student 03K). For instance, she would get an assignment during class Tuesday afternoon, have other classes all day Wednesday, and have to turn in her paper Wednesday afternoon. Between finding time to actually write the assignment and attending her other courses, she simply did not have the opportunity to seek other assistance. Another student noted that "whenever I try to find an appointment, it's always two weeks ahead and my papers are usually due by the time I can find an available appointment that fits my schedule" (Student 02K). She explained how time slots are usually booked up two weeks ahead of time, and so trying to fit an appointment into her own class schedule and writing timeline became exceedingly difficult. Some students

even talked about having to schedule appointments long before they even knew for certain if they would have a major writing assignment in order to secure themselves a spot, which then sometimes resulted in late cancelations when other things came up or when the assignment turned out to be different from what they anticipated.

Students' own plans were also often disrupted when their teachers changed or deviated from their class syllabus. Describing the way writing assignments have been given in one of her more writing-heavy courses, one student explained:

> She just pops to you, so I don't really know when to create an appointment because what if I don't have it [the prompt] by that time? And if I cancel, it's going to be hard to get another appointment... And the thing's that... She has her syllabus, but she's not completely following it, if that makes any sense... The thing is that I need something to go by so that I can plan my schedule. And if you don't follow your schedule, I'm falling behind in my schedule. (Student 19A)

For this student, making a writing center appointment wasn't simply a matter of planning ahead. Even when she tried to plan ahead, changes made by her professor during the quarter that she could not anticipate seriously limited her ability to keep to her intended schedule. Consequently, when she did have a difficult writing assignment for that class, she sought help from her teacher and classmates or simply tried to forge through it on her own.

Although drop-in tutoring was also available at the writing center, many of the students in this study expressed a preference for writing specialist appointments. For a few students, it was because they or their friends had had negative past experiences where they waited up to three hours to see a drop-in tutor. More often, however, it was because students perceived drop-in tutoring differently from by-appointment specialist consultations. I will discuss this more in the section on students' experiences with peer tutors versus writing specialists.

Use of the Writing Center as Influenced by Prior Experience with Conflicts Between Teachers and Writing Center Specialists or Peer Tutors

At least three out of the twenty-eight students in this study had personal experiences with conflicts between the feedback they received from their course instructors and the advice they received from writing center specialists or peer tutors. Each of these students responded somewhat differently to this experience. In two cases, it simply influenced the way in which students subsequently utilized writing center services, while in the last case, the student eventually stopped using the writing center entirely.

The first of these students encountered a straightforward contradiction between what the peer tutor she saw said and what her professor told her after that consultation. She explained that when she saw the peer tutor to brainstorm for a paper, the tutor told her something about digressions in the reading that her teacher later said she did not agree with. "which is why," the student explained, "I was like, okay. I need to see the teacher before I come here" (Student 09A). This was a literary narrative analysis paper, and because of these two contradicting discussions, the student had to alter the excerpt that she was analyzing as well as how she approached the assignment in order to meet her professor's expectations. Her takeaway from this experience was not that she should not use writing center services, but that next time, she should approach her professor to verify her ideas first before bringing a draft to a tutor. This incident occured during the fall quarter, and she did indeed return to the writing center for appointments during the winter, both for brainstorming and to review written drafts. This could have been

influenced by the fact that she had had extensive, prior experiences with writing centers at the community college she transferred from, and she described part of her use of this new writing center as looking for someone that she could "click" with (Student 09A). That first tutor simply was not that person.

The second of these students was far more frustrated by her conflicting experiences. She was working on a historical artifact analysis, and during her consultation, her writing specialist suggested an additional outside resource that the student could bring into her paper to further develop one of the points she had made. The student was actually very excited about the suggestion. As she put it, "I thought it was a really good idea, and I left this place, I was like yes, I know what I'm going to write about" (Student 28A). She made these revisions, but then when she asked her professor to "check it one last time... she was like, oh, I don't really agree with you adding Chumpi because... well, I forgot what she said. Point is... she said that it was incorrect because I was trying to go into something different" (Student 28A). She had already spent a great deal of time working on this paper, and so after being told by her professor that her changes were not correct, and therefore not acceptable, "I got really mad because I was really frustrated. So then I just went with my first essay" (Student 28A). Basically, she scrapped all her revisions and chose to turn in her old draft, the version of her writing before she had asked for either teacher or writing center feedback, as her final, and she would just accept whatever grade she was given. However, despite her frustration around this event, the student expressed the opinion that she would still consider coming back to the writing center in the future. Mostly, this was because of how she viewed teacher versus writing center feedback. This experience was not the first time that her professor's

critique caused her to feel like she was being forced to completely change her paper, whether she wanted to or not. Where she felt pressured to respond to her teacher's feedback, going to the writing center gave her the option of still receiving feedback while maintaining control over what revisions she actually wanted to make. Unfortunately, I was unable to confirm whether or not this student returned to the writing center, as I was only able to obtain one interview with her.

For the last of these students, the conflict she experienced was less about the paper's content and more about disagreements in teacher and writing center priorities, which resulted in a blow to her confidence as a writer. When we spoke during the fall quarter, she explained briefly what she wished had gone differently with her writing center visits, which she had made more than once:

> I thought that they were going to look at my paper and help me with my grammar a lot. But they didn't. He like... Well my first time I was here, he was just kind of reading it, and he was like, 'Okay, this is what I'm getting from your paper. Is that what you're trying to say?' And I was like, 'Yeah,' but like he didn't say, 'Oh, this is a run-on sentence.' He didn't help me with my grammar, and I thought I was going to get help with that, so that was a little bit disappointing. And then my second time I was here, I definitely got a lot of help on the context of my paper and how to make it better. But again, I didn't get help with any of my grammar issues, and that really suffered my grade in this paper. (Student 11A)

To elaborate, while the student was able to improve the literary analysis portions of her essay and was even told by her professor that her analysis was "clearly highly developed," she ultimately received a failing grade. The main reason, according to the comments and markings her professor left on her paper, was poor grammar, what her professor called "significant language errors" (Student 11A). As the student noted from her own experiences, writing centers often place a lower priority on sentence-level issues such as grammar, preferring to focus on organizational or idea-level aspects of writing that affect the development of a paper as a whole and really pushes students to think more

deeply. Grammar, in contrast, is usually only prioritized when it severely impairs a reader's understanding of the text—which, in this student's case, seems unlikely, as the teacher was able to understand her reasoning and evaluate her analytical skills. These priorities arise in large part from writing center history and the struggle to position writing centers as legitimate places of learning and not just fix-it shops for grammar. Unfortunately, these values do not always align with the values of the teachers grading student work. Receiving a failing grade on this paper when she originally thought she had done a good job was a disheartening experience for this student, and she did not use the writing center her winter or spring quarters, stating that she instead wanted to see what she could accomplish on her own and by forcing herself to be less shy and approach her teachers more for feedback. She still enjoyed her time at the writing center for the "bond" she felt she was able to build with her writing specialist, and she valued "being able to go up to them and be like, hey... I know I came here for help on my paper, but I still got a really bad score on it, which is something I felt a little more comfortable saying here than to my professor" (Student 11A). In other words, the writing center provided a welcoming environment for her that was helpful in her transition into her first year of college, but she felt that if she used the writing center again or was advising another student, she would emphasize that it should not be a student's last stop for writing feedback. Essentially, while getting feedback from the writing center is helpful, she would always want feedback from her professor before she turns in her final to account for teacher versus writing center differences.

Use of Writing Center as Effected by Students' Perceptions of Peer Tutors and Writing Specialists

None of the students I interviewed expressed any preferences for either writing specialists or peer tutors at the beginning of the year apart from the consultation format. In other words, student preferences varied only based on the tutoring format, whether it was by-appointment consultations, which were offered by writing specialists, or drop-in consultations, which were offered only by peer tutors. However, this shifted for students later in the year after they accumulated more experience with both. While some students discussed choosing either peer tutors or writing specialists depending on what aspect of their writing they wished to work on, other students stated a preference for writing specialists as they felt these were more professional than peer tutors.

A few students who reported using both drop-in peer tutoring and by-appointment specialist consultations explained that both were helpful, but in different ways. Partly, this was because of the time allotted for the different formats with drop-in tutoring being much shorter than specialist appointments. This made peer tutors a good resource for "quick suggestions," as one student put it, and a perfect choice for short or casual writing assignments like blog posts (Student 26A). Other students differentiated peer tutor feedback from specialist feedback, stating that with specialists, "it is more like how to make a structure and how to build arguments, and these are like the solid foundations of writing, and with the peer, is more like telling you, I understand what you are saying but you can make it more clear by doing this" (Student 37A). In other words, some students felt that peer tutor feedback was more specific to whatever paper they were working on, whereas specialist feedback could often be more generally applied to all her papers.

Additionally, a few students commented that peer tutors focused more on sentence-level feedback whereas specialists gave more holistic help or critique. For instance, one student said that "with the tutor, they just told me... the basic mistake, like the grammar or the citation, but not the content" (Student 22A). This differed from the student's experience with writing specialists, where she worked more on aspects like content, including how she needed to explain for a reader why her argument was important.

For other students, after experiencing both drop-in peer tutoring and writing specialist appointments, students said that they preferred writing specialists because they felt writing specialists were more professional—better able to quickly assess their writing and provide clear feedback and suggestions. In trying to put words to what she felt the difference was between peer tutors and writing specialists, one student said:

> I can see the difference in ... I don't know how to say it, wisdom, I guess... For the peer tutor, I feel like you have to ask specific questions. They don't really know what to target. And she [the specialist] led me through it, basically. I didn't have to ask... She's just a professional. (Student 29A)

Both this feeling that peer tutors sometimes struggled more to articulate their suggestions and the feeling that specialists were more experienced and confident—more professional—came up in other student responses as well. For example, a different student said, "I don't really like doing peer tutoring, because sometimes... I know this is a problem, and she knows, or he knows, but both of us cannot explain why it is a problem" (Student 03K). Whereas, in contrast, the student felt that writing specialists were much better at actually explaining why something was a problem, how to approach solving it, and the reasons behind doing so. This perception of peer tutor uncertainty was what led to another student perceiving specialists as knowing more about what they are talking about. Discussing these differences, she said:

> I feel like it is different in the effect that the peer students... If they want to make comments, they make comments in a certain way, like, 'Oh, maybe you should...' I don't know how to explain it. They're not telling you, like, 'Oh, you should do this, this, and that.' They're more suggesting, because maybe they might feel like they don't have the authority... And with the specialist, I feel it's more like, 'Oh, you should do this, and this, and this. This is going to help your paper.' Because I feel like it's just experience in general, so specialists have way more experience and they know what they're talking about, while peer tutors are still figuring it out... If I really am stuck and I need a little push, I would definitely go to the specialist. But if I need help with my grammar or fixing a paragraph, then I would definitely go with the peer student. (Student 19A)

This student's response captures a little of both types of reactions to peer tutors and writing specialists, where she categorized each one as being helpful for students seeking different kinds of feedback while, at the same time, stating that she felt specialists were more capable due to the fact that they were often more assertive in the manner of their suggestions and often gave more step-by-step advice.

It is unclear how much student perceptions and the choices made by tutors and specialists were influenced by the time constraints of drop-in tutoring versus scheduled appointments, and it is possible that these perceptions might change if students had more experience with by-appointment peer tutoring. However, regardless of their particular preferences, no students in this current study who used both services saw no difference at all between the two.

A Brief Discussion on Changes in Writing Center Use Over Time

Overall, factors beyond the writing center had a greater influence than the writing center itself on changes in students' use of writing center services over the academic year. Of particular concern were the mixed messages about writing that students in this study often received. Conflicts and contradictions—between the writing feedback students received from their instructors and the writing center, between professors with

different priorities and across different disciplines, and others—was often a source of frustration for students, especially as they made their transition into being undergraduates. Such frustrations caused some students to make changes to the way they approached the writing process. Others, like the student who ended up throwing away her revisions and turning in an old draft as her final, gave up on trying to adjust to others' expectations, since all the effort she put into trying was not paying off and she had too many other demands on her time and energy. When the expectations of an instructor are unclear or change from what students were originally told, writing can become even more difficult and unrewarding than many students already think it is.

In addition, although students very much appreciated the holistic and idea-level feedback they received at the writing center and even sought out the writing center specifically because they wanted that type of writing support, grammar remains a high priority for some instructors. It was troubling for me to learn that a student who was able to demonstrate strong analytical skills in her writing still received a failing grade solely because of her paper's grammatical issues. Such examples, while fortunately not common among the students I interviewed, emphasize the importance of being sensitive to differences in teachers' priorities. Even though grades are not everything and several students told me that they understood fundamentally that learning to write well was about more than receiving high marks on their essay, the grades they received were often these students' only concrete means of evaluating their own accomplishments as writers. When they talked about doing well on a paper, it was always about their final scores, and even when they felt they had written a good essay, students were hesitant to make the claim to me that they had done well if they had not yet seen those scores. This is not surprising

since, at the end of the day, schools judge how well their students are performing based upon their grades. Trying to divorce learning from grades is unrealistic, and although it is true that students can learn without their grades visibly improving, it would also be irresponsible to ignore or gloss over factors that might have a concrete impact on the scores a student might receive.

Conclusions and Implications

So how exactly does the writing center fit into students' undergraduate writing experiences? There are many, many answers, from a scaffold to support the transition from high school into college to a place where students can go to share their writing with a reader and jumpstart their own writing processes (see Table 8 for summary of themes).

Table 8: Student Perceptions of the Writing Center, Themes and Subthemes The writing center as a place to...	
Become a Better Writer	**Improve a Piece of Writing**
• By acquiring new writing strategies and knowledge • By refreshing their memories, developing previously learned writing skills, and easing the transition into college • By learning about new genres of writing • By being encouraged to challenge oneself as a writer	• By asking for an audience perspective on one's writing • By finding a trusted expert to double check one's work • By sharing ideas and unfreezing one's writing process • By clarifying teacher feedback and assignment expectations • By getting additional feedback when dissatisfied with feedback already received

The way students used the writing center was influenced by their classes, their past writing experiences, their teacher's expectations, their own goals in seeking feedback, and numerous other factors that combine to shape their journeys as writers. To conclude this chapter, I will discuss some of the implications of these experiences as they relate to teachers, writing centers, and students, and touch back upon the stories of Ella, Annie, and Sara with whom this chapter began.

For Teachers

In regards to teachers, there are four points I would like to revisit: 1) students' and instructors' choice of writing support, 2) changing students' beliefs about writing and their own ability to write well, 3) the motivation of being allowed to express one's own opinions, and 4) students' perceived differences in the importance of writing quality.

First, a majority of students agreed that, on some level, writing in college is challenging, and the writing center was just one of many resources that they relied upon in order to overcome this challenge. It was concerning, therefore, to learn that some students had had instructors who actively discouraged them from seeking help at the writing center. One student explained that her teacher wanted them to either ask the teacher or their classmates for help instead, as he wanted them to become a supportive writing community within their own classroom. This worked well for the student in that class, because both her teacher and her classmates made time to provide feedback, and the student felt the quality of feedback was enough to help guide her through her writing. However, this support was not something she was able to take with her into her next quarter. Although this particular student felt confident enough in herself by that point to

not need writing assistance from others, many other students encountered situations where they needed or wanted support beyond what was offered by a particular teacher or within a particular classroom. In contrast, the writing center is a resource that is always available, that students are free to return to at any time during their undergraduate careers. For students who do not feel well-supported in a class or who do not have their own outside network of peers or relatives that can give them feedback and encourage them in their writing, it seems unfair to discourage them from exploring all the writing resources that are available to them.

Second, many students expressed the belief that writing simply comes naturally to good writers. Ella was one such student, and it was problematic because of how frustrating such a belief made the task of writing whenever her first draft did not turn out well. Spending more time on a piece of writing was, to her, a sign of not being good enough as a writer. What helped Ella change her mind about this were her instructors. Ella said that they "opened my eyes, that writing is not just something that I'm going to have in one second.," and they did this by "sharing their own experiences as being a part of the English industry or as writers." In other words, hearing about the experiences of people who were acknowledged professionals in writing-related industries helped convince her that terrible early drafts and multiple revisions was normal, even for published authors. She developed a more relaxed view of both feedback and revision, and she ended the year both more comfortable taking the initiative in sharing her work and feeling confident that she would be able to handle future writing assignments on her own. Creating opportunities for students to meet and speak with such individuals could be extremely helpful for some undergraduates, and stories like Ella's should perhaps serve

as encouragement to writing instructors and other teachers to share more about their own approaches to writing, especially in terms of challenges and revision.

Third, it was amazing how much of an impact it had on students to have the space in a writing assignment to truly express their own opinions. It is not surprising that having some freedom when writing to choose a topic that interests or matters to them is motivational. However, not only did this freedom to share their own opinions motivate many of the students in this study to write, it motivated them to look beyond their classrooms for additional support to improve their writing. Wanting to share their own thoughts on important issues and wanting those thoughts to be understood by others can be powerful incentives for students to develop their writing skills.

Lastly, although it was not the focus of this study, the idea of writing quality came up in a number of student interviews and influenced the choices students made in regards to their writing in a number of ways. Namely, when students saw writing quality as important to their success in a class, they were much more likely to use the writing center or seek other forms of additional support. High quality writing for these students was generally writing where more than just content would be evaluated—overall structure and clarity, for instance, and how accessible it would be to a general audience. Additionally, students shared the sentiment that quality was not expected of them for most of their non-writing class writing assignments. Does it matter that students do not feel that quality is important to the writing they are asked to do for other kinds of classes? The answer to this question probably varies depending on the particular values of a school or department. Whatever the case, however, it certainly provides food for thought.

For Writing Centers

For writing centers, the results of this study highlight a few important concepts, including 1) the problem with undervaluing grammar, and 2) the potential benefits of long-term relationships between students and tutors.

First, due to the emphasis on developing better writers rather than just better writing, writing center staff often focus on global writing issues such as ideas and organization and steer away from sentence-level concerns such as grammar. In other words, aspects of writing such as grammar and punctuation are often seen as less important and are not prioritized during consultations. Unfortunately, some instructors do not share this view, as in the case of the student who received a failing grade on her paper because of poor grammar despite having good analysis. A number of writing center scholars have argued for the need to talk about grammar when working with English Learners, because of how important such linguistic mechanics can be for someone learning to write in a foreign language (Grimm, 2009; Myers, 2002; Phillips, 2013). This study adds to this argument, not because of the importance of grammar, but because some instructors weight grammar heavily when evaluating student work. Even though we want students to see learning to write as being about more than getting a good grade, grades are an important part of students' lives and a primary means by which they assess their own progress. In order to better support students, writing tutors and specialists need to be responsive to differing priorities and needs amongst both students and classroom teachers.

Second, for students like Annie, who attributed her growth into an independent and confident writer to the writing center, the opportunity to build a long-term

relationship with her writing tutor was incredibly significant. When it came to her comfort level with both experimenting as a writer and accepting advice, it was important to Annie not only that she knew and trusted the tutor or specialist, but that he or she knew her in return, her strengths and weaknesses, and how she had progressed. This was especially true when she was just starting out and had not yet built any self confidence as a writer. Another student talked about how valuable it was to her that she was able to grow with her writing specialist. She saw the same specialist every time she came to the writing center, and she was able to form the kind of relationship with her where she felt comfortable sharing her disappointments when her writing didn't receive the scores she had hoped for. Her writing specialist became someone she could rely upon to encourage her and be there for her when she felt down, and even after she stopped using writing center services, she spoke warmly of this experience. Writing centers are uniquely positioned to offer this kind of long-term support, because they are not tied to one particular class. Whether or not students have the opportunity to develop such relationships with writing center staff, however, depends in part on how the writing center structures its services, such as whether students are able to make repeat visits with the same individuals.

For Students

Finally, for students, this study speaks not only to the richness and diversity of their college writing experiences but also to the many different ways in which students can make resources like the writing center work for them. Among the 28 students I interviewed, there was a wide range of approaches to composing that, in turn, led to

students viewing and using the writing center in a variety of different ways. Whether they came to the writing center because they wanted to ensure that they understood the basics of writing research papers or because they wanted a second opinion on an essay worth half their grade, one thing these students had in common was that they experimented with the resources that they had and, in so doing, were able to find ways to leverage these resources when writing that could help them accomplish the work they wanted to accomplish.

The student Sara from the beginning of this chapter is a prime example of this. As a first-year college student, she encountered new genres of writing that she had never written before. Each time this happened, she took control of her own learning by using a variety of resources in order to learn what was expected of her in this new form of writing. She talked to her teachers, shared with her peers, read examples and guides online, and visited the writing center. Soliciting feedback at the writing center was only one of many tactics she employed to support herself through the writing process until she felt confident enough in her own understanding and approach to write similar assignments on her own.

There is more than one path to success at college writing, just as there is more than one way to utilize writing center services. What is important is a willingness to give these different resources a chance. For students, it makes little difference whether the writing center works to make them better writers or to help them improve one particular text. Instead, what matters is knowing that the writing center is available to them and that, should they encounter challenges while learning to write in college, there is a place they can go where there are experienced writers who are ready and willing to help them.

6. Key Contributions and Limitations

Writing and learning to write are complex processes that are influenced by numerous factors both internal and external (Graham, 2010), and this complexity is reflected in both how students respond to writing center feedback and how they position the writing center in relation to their other college writing experiences. In this dissertation, I explored some of these complexities, and the findings showed that:

- The writing topics that students reported learning about during their writing center visits were similar to what tutors reported discussing. Among these, there was a balance of both global or higher-order concerns and local or sentence-level issues, similar to what has been found in previous studies, with organization, overall structure, and flow being an area of particular emphasis (Cross & Catchings, 2018; Winder et al., 2016). Furthermore, many students continued to refer back to their writing center discussions later in the year when approaching other writing assignments on their own. Specific tips and tricks for writing such as the importance of transitions and specific strategies for constructing effective transitions were especially useful.

- After leaving the writing center, students usually made some attempt to respond to all the suggestions that tutors made. In contrast to small-scale changes like correcting spelling errors, however, the way students responded to suggestions that involved making complex or large-scale revisions was more impacted by other factors such as interpretation of tutor feedback, time constraints, note-taking, and personal likes and dislikes. Whether and how students took notes

during their conferences also affected the changes that students did or did not make, although in either case, notes served as helpful reminders of what they discussed with their tutors and supported students in their post-conference revision choices.

- Although students agreed that they learned transferable writing strategies from their writing center consultations and reported continuing to use those strategies independently on other writing assignments, students primarily sought out the writing center to support their writing and revising of a particular task. This was not because they did not see the value of the writing center in helping them to improve as writers in general, but because factors such as the time constraints placed by the demands of college life and coursework made it impractical to visit the writing center simply to learn about writing.

- High-stakes writing and writing in unfamiliar genres were common motivators for students to return to the writing center, and center tutors served as especially important resources for students who wanted more or different feedback than they were receiving from class, students who especially valued feedback from professionals or experts they considered credible and trustworthy, and students who did not have other sources of writing support like skilled writer friends or family.

The results of this dissertation contribute to existing research by broadening our knowledge of the impact of the writing center on students' college experiences and subsequent writing and revision choices. It reaffirms prior research on what students often discuss and learn about during their writing center conferences (Cross & Catchings,

2018; Winder et al., 2016) and provides an alternative perspective by which to understand how writing center feedback connects to students' revisions by focusing not on whether papers were improved (Williams, 2004) but on students' thinking and their own reasoning for the changes they decide to make. Lastly, this study provides a more holistic picture of how students who use the writing center view the center in relation to themselves and their learning, adding to prior research on the effects of writing center work on students beyond center walls, which has largely focused on peer tutors rather than student users (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Hughes et al., 2010).

That said, the sample of students who participated in this study was small ($n =$ 28), only a fraction of the number of students who use writing center services at UCI. While they do represent a diverse array of experiences, they likely still represent only a portion of the larger picture. Likewise, writing centers come in many different formats, offer a variety of different services, and offer those services in a variety of different ways. All of these factors influence how students interact with the writing center, as the findings of this dissertation demonstrate. The experiences of students are necessarily tied to their specific situations and contexts, and so should not be generalized across writing centers. Instead, these findings should be seen as a testament to the diversity of those experiences and a reminder of the complexities of learning, writing, and student life.

Whatever their background or reasons for coming to the writing center, however, all the students who participated in this study agreed that the writing center was helpful to them. Sometimes, it was because they learned specific tips and tricks that made writing a little easier. Sometimes, it was simply because they wanted someone who had time to sit down and talk with them about their writing, a place where they could feel comfortable

and not feel as though they were imposing on someone's time with their composing troubles. Beyond debates about whether writing centers are helping to develop better writers or better writing, this study highlights how the writing center can serve as a powerful tool for students to take control of their own learning and remain active participants in shaping their own writing processes.

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Appendix A—Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (Students)

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for First Interview

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself. So I can understand where you're coming from in terms of language.

2. Can you please start by telling me a little about your views on writing? Do you like it? Hate it? What do you think is the hardest thing about it, or the easiest?

3. Has the writing you've been asked to do in college so far different from the writing you've done before in the past?

4. What was your reason for coming to the writing center and making an appointment with a specialist?

5. What were your expectations when you came to your writing center consultation? Did the session meet those expectations?

6. Do you know about the other writing center services? Like peer drop-in tutoring? Have you ever used other services? Would you consider doing so in the future?

7. Is there anything your tutor did that you found especially helpful?

8. Is there anything else you wish your tutor had done that would have helped you in revising your paper?

9. Other than from your tutor, have you gotten help with your writing from anyone else? For instance, what kind of feedback did you get from your teacher? Have you ever asked your friends or family to look at your writing or give you suggestions?

10. When during your writing process do you think it's most helpful to get help from places like the writing center?

11. Do you feel like you learned anything about writing that you can use on future assignments?

12. (Look at students' old and final drafts together to talk about revision choices)

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Follow-Up Interviews

1. So how have you been? How are your classes going so far this quarter?

2. Can you tell me a bit about the kinds of classes you're taking now? Have you done any writing either for those classes or outside of class for other things? Or are you expecting any writing assignments later this quarter?

3. If you've had a writing assignment this quarter, can you describe to me how you approached completing it?

4. So far this quarter, have you used any writing center services? If yes, which ones and for what? If no, why not? Have you considered it?

5. Can you think of a circumstance that might cause you to seek out the writing center again in the future?

6. When you think about your past writing center experiences, what still really stands out to you? Or what do you rmember best? (Note: this could be anything at all, from things about writing to whether the receptionist was nice)

7. Is there anything you learned at the writing center that you feel like is still useful to you or that you still think about when you write?

8. Have you received help from anyone else for your writing so far this quarter? Friends, family, teachers, etc?

Appendix B—Writing Center Exit Survey

Introduction

Welcome to our confidential survey.

Your feedback is very valuable to us and will be used to make improvements to the Writing Specialists' consultation services at the Center for Excellence in Writing and Communication. After each consultation, we ask that you complete this evaluation of your experience. Your UCI Net ID's will be stored separately from your responses in order to ensure that your feedback remains confidential.

Instructions

Please choose the response that most closely matches your opinion.

1.

During my consultation, my Writing Specialist and I focused on the following:

	Yes	No
Improving my understanding of the assignment prompt	○	○
Improving the thesis/central argument of my writing	○	○
Clarifying my ideas in my writing	○	○
Evaluating evidence/sources I have found	○	○
Integrating evidence/sources into my writing	○	○
Understanding the principles of academic honesty vs. plagiarism	○	○
Strengthening my paragraph structure	○	○
Improving my word choice and the overall tone of my writing	○	○
Improving my skills in revision and proofreading	○	○

2.

My experience in the writing consultation

○ Exceeded my expectations

○ Met my expectations

○ Did not meet my expectations

3.

In terms of my understanding of the writing/research project overall, my consultation made me feel…

○ Much more confident

○ More confident

○ Less confident

○ Much less confident

○ No change

4.

In terms of my understanding of the next steps to complete the writing research project, my consultation made me feel…

○ Much more confident

○ More confident

○ Less confident

○ Much less confident

○ No change

5.

In terms of my writing/research abilities, my consultation made me feel…

○ Much more confident

○ More confident

○ Less confident

○ Much less confident

○ No change

6.

Based on your experience:

	Very Likely	Likely	Not Likely
How likely are you to use the Writing Center again?	○	○	○
How likely are you to recommend the Writing Center to your friends?	○	○	○

7.

What did you learn about writing during your consultation?

8.

What do you plan to do next in developing or revising your writing project?

9.

Please use the following space for any comments about your experience with the Writing Specialist or your overall experience with the Center for Excellence in Writing and Communication.

Closing Text

Thank you for completing this survey, and sharing information with us about your writing center experience!

Appendix C—Complete List of Topics Discussed According to Student Exit Surveys and Writing Specialist Post Visit Notes

Table #?: Complete List of Topics Discussed According to Student Exit Surveys and Writing Specialist Post Visit Notes				
Topic	Examples (from survey responses)	Student Surveys (specialist appointment)	Specialist Visit Notes	Student Surveys (drop-in peer tutoring)
Academic Honesty and Plagiarism	"I learned about academic dishonesty" (Student, Fall 2018) "what plagiarism is and I know what is the real meaning of citation and how it works for critical thinking and writing" (Student, Fall 2018) "Academic integrity (information)" (Specialist)	5 (0.54%)	4 (0.40%)	4 (0.73%)
Understanding, Addressing, and Adhering to a Prompt	"Understand and follow the prompt step by step" (Student, Fall 2018) "Hhow to breakdown the writing prompt, to answer it clearly and effectively" (Student, Winter 2019) "We discussed how she could better reply to the prompt by revising her thesis and topic sentences to include the answer to why people don't speak up, in addition to the info she had already provided regarding the consequences of not speaking up" (Specialist)	59 (6.41%)	131 (13.02%)	26 (4.74%)
Analysis (what is it, how to do it, etc)	"How to actually analyze quotes... rather than glossing over and doing surface level analysis" (Student, Fall 2018) "Benefits of analysis in my essays" (Student, Fall 2018) " "Reading" film" (Specialist)	29 (3.15%)	59 (5.86%)	25 (4.56%)
Audience and Reader Response/Expectations	"How to give a specific direction to audience" (Student, Spring 2019) "I should be conscious of who is reading my paper and what their knowledge about the topic is. In this way, I will be aware of how clear I am in my explanations and use of terms" (Student, Winter 2019) "Audience expectations" (Specialist)	57 (6.20%)	101 (10.04%)	15 (2.74%)
Being Specific and Focusing (using more specific examples, staying on topic, etc)	"I need to make my statement as specific as possible" (Student, Fall 2018) "I learned how to hone in on one specific topic to write about" (Student, Spring 2019) "Focusing on specific examples" (Student, Winter 2019)	58 (6.30%)	99 (9.84%)	36 (6.57%)

	"Not going off topic and staying on the point" (Student, Winter 2019) "Discussed why topic was too broad and how to potentially narrow it" (Specialist)			
Citation and Formating	"What I can do to properly cite my sources" (Student, Fall 2018) "MLA" (Student, Fall 2018) "How to do works cited page" (Student, Fall 2018) "APA citation" (Specialist)	49 (5.33%)	61 (6.06%)	23 (4.20%)
Conclusions	"How can I write the last paragraph" (Student, Fall 2018) "How to make my conclusion more attractive" (Student, Winter 2019) "How to… cohesively conclude my paper" (Student, Winter 2019) "improving the closing rhetoric" (Specialist)	14 (1.52%)	38 (3.78%)	21 (3.83%)
Consistency	"I learned about consistency" (Studdent, Fall 2018) "Make sure your argument is consistent throughout" (Student, Winter 2019) "We talked about how she could form a more consistent theme in her essay by including topic sentences before her summary of experiences" (Specialist)	13 (1.41%)	12 (1.19%)	2 (0.36%)
Counter Arguments	"I learn the counter argument of my problem" (Student, Spring 2019) "Formulating a counter argument" (Specialist)	5 (0.54%)	3 (0.30%)	2 (0.36%)
Critiquing	"Critiquing" (Student, Fall 2018) "Considering strength of proposal" (Specialist)	1 (0.11%)	1 (0.10%)	0 (0.00%)
Don't Stress, Be Confident	"I learned to be more confident with my writing" (Student, Fall 2018) " learned to stay positive when a topic doesn't work out" (Student, Spring 2019) "Building confidence" (Specialist)	7 (0.76%)	2 (0.20%)	7 (1.28%)
Expand, Develop, Elaborate On, Relate, and Clarify Ideas	"How to connect my ideas to the overall theme" (Student, Winter 2019) "How to strengthen writing for a specific purpose" (Student, Spring 2019) "Include more details regarding the subject that is being discussed" (Student, Spring 2019) "how to make my argument clearer and more effective by expanding on sub-topics that I introduce throughout the paper" (Student, Spring 2019) "We found some points that needed clarification" (Specialist) "We talked about how he could add more complexity to his writing by breaking down his ideas and describing not only the relationships amongst those ideas and	80 (8.70%)	153 (15.21%)	58 (10.58%)

	justifications for those relationships" (Specialist)			
Genre (different types of writing and related rhetorical techniques)	"The difference between a CV and resume" (Student, Spring 2019) "How to compose a personal statement for graduate school" (Student, Spring 2019) "How to think more like a philosopher" (Student, Spring 2019) "How to reframe personal statements into manageable chunks and paint a picture of who I am rather than listing things like a resume" (Student, Spring 2019) "We discussed how much ambiguity is appropriate in different story-telling situations" (Specialist)	95 (10.33%)	163 (16.20%)	28 (5.11%)
Giving Context (contexualizing ideas, arguments, information, etc)	"I learned to back up what I am saying with more context" (Student, Spring 2019) "Integrate historical context" (Student, Spring 2019) "We talked about how she could add background information on characters so that their actions would feel more justified" (Specialist)	11 (1.20%)	17 (1.69%)	5 (0.91%)
Grammar and Punctuation	"Verb tenses that are affected by the subject tense" (Student, Spring 2019) "How to improve my comma usage" (Student, Spring 2019) "Word form, articles, and prepositions" (Specialist)	93 (10.11%)	161 (16.00%)	82 (14.96%)
How to Start (how to choose topic, how to start writing, how to approach assignment, etc)	"How to approach writers block" (Student, Spring 2019) "How to approach my essay bit by bit" (Student, Fall 2018) "How to get my thoughts down to paper" (Student, Spring 2019) "Ways to start an article" (Student, Spring 2019) "First draft strategies" (Specialist)	27 (2.93%)	35 (3.48%)	8 (1.46%)
Introductions	"How to start an introduction" (Student, Spring 2019) "Easier ways to write a hook" (Student, Spring 2019) "We talked about how she could give the reader a sense of context and direction in an opening paragraph" (Specialist)	7 (0.76%)	44 (4.37%)	11 (2.01%)
No Answer		232	1431	371
Not Specified	"How to write my assignment" (Student, Spring 2019) "A lot" (Student, Fall 2018) "We discussed her situation, watched the video, took the tutorial and discussed 39C" (Specialist)	81 (8.80%)	26 (2.58%)	45 (8.21%)

Organization, Overall Structure, and Flow	"I learned to have a parallel structure between paragraphs and to break a paragraph into two if it has two ideas in it" (Student, Fall 2018) "Paragraph organization can be a useful tool for simplifying flow in a paper " (Student, Winter 2019) "How to connect my ideas in a more cohesive way" (Student, Spring 2019) "Employing structure and what to pay attention to" (Student, Spring 2019) "We talked through her audience and purpose, and then used those ideas to draft an organization for the paper" (Specialist)	189 (20.54%)	295 (29.32%)	75 (13.69%)
Student's Own Strengths and Weaknesses in writing	"I learned that I tend to change my tenses in my writing" (Student, Winter 2019) "What strengths I carried and what I lacked" (Student, Spring 2019) "My writing has a tendency to lose the main point and stray off topic" (Student, Winter 2019) "My message in my essay was well supported and very obvious, but i just need to clarify a few things to solidify my analysis" (Student, Winter 2019)	31 (3.37%)	N/A	6 (1.09%)
Paragraph Structures and Topic Sentences (structure within a single paragraph)	"In order to create a good topic sentence I could consider what I write in each paragraph and try to summarize the content into one sentence" (Student, Winter 2019) "Restructure my paragraph" (Student, Spring 2019) "We also talked about providing explanation and analysis after quotes, so that he isn't ending a paragraph on them" (Specialisst)	36 (3.91%)	76 (7.55%)	33 (6.02%)
Planning, Outlining, and Brainstorming	"The different topics I could hit on" (Student, Winter 2019) "How to effectively brainstorm and thinking process for this upcoming project." (Student, Spring 2019) "Exploring different avenues in case some aspects of proposal were to fall through" (Student, Spring 2019) "We practiced brainstorming strategies (listing, clustering, organizing an outline) " (Specialist)	44 (4.78%)	185 (18.39%)	24 (4.38%)
Professor Expectations and Feedback	"What the professor expects" (Student, Fall 2018) "I learned how to improve my thought process on a grade dispute" (Student, Winter 2019) "The student wanted to incorporate her instructor's feedback" (Specialist)	14 (1.52%)	35 (3.48%)	2 (0.36%)

Reading (skills, strategies, etc)	"How to improve my reading skills" (Student, Fall 2018) "I learned about close reading model" (Student, Spring 2019) "We reviewed close reading techniques" (Specialist)	6 (0.65%)	11 (1.09%)	3 (0.55%)
Choosing Relevant Information/Evidence, Deleting Irrelevant Information	"How to play with the key words to find evidence that support my argument" (Student, Fall 2018) "How to figure out which sources I am using is actually helping my paper" (Student, Spring 2019) "Assessing evidence" (Specialist)	15 (1.63%)	31 (3.08%)	6 (1.09%)
Research, Research Methods and Strategies	"Better research ideas and how to streamline the process" (Student, Winter 2019) "How to go about research" (Student, Spring 2019) "We covered a way to focus database searches" (Specialist)	22 (2.39%)	67 (6.66%)	9 (1.64%)
Resources and Tools	"How to use text box in google docs" (Student, Spring 2019) "About using owl purdue" (Student, Spring 2019) "How to use the writing center" (Specialist)	28 (3.04%)	41 (4.08%)	5 (0.91%)
Revising Content (of an existing paper)	"How to change the focus of essay so i would not have to start all over" (Student, Winter 2019) "Changing the cause and effects of the problem presented in my paper" (Student, Winter 2019) "The student wanted to incorporate a new paragraph about volunteer experiences into her essay, so we practiced identifying overlapping ideas in the essay to find a place that made sense to add it" (Specialist)	20 (2.17%)	59 (5.86%)	15 (2.74%)
General Beliefs, Philosophies, Rules, and Truisms about Writing	"Sometimes less means more" (Student, Spring 2019) "I can incorporate my major into my writing, thus making me passionate about what I'm going to write about" (Student, Fall 2018) "I learned that writing in English is about idea being organized" (Student, Winter 2019) "Writing doesn't have any boundaries" (Student, Spring 2019) "It's a long process of proofreading aloud. Forever" (Student, Spring 2019) "I tried to impress upon him the importance of engaging in very close analysis of the passages he quoted " (Specialist)	80 (8.70%)	8 (0.80%)	33 (6.02%)

Self Editing and Revision Strategies	"I learned to ask myself questions that will help improve my argument" (Student, Spring 2019) "When proofreading, do it backwards" (Student, Fall 2018) "Revision strategies and editing techniques" (Specialist)	74 (8.04%)	118 (11.73%)	18 (3.28%)
Sentence Structures	"I learned about sentence structure" Student, Winter 2019) "I learned how to make my sentences flow better" (Student, Winter 2019) "We talked about how she could vary some of her sentence structures to add more specificity" (Specialist)	39 (4.24%)	65 (6.46%)	44 (8.03%)
Style and Tone	"How to handle tone in academic setting" (Student, Spring 2019) "How to form my sentences in academic writing rather than casual writing " (Student, Spring 2019) "writing can be improved by choosing the tone of the writing carefully" (Student, Spring 2019) "Being authentic, not misleading" (Specialist)	36 (3.91%)	29 (2.88%)	8 (1.46%)
Summarizing	"How to summary of the article" (Student, Fall 2018) "Condensing a feature-length screenplay into 5 minutes" (Specialist)	6 (0.65%)	13 (1.29%)	1 (0.18%)
Thesis and Claims	"Developing a thesis based on my ideas" (Student, Winter 2019) "I learned about the formation of thesis statements and how to develop claims by using evidence to support it" (Student, Winter 2019) "How to write a more focused thesis" (Student, Spring 2019) "We discussed developing a strong thesis" (Specialist)	37 (4.02%)	58 (5.77%)	51 (9.31%)
Titles	"I learnt how to make title interestingly" (Student, Fall 2018) "Title changes to more clearly convey the genre and purpose of her sample" (Specialist)	2 (0.22%)	1 (0.10%)	4 (0.73%)
Transitions	"how to transition from one idea to the other" (Student, Fall 2018) "I learned that transition sentences are needed to introduce the topic by first using old information from the previous paragraph and then the new facts" (Student, Fall 2018) "Paragraph transitions" (Specialist)	31 (3.37%)	51 (5.07%)	18 (3.28%)
Using Evidence / Integrating Outside Info (integrating	"I learned how to connect secondary sources to my thesis" (Student, Spring 2019) "I learned how to integrate sources	60 (6.52%)	92 (9.15%)	35 (6.39%)

quotes, integrating outside sources, paraphrasing, connecting evidence to claims, etc)	properly and with purpose" (Student, Fall 2018) "Merging my evidence and analysis into one" (Student, Spring 2019) "Incorporating outside sources" (Specialist)			
Vocabulary and Word Choice	"some word choice mistakes that I won't notice by myself" (Student, Winter 2019) "Try to use simple verbs" (Student, Spring 2019) "How to better use art terms" (Student, Fall 2018) "Strategic word choice" (Specialist)	40 (4.35%)	75 (7.46%)	35 (6.39%)
Cutting Words, Meeting Word Count, Being Concise, and Deleting Repetition and Redundancy	"How to cut out unnecessary sentences and make my writing more concise" (Student, Fall 2018) "Shrink down repetitive writing" (Student, Fall 2018) "Condensing content" (Specialist) "Concision" (Specialist)	29 (3.15%)	75 (7.46%)	23 (4.20%)

NOTE: On the student exit surveys, students were asked, "What did you learn about writing during your consultation?" For writing specialists, their post consultation reports had a section called "Visit Notes."
Total student exit surveys from specialist appointments = 1,152
Total student exit surveys from peer tutor drop-ins = 919
Total specialist visit notes = 2,437
These totals include "No Answer" responses. "No Answer" responses were excluded when making the percentage calculations above.