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Writing Center Data Collection and Analysis: Creating a Survey System for Collecting Data and Communicating Effectiveness

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WRITING CENTER DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS: CREATING A SURVEY SYSTEM FOR COLLECTING DATA AND COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVENESS

LOUIS AARON HERMAN
Doctoral Program in Rhetoric and Composition

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For Zoey
DON’T PANIC!
WRITING CENTER DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS:
CREATING A SURVEY SYSTEM FOR COLLECTING
DATA AND COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVENESS

by

LOUIS AARON HERMAN, M.A.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
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of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English
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Chapter 1
Understanding the Situational Need for Data Collection and Analysis in Writing Centers

What makes a Writing Center

As budget cuts, increased tuition, and student debt become more prevalent issues among institutions of higher education, there is increased pressure for departments to find ways of proving their worth within the institution; none more so than with Writing Centers. As an interdisciplinary service, Writing Centers across the country continually find themselves fighting for dwindling resources, arguing that the service they provide to a student body is just as valuable as discipline-specific student services such as disciplinary tutoring centers and career service centers. Writing Center directors, administrators, and managers need to prove that their work contributes to the overall goal of their institution, through GPAs, retention, or students’ professionalization after graduation. Collecting, analyzing, and reporting on relevant data becomes an overwhelming task, taking up as much space as one is willing to give it. Yet, assessment of Writing Center success is necessary to continue to fight for the relevance of the work writing center administrators put into their center to make it a success. The problem lies in being able to quantify what is typically a qualitative issue. Writing improvement is not normally measured with concrete numbers and hard data, but rather in long-term studies, holistic in nature, and wholly dependent on peer collaboration (student, faculty, and administration) and participation over long periods of time, typically across multiple disciplines and in many differently taught classes on the same subject (Salem, 2014). With such disparate incoming data, both qualitative and quantitative, it becomes daunting to sift and sort through the myriad of students a writing center sees, and put their progress into meaningful categories to show a wide
range of audiences that the work done at a writing center matters. Writing center pedagogy does not focus only on the writing intensive disciplines normally found in the College of Liberal Arts, but has begun to reach far into many of the STEM fields to show that these students engage in writing as frequently as their peers in the humanities. The writing center is a broad student resource, it therefore becomes even more important for writing centers to face the challenge of collecting data and show its impact on the university. So, how does a writing center define success?

Since this is a project that focuses on writing centers, I would be remiss if I didn’t invoke Stephen North (1984) and his statement: “[Writing Centers] make better writers, not better writing.” This statement was first concocted to respond to those outside of a general university setting who ask the question about what writing centers do. North’s quip is more like a back-pocket elevator speech that writing center directors/staff can pull out whenever faced with that question. In my experience, it is a question that is asked frequently, and it is a loaded question. It could be asked as simple curiosity of what writing centers actually do as writing centers are not typically an institutional powerhouse that everyone is familiar with. On the other hand, it could be an exploratory question from someone trying to figure out where exactly the writing center fits in the larger institutional context. North (1984) states that this quip is meant for people outside of the university, yet I have used it in the past to tell people at the university what the writing center does. And, regardless of who asks the question, North’s response is wholly inadequate to truly describe what writing centers do for students.

There are several aspects of North’s statement that can be expanded, and that is largely what I do in this dissertation. The notion of “better writers,” I argue, means different things for different audiences. Mostly, it is not the study of what makes better writing; scholars have been
digging at the question for decades and still haven’t found the key to what makes better writing. Instead, I argue, that better writing doesn’t need to be examined as closely as we might suspect. Better writing means different things for different people insomuch that it is a difficult aspect of learning to measure accurately. However, the results of better writing are easily measureable and from that measure, writing centers can create arguments showing the benefit and impact the writing center has on the institution. And this is where we might find a better answer than North’s when asked about what writing centers do. Instead of talking about better writers, we need to be specific in the impact that a writing center has on students, not in their writing, but what they are able to accomplish because of better writing.

Being able to differentiate the needs of audiences at the institution and communicate student success, or the results of “better writing” to those audiences, is crucial for a writing center’s viability, regardless of how students achieve better writing. Instead, it is the results of better writing that are measureable and similar across institutions. The other aspect of this is a simple exercise in audience awareness. Writing centers need to understand the needs that different audiences have for seeing how units impact the institution as a whole. Understanding how the writing center can provide that impact, based on the audience asking the question, is crucial for a writing center to convey its viability. Most institutional needs are fairly similar when it comes to student success; however, different audiences at the institution are interested in different aspects of student success. I will talk about the needs of different audiences at the institution later in this chapter.

The other aspect of North’s statement that I want to examine is the notion of “We make” as writing centers’ primary focus of the work they do with students. Often, the goal of the writing center is misinterpreted as a place that holds the key to better writing rather than a center
for teaching and learning. Instructors see the writing center as a place that holds some specialized knowledge for writing where students can enter as bad writers, and leave as better writers (Barnett, 1997; Carino, 1996; Kail, 2000; Hayward, 1983). The idea of how writing centers accomplish that feat is talked about at length within the writing center community, but rarely leaves that circle of conversation into the larger discourse of the institution. While writing centers approach their work with students differently depending on the student population and need, the ultimate goal is to improve student writing. While North’s assertion is that writing centers make better writers, this is achieved in a myriad of ways. It would be difficult to walk into two different writing centers and find them using the same pedagogy or approaches. Instead, writing centers adapt to the institution for which they work, serving the students in the ways that those students need most. And so arguing that we make better writers, while uniform in intent, is not so in procedure. This poses a difficult argument to measure. Since writing centers are malleable to the needs of the population they serve, what works for one center, may not work for another. However, it is not necessarily the procedure that matters most here. I have been to numerous conferences and presentations on writing center approaches and pedagogy, and have been able to implement maybe 20% of what I’ve learned at my own center. This is not to say that what these other centers are doing is wrong or bad, it just doesn’t fit with the institutional context that we operate in. Instead, it is the results of those procedures that matter most. Are the procedures that writing centers engage in, and assist students with, producing better writers? Again, I stress that better writing is not what needs to be measured, rather what students can achieve with better writing skills.

Both of these aspects of writing centers (how a center makes better writers and what better writers look like) present enormous challenges for analysis. So, instead of burdening
myself with trying to delineate what better writing looks like and how we can achieve that through the writing center, I looked to the results of better writing contextualized through the needs of several different stakeholders at the university. What I discovered is that studying the institutional context of the writing center to determine what stakeholders within that institution value in terms of student success, and then begin to analyze those aspects of the writing center, creates a more effective argument to communicate to said stakeholders. By understanding the audience’s needs for information in regards to student success, writing centers can develop analytical methods that speak to those needs while still completing their mission of making better writers. What also came from examining these needs and creating a survey system was something cyclical. In discovering what the institution needed in terms of student success, I was able to find ways of adapting our pedagogy to create even more success under those terms. The writing center became an additional audience, or stakeholder, once all the other audiences’ (students, faculty, and administration) needs were met.

**Literacy Sponsors**

It is also important to talk about how writing centers position themselves as “literacy sponsors,” a term defined by Deborah Brandt (2002) and then reformed by Lori Salem (2013) as a person or institution that provides access to a specific literacy. The literacy sponsor is a commodity that is formed by the institution as a way to improved knowledge for students, but also as a form to improve the institution as well (Brandt, 2002). Literacy sponsors are, in part, created by the major stakeholders within the institution for the benefit of the students and for the benefit of the institution. Salem (2013) goes on to say: “a university targets its resources so that certain people (usually tuition-paying students) can learn certain kinds of literacy in ways that
cohere with and support the university’s overall mission and goals” (p. 23). Thus, the creation of a writing center is not a benevolent act for the benefits of the students. Instead, writing centers are created with the overall mission of the university in mind. This creates a strong connection between what the mission of the writing center is and what the mission of the university is. It is therefore important for the writing center to be able to speak to the university (all its stakeholders: students, faculty, and administration) in a way that meets the goals and missions.

To be able to show that a writing center is successful within an institution, there are several aspects that writing center administrators must take into consideration. Data collection and data reporting are the most important aspects to be able to speak to a specific audience about the worth of a writing center. As writing center directors face speaking to multiple audiences, we need to understand which data is relevant to different audiences, who are often concerned with different aspects of student writing. Upper administration\(^1\), for example, is commonly concerned with retention numbers as well as overall GPAs across the multidisciplinary landscape of students, faculty is concerned with their specific pass/fail rate in their courses and class GPA, and students want to know how good the writing center is and how it can improve their writing. In addition, data collection is an effective method for understanding the internal workings of the writing center, which will help the center to effectively adapt to changes in the institutional community and student body to provide assistance to the students who visit the center. In all, there are three external audiences that writing centers most often have to speak with: students, faculty, and administration, and all three audiences have different questions regarding the operation and effectiveness of the center. However, all the audiences’ questions, or need for

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\(^1\) Throughout this entire dissertation I will use “upper administration” to refer to anyone in the position of Deans and Provost, as these are the positions I have had most of my contact with in upper administration.
information, relates to the larger mission of writing centers assisting students to become better writers.

While the upper administration is frequently concerned with the overall function of the university in providing students with education, their purpose is commonly focused on ensuring that students are navigating the institution and completing their education in a successful manner. One of the upper administration’s major concerns is graduation rates: monitoring how quickly and effectively students complete their credit requirements to graduation. Most often, this is qualified by a 4-6 year graduation rate, and in Texas directly linked to the state’s 60x30TX plan in which Texas institutions are working to have 60% of Texans ages 25-34 obtaining certificate or degree by 2030 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015). Additionally, in Texas, state appropriations per student have remained more or less constant since 2008 (See Figure 1). And in 2013, states were spending 28% less per student on higher education than they did in 2008 (Oliff, Palacios, Johnson, & Leachman; 2013) As Oliff et al. show in their 2013 report, “Students with less academic preparation and fewer financial resources are more likely to need intensive turning to ensure that they are keeping up with their coursework… to ensure that they get the credits they need to graduate” (p. 15). This means that even as expectations for graduation rates increase, the funding to support these outcomes remains stagnant. Graduation rates are directly linked to the students’ ability to pass course and achieve some of these statewide goals in an efficient manner. In addition, many public institutions’ funding is directly related to graduation rates, so this aspect of student success is of utmost importance. There are many recent examples of performance based funding in higher education. Previously, the majority of state funding was based on the number of students the institution enrolled. However, states like New Mexico, Tennessee, Mississippi, Ohio, Louisiana, and Missouri have adopted
performance based funding models which tie performance metrics, such as graduation rates, to the state appropriations for the institution (Milligan, 2013). Yet, with diminished funding it has become more difficult to improve graduation rates.

What this project takes into consideration is that all of these degrees and certificates will include some aspect of writing regardless of the discipline, and therefore need to be analyzed in terms of writing ability and outcomes to meet many of the above mentioned programs. From the perspective of the writing center, it is crucial to show that a student’s ability to pass a course and proceed towards graduation is directly linked to successful writing a student does in class. This is an area that the writing center can directly impact.

While having a student’s ability to graduate in mind, faculty, on the other hand, are more concerned with the student’s ability to pass the course. How well students are answering the assignment guidelines, whether students are doing enough work prior to due dates, and intellectual growth are the larger concerns for the faculty member. Again, because most classes have a writing aspect of one form or another, be it a specific writing assignment, discussion postings, and even emails to the instructor, the writing center can have a direct impact on the students in the classroom and their ability to pass the course. This also speaks to a faculty member being able to adapt their own classroom pedagogy to fit the needs of the student. If they are able to see the success and failure points of writing assignments in their classroom, where students stumble the most, where they succeed, faculty can improve their syllabus and provide even more pathways to success for the students. Again, this system becomes cyclical in that the more we are able to measure success of the students, the more we are able to adapt our pedagogy and approaches to improve student success.
Finally, the writing center needs to be able to communicate to students. In my experience there are several different types of students who visit the writing center: those who are active in their own learning and visit the writing center on their own recognizance, students who are recommended to attend a session at the writing center by their instructor, students who will receive extra credit for attending a session at the writing center, and students who are required to attend sessions at the writing center. Students need to know that their peers have a good relation with the resource, and that is something that writing centers should speak to. Being able to communicate to all students, no matter their motivation, how the writing center can assist them in achieving better grades in courses, becoming better writers, and moving closer to graduation, is again something that the writing center can have direct impact on. Being able to communicate to students how the writing center improves success rates, in terms that are relevant to students, is an important aspect of the writing center. Being able to cut through some of the old stigmas of writing center expectations\(^2\) is in part one of the primary contact points for students throughout the institution. Collecting data on student success, and showing the students that their success rate can be improved if they visit the writing center, is an asset in achieving the overall goals of the institution at the local level. Speaking with students about the skills and knowledge they acquire from the writing center goes beyond the classroom and can impact their success once they graduate. This aspect of writing center impact would be an additional, and very interesting, aspect to study with the students. However, the focus here is only on students’ success within the institution.

The survey system that I will describe in later chapters assists writing centers in determining the best approach for sharing knowledge with their students. Once all the arguments

\(^2\) As I mentioned previously, instructors often think of writing centers as places of editing and proofreading, not teaching and learning. This misrepresentation of writing centers is often carried by students as well.
are made to upper administration, faculty, and the student body, writing centers can see where they might be lacking in providing tools for student success. Looking at the audiences’ need and determining how much of that need is being fulfilled by the mission of the writing center will provide an important clearing house of information that writing centers need to take into consideration. By continually monitoring and reporting on the success of students in these ways, writing centers can adapt approaches to improve their ability to make better writers. The need for this information also serves as a defense mechanism for writing centers. When that question of “what do you do?” is asked with the implications of questioning the importance of a writing center within an institution, writing centers can respond with a more in-depth analysis of what they actually do for students.

THE UNIVERSITY

This survey system was originally created to collect data and create arguments for The University Writing Center located at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in El Paso, Texas. UTEP is a public university, and part of the University of Texas system, and while not yet a Research 1 institution, UTEP holds a strong commitment to research as part of its main faculty focus (utep.edu). UTEP’s mission is to provide access and excellence to a 21st century student demographic. UTEP is one of the nation’s largest Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and is located on the border of El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico. The bi-national region provides a unique student demographic of 80% of the 23,922 student body identifying as “Hispanic.” Ninety percent of the student population is from the region, and UTEP is considered a commuter campus (very few students live on campus, rather they stay off campus, typically with a family member, and commute to campus each day). Nearly 20% of college students are first-generation
students, and among those nearly 63% are Latin@/Hispanic. Traditionally, first generation students graduate within 4 to 6 years at a rate of 27% compared to a 47% 4 to 6 year graduation rate for students of parents who graduated from college (National Center for Education Statistics). This statistic becomes even more significant at my institution where 85% of the undergraduate student population is LatinX/Hispanic, some of which commute from Juarez, Mexico every day for class (utep.edu). The unique position UTEP holds both in the region and as an institution of higher education, provides a distinctive site for study in many aspects. The students, faculty, and administration of UTEP has had a singular vision of accomplishment for the last 30 years, and is considered one of the top universities in the country because of it. It is also because of this distinctive position that writing literacy sponsorship also becomes necessary to examine through the lens of the mission and expectations of the institution. It is relevant to take both the physical and educational position of the university, the stakeholders that keep the mission moving forward, and the students the university serves in mind while creating the survey system that is described in this project.

THE ASSESSMENT MODEL

Most writing centers have an assessment model of one sort or another. However, these assessment models do not always provide relevant data to all of the above mentioned audiences. Many writing centers are able to produce on-demand raw data relating to number of visits, hours spent working with students, and a small qualitative assessment of perceived student improvement based solely on the perspective of the tutor providing the assistance. Next level...
assessment can show customer satisfaction of student success (students’ perspectives of their own improvement in writing). Even further, most writing centers can show that their numbers have direct correlation to issues such as retention and overall GPA (Brandt, 2009; Mullen, 2010; Salem, 2014). However, at this time, there are no writing center assessment models that are designed to speak to all three audiences with a single mode of assessment.

Without the capacity to speak to multiple audiences, writing centers are missing opportunities to have their success heard within the institution. This issue was addressed in Gofine’s (2012) study on the assessment of writing centers across the country. In “How are we doing? A review of assessments within Writing Centers,” she focused on both quantitative and qualitative methods of assessments. Her findings were twofold. One, writing center assessment needs more cohesion amongst scholars, that while “investigators currently develop isolated lines of research, a more effective approach might be for researchers to collectively focus on a small number of issues that are of common concern to the majority of writing centers” (Gofine, 2012, p. 46-47). In her view, because writing centers are currently focused on how they are positioned within their own institution and how they serve their own student population, investigators are limited in what they can do in assessing the success of improved writing. This is a common problem considering demographics, culture, and institutional goals that writing centers face when trying to collect qualitative data to show their success within the institution they serve. What may be integral qualitative data for one institution may not be relevant to another. Gofine also points out that while writing centers attempt to employ quantitative data collection and analysis methods, it is of limited validity when attempting to assess subjective material such as improved writing. Gofine suggests that a national standardization of assessment be implemented that can “generate data for writing center’s annual reports, examining how tutorials affect
development of clients’ writing skills, and surveying client perceptions after each tutorial” (p. 47). While a standardized model would not encompass every unique situation found at writing centers (i.e. ESL students, online universities, or two year versus four year institutions), a standardized assessment model would provide writing centers with a framework that could be modified to meet their unique needs in reporting.

It is Gofine’s call for a standardized assessment model that this project responds to. I seek to define and show a single model assessment tool for writing centers that can speak to the three different audiences Gofine outlines in her study (upper administration, faculty, and writing centers) about their specific concerns regarding the writing center’s value within an institution. Because this model has already been implemented at a university, I will show how the data was collected and then reported on to the different audiences. It is from understanding these audiences, and the needs they have when it comes to understanding how the writing center impacts their areas of interest, I have developed the following research questions:

**Research Questions**

1. How can a writing center assess and communicate its contribution to an institution?
2. How can a writing center assess its value to upper administration?
3. How can a writing center assess its value to faculty?
4. How can a writing center assess its value to students?
5. How does a writing center assess its effectiveness internally?

From these questions I will provide a method of inquiry and analysis to share with writing centers in the hopes that centers around the country will be able to prove their value to the institution as a whole, and be able to develop a method for collecting the relevant data in
assessing that value. In many ways this data can reveal aspects of writing centers that are not commonly studied, as well as give writing center administrators tools in the fight for relevance and value that can be lacking in the general day-to-day aspects of a writing center (Salem, 2014; Gofine, 2012). These methods, both collection and analysis, are general enough to adapt to the unique situations that each writing center faces based on the institutions’ general demographic, student population, and cultural climate. Since these aspects change even between colleges within the same general area, I attempted to create collection methods that can be used and adapted to fit the variability of writing centers in both technological access as well as institutional demographics. As not all institutions share the same software contracts or even technology support, these collection methods can be used with free software found online. The analysis portion of this dissertation is a bit more complicated. My home institution has an office dedicated to data analysis for departments, and I lean on the heavily throughout my analysis. Nonetheless, I attempt to share the methods used this institutional office so that writing center administrators without this resource can conduct the same type of analysis. It is important to note that while the challenges faced by my home writing center are unique in many ways, the need to provide relevant data and analysis for all writing centers is not.

Chapter 2 begins by looking at the historical and contextual aspects of writing centers and how they have evolved into the teaching and learning centers they are today. In doing so I hope to reveal the reasons which lead us to the current situation of writing centers as vital spaces within institutions and the need to validate that position through effective data collection and analysis. As interdisciplinary resources on campus, many writing centers are often misunderstood as places of triage, rather than sites of learning and teaching. In my experience I have often heard instructors command/require their students to visit the writing center because
they need help, yet the instructors themselves have a difficult time conveying exactly how a writing center would assist the student. By looking at the historical contexts of writing centers we can come to understand the divide that has occurred in this way. The data and analysis provide an informed response for those looking to educate their administrative and teaching colleagues. Through this, writing centers can better assist students with their writing skills and abilities, as well as open access to the writing center to students in the ameliorative sense. Armed with this ability, writing centers can reach more students, not just “bad” writers, and teach students how to become better writers⁴.

In addition, I also examine the pedagogy of writing centers so that the reader may understand how then the data collection and analysis would work within the current climate of writing centers. Because each site of inquiry has its unique challenges and demographics, the collection methods are generalized. This will allow other sites of research to conduct their own studies based on the needs of the writing center’s institution. In many ways this is more difficult due to the ever changing nature of writing centers and the relatively young pedagogy we have. Just finding a foothold with the larger body of a college can be difficult, and even more so if the writing center is fledgling. Being able to show an impact on aspects of higher education is invaluable. Yet, depending on the critical aspects that the writing center administration chooses to use (directive, non-directive, or mixed approaches), will greatly affect the type of data that needs to be collected.

Through this, I will examine the current data collection methods, their strengths and weaknesses, and how they have become an integral part of writing center administration and the

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⁴ This notion of better writers includes a myriad of aspects for student success, most of which will be covered in later chapters as I describe the stakeholders that need/want information about how the writing center impacts students.
overall operation of writing centers. While not all sites will have access to the exact software that I have used for this analysis (my institution has a system wide license for the survey collection software), there are several free, web-based, pieces of software that can be used just as effectively to collect the data described here. While not easy, writing centers can use these methods in a paper form to collect the relevant data.

Finally, I will described some of the weaknesses found within current data collection and suggest methods for improving the data collection to alleviate said weaknesses. While I believe that many writing centers aspire to prove their effectiveness within the university setting, the ability to do so has been incomplete. Through the method described here, I attempt to create a whole picture of a writing center, from its internal demographics, to the students it serves, and the impact it has on the institution in many different ways. This is not a slight against what many writing centers struggle to argue for, but rather a way for them to reexamine what they do so that those who are not familiar with writing centers and their methods might hear them better, and can more effectively argue for much needed support and resources so that they can continue to be an integral campus entity and have a positive effect on both the students and the institution.

In the conclusions, I will convey some of the successes and failures of the data collection system described here, how it has evolved since its inception, and how this data has been used in situations I have encountered during my time at the writing center. Through this entire examination I hope to share with the writing center community an effective method of data collection that can be used to validate the work writing centers do when the time comes. Believe me, the time will come when writing center administrators will need proof of what they are doing and why. With the current climate of the economy, politics, student loan burdens, and shortages in university funding, the need for effective data analysis for proof of validity is more
important than ever. As marginal spaces within institutions, writing centers are more often on the chopping block than not, and being able to show an effect on the student body within the university is crucial in a writing center’s survival.
Chapter 2
An Examination of What Writing Centers Get Right and What They Get Wrong with Data Collection

HISTORY

Since the early 1980s, many writing center scholars have attempted to examine the pedagogical practice of their center to determine effectiveness. However, this has not always been an easy undertaking as writing center pedagogy and practices have shifted significantly over the last several decades. Writing center pedagogy has shifted from grammar based, individualistic, practices, to peer-based learning centers focusing on the writing process (Ede and Lunsford 1983; Lunsford 1991). Because of these shifts of what writing center pedagogy values, determining effectiveness in a writing center has been a difficult task. For example, scholars have argued over the function of grammar and other lower order writing skills and their importance in the writing process for years (Berlin 1987; Selfe 2007). This created new pedagogy that both reinforced the function of grammar in the writing process as well as diminished its place in the writing process. As these pedagogies shift, it becomes more difficult to evaluate outcomes if the analysis is focused on the approach to teaching the student. In addition, no two writing centers are the same. Institutional context, student demographics, discipline focus, or even geographical contexts provide each writing center with unique aspects for their pedagogy that also make it difficult to evaluate and communicate the effectiveness of the writing center. Yet, the system described in this project is able to partially remove itself from all of these constraints and provide writing center directors a template to evaluate their center’s effectiveness regardless of the constraints. This review sets out to examine writing center
practices throughout the last 35 years, as well as examine some of the modes through which writing centers have attempted to evaluate their different pedagogies for success.

This research will tie into the reason and need for the project described here – whole writing center evaluation for different audiences. The main reason for this examination stems from the continued marginality of writing centers within institutions. While the position of writing centers has certainly improved, it is by no means an ideal situation. In order to understand how we arrived at such a situation with writing centers, we need to understand the history and origins of writing centers and writing center theory. And, like any other writing center based project, we have to start with Stephen North’s (1984) “Idea of a Writing Center.” North’s scholarship is certainly not the beginning for writing centers, but rather the point to which most writing center scholarship looks to as the first instance of writing centers demanding to be taken seriously as a student resource and valid institutional component. North demanded that writing centers no longer be regulated to the margins and basements of universities, underfunded and expected to do yeomen’s work with no assistance or departmental recognition. Like most writing center discussions of the time, North’s analysis was born out of frustration with the structure and placement of writing centers within institutions, and he focused his critiques and ideas towards those who were not intimately involved with writing centers as a way to gain attention for the work writing centers do. In doing so, North posited several aspects of what he would expect people unfamiliar with writing centers to understand; most importantly that “[The new writing center] represents the marriage of what are arguably the two most powerful contemporary perspectives on teaching writing: first, that writing is most usefully viewed as a process; and second, that writing curricula need to be student-centered” (p. 438).

This, unarguably, is still how the majority of writing centers operate as a whole, and is crucial for
those outside of a writing center to understand how they function as a student resource for all students within an institution. However, several of North’s ideas have since been challenged, changed, and questioned over time and across institutional contexts. As noted in chapter 1, during most of the 80s, writing centers moved between two different pedagogies: the Storehouse model and the Garrett model (Lunsford, 1991; McDonald, 1994; Runciman, 1990). These two models focus on the way that writing centers teach or work with students on writing. North’s article focused on the Storehouse model; looking at writing centers as places of expertise, where students could speak with an expert writer about their writing, have their writing diagnosed, and receive methods for fixing their writing. The Storehouse Model places knowledge at the writing center, and the student only visits the writing center to gain a piece of that knowledge. Yet, this did not encompass the core of a writing discipline. Even Stephen North changed his approach and argument for writing centers shortly after “Idea” was published. North later argued for more of a Garret model wherein students would come to the writing center to work with experts in a pseudo-collaborative environment (1984), students were expected to participate in the writing process, the diagnosis was tutee centered, and the method for learning was largely done Socratically. The Garret Model comes from the term “garret,” or the top-floor or attic, especially a small dismal one, traditionally inhabited by an artist. In this, Lunsford (1994) uses the Garret Model as a center where they view knowledge as “interior, as inside the student, and the writing center’s job as helping students get in touch with this knowledge” (94). The Garret Model shifted the focus of writing center pedagogy away from “fix-it” shops to a more collaborative environment through this practice. Though not entirely collaborative (Lunsford 1994), the methodology used a more interactive approach for writing assistance where students would work closely with a tutor to get assistance through question asking and team scaffolding. While a mix
of approaches were used, students still relied on expertise from the tutor to pass knowledge onto
the tutee in an expert-learner relationship (Lunsford, 1994). The Garrett Model did offer a more
collaborative environment, giving tutees more control over their writing and the paper they were
seeking assistance with, but it did not create an entirely collaborative model that writing centers
are so focused on today. Andrea Lunsford (1994) questioned the Garrett Model (and ultimately
North’s original argument for the way writing centers operated); “collaboration often
masquerades as democracy when it in fact practices the same old authoritarian control. It thus
stand open to abuse and can, in fact, lead to poor teaching and poor learning” (p. 3-4)

Even though the North identified the Storehouse and Garrett Model as pervasive methods
that writing centers used, there was still no method for understanding the effectiveness of these
approaches. It was almost taken at face-value that writing centers helped students, after all. It
was why writing centers were put in place for many institutions in the first place. This made it
difficult for writing centers to convey their approaches and effectiveness to the entire institution.

Even more difficult to evaluate is the current collaborative model common to most
writing centers across the country. Through the collaborative model, the peer relationship is the
mode through which tutees learn. Achieving this model in its truest form is difficult at best.
Tutees often look to the writing center as places of expertise, and see the tutors as those who
hold knowledge about the skill they are seeking to improve. It is also difficult for tutors to not
take over the assistance as the expert that the tutee was seeking. However, striving for the
collaborative model is ideal when it comes to writing and the teaching of writing skills (George
& Grimm 1990; Harris 1985; Mosley 1984; Simpson 1985). While writing centers focus on
creating this collaborative environment, it becomes difficult to evaluate the success of the
tutoring session. Because tutees and tutors work so closely as a peer-to-peer project, the
outcomes can often be misconstrued as student success, when it is actually difficult to delineate who was at the center of the learning. It could be argued that if the collaboration was conducted in true fashion, how student success is achieved really doesn’t matter.

As mentioned earlier, there are a variety of contexts that individual institutions face, including the process that a writing center uses to effectively assist writers. It therefore becomes challenging to say that one method for evaluation works better than another, no matter the method used in the transferring of skills. No matter how difficult it might be to evaluate such an objective subject, it is still necessary for those involved with writing centers to understand what it means to communicate the learning outcomes of what the writing center does. Again, we turn to North (1984) as the progenitor of this argument. Writing centers needed to move outside of their own center as part of the larger institution to see what the needs of the institution are in terms of writing skills. Communicating outside of writing center borders to those who don’t necessarily understand the difference between Storehouse, Garret, or Collaborative models is a large undertaking. Most audiences outside of the writing center see it as an editing and proof-reading center. In many cases, they are generally mistaken about the work a writing center does. The historical positioning of this notion is not unique to any one model of writing center, but rather an ongoing general misunderstanding of writing centers and what they do. So, what this review sets out to do is examine the pedagogical shifts in writing center pedagogy throughout the last few decades to understand how we came to the situation we are currently in today and can use that to communicate effectiveness to stakeholders.

Writing centers continued to evolve their pedagogy as university and institutional climates changed. Throughout most of the 1980s, writing centers were seen as a destination for students to visit--places that operated outside of the regular institutional hierarchy where writing
happened separately from what occurred in the classroom. Many scholars bemoaned this practice during the decade and worked toward bringing writing centers back into the center of the institution. During most of the 90s, writing center pedagogy focused on how writing centers could be a more central aspect of an institutional model. Realizing that writing is an integral part of almost every class, every discipline, and every degree on campus, writing centers starting gaining traction to becoming recognized as an important piece of the larger institutional model (Barnett 1997). Yet this was dangerous territory for writing centers to start occupying, as James McDonald says “At best, the writing center occupies a place in a hierarchy of instruction below the course; at worse, it represents a threat to the course’s autonomy” (1994). When writing centers became a more significant part of an institution, they began to find that their role within the university came with more power than at first expected. One revelation was that it wasn’t just that student writing was suffering, but that writing instruction was also lacking in many classrooms. Suddenly having a place that was actively working to reveal the problems of a classroom was seen as an issue for many instructors as it challenged their authority in the classroom. This forced writing centers even further into the margins of the institution. While this was not necessarily exclusive to the decade, this was one of the major hurdles writing centers were faced with as they progressed into finding a more legitimate foothold within the institution. As writing centers worked to overcome challenges like this and find stable ground within their institutions, they were faced with new problems – advancement and expansion which included new models of writing center pedagogy to accommodate students.
NEW MODELS OF WRITING CENTERS

Peter Carino (1996) spoke about the new models of writing centers and their expected work within a university as a dialectic model, one that put “open admission centers in a pedagogical and political dialectic with writing programs and other institutional entities” (p. 27). Here centers pushed back against the expectations that they operate supplemental to the university as an outside student resource (Barnett, 1997; Hayward, 1983; North, 1984; Runciman 1990), and move to a more “student-centered writing pedagogy that competed with classroom work” (Carino, 1996). From this pedagogical approach grew many of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) initiatives that writing centers still practice today. Yet, what this model suggests is that writing centers moved away from a “central” model and began to push outwards into the institution, embedding themselves within departments and disciplines which were not traditionally associated with writing. This also came with more recognition through the form of funding, space, employment - as writing centers started gaining more value as a widely accepted student resource that was effective in improving students’ ability to perform in the university (Harris 1990, George & Grimm 1990). However, this also created issues, as writing centers were, as mentioned earlier, suddenly seen as a challenge to both the instructor and the classroom. This came about primarily from concerns that writing centers were taking over the pedagogy of the classroom and calling out instructor’s knowledge as “insufficient” for the teaching of writing (Carino 1996), but in reality, this fear came from the lack of knowledge about writing centers and what they do. Instead, writing centers were looking to provide essential embedded support for classroom instruction, rather than supplementary support on the margins of the institution. Again, this was the beginning of WAC and WID initiatives that provided in-class writing support for specific disciplines and
writing situations. Through this, writing centers began to open their assistance to more non-traditional students, both in the sense of non-traditional writing courses, and non-traditional student populations—age, part time, non-native English speakers (Harris, 1990).

This era also marked writing center’s move away from the Storehouse model of knowledge transfer to a more collaborative model, as Andrea Lunsford (1991) called them “Garret Centers.” “Garret Centers don’t view knowledge as exterior, as information to be sought out or passed on mechanically. Rather they see knowledge as interior, as inside the student, and the writing center’s job as helping students get in touch with this knowledge, as a way to find their unique voices, their individual and unique powers” (p. 5). Writing centers were no longer viewed or operated as places where experts were sitting around waiting to share their expertise with other students as the Storehouse Model of writing centers did not account for the skills and abilities that students brought with them to the center. Instead, the Garret Model placed far more value on the student’s ability than the tutor’s. This opened up many more opportunities for writing centers. First, and most importantly, students were more comfortable going to a center that operated with the student’s position in mind. The notion of alleviating fears and busting myths about writing centers has since been a hot topic for many scholars as it has been difficult to change the general perception of what a writing center does and who they assist (Harris, 1990).

With the Garret Model, writing centers became more prevalent, the notion of collaboration once again became the center of discussion. How could centers truly embrace the notion of collaboration and assist students with their writing? This move towards a more collaborative process to writing assistance was another aspect of writing center growth throughout the ‘90s: Expanding outward into non-traditional writing classrooms and providing
assistance across the campus to students who were seeking assistance. The idea of a writing center was moving out from the basement of institutions and into a more recognized aspect of the university’s overall curriculum. As writing centers were gaining more recognition, they were once again forced to prove their existence within the institution. However, Lunsford was hesitant to use the word “collaboration” because at the time writing centers still embodied old notions of authoritarian control that were present in Storehouse models of writing centers (Lunsford, 1991). Collaboration had yet to become a term associated with writing as interior knowledge, already embedded within someone and needing collaboration to bring it out, but collaboration was something that Garret Centers embraced. Lunsford (1991) provided a list of what collaborative writing could produce and included aspects such as problem finding and solving aspects teaching, learning abstractions that provided students with tools to apply their writing to other situations, and interdisciplinary thinking (p. 5). This became even more difficult as writing centers were assisting more and more students outside of traditional writing classrooms. This became apparent with much of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) initiatives that brought writing curriculum into classrooms beyond English and First Year Composition. Yet, as Lunsford points out, the notion of collaboration and Storehouse Model of writing centers were not enough to encompass everything writing centers were becoming part of. Instead, Lunsford (1990) suggests a Burkean Parlor writing center which would “place control, power, and authority not in the tutor or staff, not in the individual student, but in the negotiating group. It would engage students not only in solving problems set by teachers but in identifying problems for themselves… not only in reaching consensus but in

5 Burkean Parlors is a metaphor introduced by Kenneth Burke wherein there is a never ending conversation happening from the point in history when a person is born. The metaphor for writing centers is one in which collaboration between student and consultant takes place to improve the student’s writing by examining their work in terms of a larger conversation.
valuing dissensus and diversity” (p. 8-9). While first year composition programs were a major influence on writing centers during the 90s, centers also had to find footing outside of writing classrooms in curriculum that was not always focused on writing, but included writing as a major component.

**WAC AND WID**

Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) started as an answer to what writing centers were facing through this institutional expansion. Being able to embed writing center work and assistance in the classroom as part of the pedagogy and curriculum was an important step in getting writing centers recognized as serious student resources. Not only were writing centers starting to speak with instructors who were unfamiliar with writing center pedagogy, they were contacting students who were also unfamiliar with the writing center as a resource for students. WID and WAC curricula pushed writing curriculum out of the traditional first-year writing courses and into non-First Year writing classrooms. More specifically, WAC focuses on first-year writing in other disciplines, but rely on the disciplinary instructors to create the writing assignments. WID initiatives focus on mostly Rhetoric and Composition disciplines taking responsibility for students’ writing in all their classes (Deane & O’Neill, 2011). Both movements involve writing and writing assessment at the first-year level and rely heavily on writing centers to provide support for students. Essentially, writing centers were already practiced in WAC and WID initiatives and their pedagogy helped form the basis for much of the WAC and WID curriculum that is now growing in popularity throughout higher education in the United States.
Both WAC and WID gave writing centers more opportunities to get out of their regular writing center space and into parts of the institution they would normally be excluded from. Having writing center and writing center pedagogy as a central, or partial, theme to the classroom was a challenge for many instructors as, again, it took away much of their authority. But once instructors realized that the authority they were giving over was to a group of experts on a subject they were untrained in, it was a more amicable handover. Writing centers were growing to be a more recognizable part of the institution yet were still unable to fully communicate to essential audiences of the institution about how effective the WID and WAC programs were at improving student writing. Kathleen Blake Yancey and Brian Huot wrote about the assessment of WAC programs in the late 90s in a collection of essays. In “Assessing Writing Across the Curriculum: Diverse Approaches and Practices” Yancey and Hout created a short, middle, and long term model for assessing WAC success for students that understand the difficulty in assessing writing and writing skills: “Writing is not a set of secret skills that lend themselves to the kind of atomized testing that we see in multiple choice tests, but rather is a way of learning and performing that is philosophical and epistemological as well as behavioral in nature” (10). Which is what makes writing assessment so difficult. Assessment becomes even more difficult when writing centers move outside their normal boundaries (WAC and WID programs in classrooms instead of the center) and begin to address the writing improvement of students. Yet this only painted a partial picture of what writing centers were doing for their institutions in the 90s. There were the continuing efforts of writing centers to provide writing assistance to students within their institutions even though they continued to be marginalized spaces within the institution.
GETTING RECOGNIZED

Writing centers, although breaking free of many of the old stereotypes and restrictions, were still unrecognized as integral portions of the institution. Writing centers were marginal spaces at best, with little funding, and even less recognition. Bonnie Sunstein (1998) defined this existence as “liminality;” referring to six specific sites: textual, pedagogical, spatial, cultural, professional, and academic and institutional liminal spaces that writing centers operate within. Specifically, three of these six liminal spaces are of special interest for writing centers here: the pedagogical, professional, and academic/institutional spaces, as they are direct sites of liminality through which effective measuring of achievement need to be defined. Sunstein (1998) argues, “When we live in blurred disciplines, hidden between institutional budget lines, we must listen, speak, and sometimes redefine ourselves to synchronize with the very structures our centers want to resist” (p. 22). Tied to her argument regarding pedagogical liminality, she states in the same article, “Unlike other school settings, tutoring is intimate; it is one-on-one; it focuses on a writer’s unique crafts and processes, and the record-keeping details of the ‘in-between’ kind” (p. 16). Within these two arguments about the position and action of a writing center on both the institution and the student, there is the deep seeded need to create and retain well-kept records of what the center does, and how it is positioned within the larger system. Sunstein argues for the importance of a writing center’s need to understand the center’s position within the university, how the pedagogy of the center affects both the students and the institution at large, and finally how both of these aspects tie into the professional liminality of the writing center.

Professional liminality and the need for recognition are difficult aspects to reconcile as writing centers have amorphous boundaries within the institution. They are often embedded in every discipline, serve students from across the campus, are located in a variety of buildings
(libraries, English departments, Linguistics departments) and employ tutors with diverse disciplinary backgrounds. Writing centers are hard to define even looking at the plethora of centers at institutions around the country and their general composition. Each one inhabits its own space, has its own agenda, and creates and follows its own combination of pedagogy when training tutors and assisting students. In addition, each one is unique to the demographic and culture of the institution it serves. This “professional liminality” makes writing center hard to define by any one standard or any one approach. Sunstien writes: “For close to two decades, we’ve attempted to explain ourselves and our work to the already beleaguered profession of composition programs and English departments, even to our professional organizations” (p. 20-1). Being able to assess all the aspects of Sunstien’s liminality might have a greater impact on the audiences that writing centers encounter on a daily basis. These liminal boundaries suddenly become less moveable and more defined within the auspices of assessment and reporting.

Nevertheless, as writing centers continued to grow and adapt their pedagogy to make sure they were true egalitarian centers, a major shift in writing center pedagogy came in the mid-2000s as the cultural climate of the United States also began to shift. One of the big shifts in pedagogy with writing center pedagogy revolved around racial and social justice movements throughout the country. These movements began to examine writing center pedagogy in a way that saw writing centers as an open-access space in which all students were entitled to writing assistance, and, more importantly, how writing centers could provide writing assistance to everyone given such diverse backgrounds and abilities of students visiting these centers. It was difficult at first, mostly due to the fact that universities across the country had vastly different demographics and compositions including where writing centers were housed (physical location), what department they were housed under (typically English Departments), who funded
writing centers, and most importantly the makeup of the student body the writing center served. In this, writing centers began to examine identity: race, culture, sexual orientation, and a myriad of other aspects that related to the self-identified composition of students that were visiting the writing center. While writing centers have not necessarily been seen as a “one-size-fits-all” assistance for students, they also did not spend much time looking beyond the writing itself to the person who was composing the writing. While North’s mantra does focus on the writer, it does not take into consideration what identity the writer brings to the writing center. This is also where writing center pedagogy takes a turn and begins to move away from the process writing practices (prewriting, writing, rewriting) of the last forty to fifty years (Brooks, 1991; North, 1984,) and begins to take into consideration who the writer is and how that affects their writing skills and abilities. Yet, while writing center pedagogy continued to evolve, the need to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of the writing center still remained. And that need became even more challenging as writing center pedagogy began to include more qualitative elements. Where before writing centers could examine quantitatively the aspects of writing that they improved, such as grammar or spelling mistakes made per words written; newer aspects of writing center pedagogy become more difficult to quantify.

In the post-process writing theory and writing center includes many different aspects, generalized by the notion that writing cannot be codified into a specific set of practices to achieve good writing (Kent 1999). Instead, writing is a practice that involves a myriad of parts that make up the writer, meaning that the writers “always comes with baggage, with beliefs, desires, hopes, and fears about the world” (Kent, 1999). This became an important aspect for writing centers to consider as part of their pedagogy during the 00’s as these notions were examined even further to include aspects of the writer’s identity (sexual, cultural, linguistic,
racial, economic, and a variety of others). Because universities were becoming more diverse through their demographics, writing centers began taking into consideration the post-process aspect of writing as an integral part of their pedagogy. This, as part of the post-process method, meant that writing centers needed to be truly focused on equality for students. If centers could not engage with students on their level – meet students where they are at in their process – they would fail at being able to assist them with their writing: “if we are to help students see writing as something that transcends acculturation into the university, we must open the discourse and show them the incredible impact of the social world in fashioning a significant piece of discourse” (Shafer 2012).

The biggest aspect of post-process writing pedagogy is the notion that all writing is social and never monologic (Kent, 1999; Russell, 1999; Shafer, 2012). Students engage with their writing through a variety of means, but most importantly, through their own identity. This led writing center scholarship to begin examining students’ post-process writing and identity as the major contributing factor in their ability to produce effective and good writing. Leading this charge of understanding students’ identities and process they bring to the writing center is Nancy Grimm and Nancy Barron. Students arrive at the writing center with diverse cultures and are expected to engage in the academy in ways that can often deny their diversity; “…higher education has theoretically endorsed the idea of multiculturalism. Diversity in students, in faculty, in curriculum is generally accepted as a good thing. In practice, however, teachers, tutors, and administrators have struggled with meaningfully instantiating diversity” (Grimm & Barron, 2002). However, writing centers can be sites where that diversity is embraced and fostered as a method for developing better writing. Instead of students being asked to engage in what is often seen as a restrictive pedagogy of Academic English writing, they are instead asked
to find their own voice within their writing. This makes the writing process a more enjoyable and cathartic endeavor. It also gives students the ability to subvert the power structure they are embedded within at a university (Carino, 2003). Being able to engage with the power structure in a meaningful way with colleagues who have a shared or vested interest in challenging said structure is a powerful tool for students to have when they are invested in large oppressive structures. The writing center, and the methods it uses to provide students with these tools is an important aspect of their pedagogy. Jonathan Doucette, a writing tutor at Oberlin College, wrote about these tools and the approaches writing centers can take with their peers who use the writing center services: “as a writing associate, to think of how my own position(ality) occupies this important and emerging intersection in either supportive or oppressive ways; as a writing tutor, I have the opportunity (indeed, the obligation) to create an open, low-stakes, and welcoming environment where students are able to uncover the ways they might see their lives communicated through writing” (Doucette, 2004). This again includes all measures of a student’s identity and how they see themselves either represented, or not represented, in the institution of higher education. It is an important aspect to take into consideration when evaluating the success or effectiveness of a writing center’s approach to teaching students. How well a student acquires and transfers writing skills can be directly linked to how well they are represented within an institution (Christensen, 1990). However, being able to first create a space where all forms of identity are welcome and treated equally is by far the first step that all writing centers must take. From there, writing centers can begin the task of determining how well they have accomplished creating a space where student success is the focal point so that the message will spread that the writing center is a safe space for students to practice their writing, and a safe space in general.
This is by no means the finality of writing center pedagogy and practice, only a short history up to this point. It is without a doubt that as politics, demographics, technology, social and economic statuses of college campuses, as well as the climate of the states and country that supports them, changes, so will the pedagogy that writing centers practice.

**Writing Centers Today**

So what is the purpose of going through such a brief history of writing centers, their pedagogical approaches, and the changes they went through? For the most part it is to highlight the fact that, as North (1984) originally claims, writing centers have to continually stretch the boundaries of who they are and who they serve, and this review shows just some of the ways in which writing centers have accomplished this. Admittedly, this is not a complete history of writing center theory and pedagogy. However, behind much of what I have shown here in the history of writing centers there is the constant need to prove that these changes are effective in making better writers. Otherwise, how else can writing centers continue to function within the institution? While North, Harris, Grimm, and the lot have certainly changed the face of writing centers for the better, and writing centers will continue to grow and adapt their pedagogy, how can we prove that what they changed has proved effective? I could argue that the mere fact that many of these aspects were adopted by the majority of writing centers across the country is proof enough that these pedagogies fit the time to which they were practiced, grew from there, and formed new pedagogies. Yet, this would not be sufficient for understanding just how the pedagogies were effective for students. So, we must, in addition to understanding the pedagogical maneuvering of writing centers, also find ways to measure this progress. Sadly, this has not been a long term aspect of writing centers compared to their history. Instead, it is a more
recent development (late 90s early 2000s) wherein writing center directors and administrators had to begin the process of looking at, and assessing the effectiveness of, their centers. This need might have come to fruition due to potential budget cuts or other funding problems within the institution, the need to explain the center’s theory and reason for existing within an institution, or through basic pedagogical practice and reflection. It is, however, becoming a more prevalent and ubiquitous practice. Given the digital and technological resources directors now have at their disposal they are able to find user friendly and economical ways to participate in the process of writing center analysis and determining how writing centers make better writers. However, there is a large hole within the analysis projects that I will outline below. Typically, analysis projects focus on one aspect of a writing center – making better writers – but fail to discuss how making better writers affects the institution as a whole. Put differently, these are good analysis methods, but they do not create good reporting methods. What good does the analysis do if it only speaks to those who are in-the-know? The majority of what is described later, in terms of writing center analysis, does not speak to many audiences outside of the writing center community. While this is still an important aspect of what writing centers should engage in, it does not provide for much credibility outside of writing centers. And that seems to be where writing centers struggle the most: being able to create and discuss their value to spaces and stakeholders outside of their own community. This is where the majority of resources (funding, tutors, and clientele) come from, and writing centers must be aware of the needs and expectations of some of the larger aspects of the institution and the parts that affect those bigger parts of a university. There is a great breadth of knowledge when it comes to writing center analysis, and that is what I plan to focus on in the next section of this review. It is not to say that the work done by these scholars is insufficient, it only lacks the next step (steps I hope to
accomplish in the remaining chapters of this dissertation). Instead, I aim to look at how those before me have collected and analyzed data, comment on how those aspects of data might have been reported on to different audiences, and create and narrative of how this data could be relevant to the audiences I discussed in my introduction. The scholars and articles discussed here are used to paint an entire picture of what writing center data collection and analysis looks like. I will fill in some of the gaps as to how this data could have been reported, or at least taken to different audiences with relevance.

Miriam Gofine’s 2012 call for standardized assessment models for writing centers was largely the result of many years of writing centers flying blind, attempting to make sense of what data they were able to accumulate and make it relevant to whomever might ask. The need for assessment in writing centers has long been a discussion among writing center administrators, who need to accurately and persuasively report on their value within the institution. As stated previously, writing centers often operate on the margins of an institution; housed in small rooms with little staffing, small budgets, and no oversight. Yet, they are an institutional service that is in demand. Writing centers are continually recognized as a needed service, but not always financially supported as such. As a result, writing centers have developed methods to assess their value in hopes of persuading appropriate parties for further support. Additionally, writing centers are forced into a balancing act between service and education. On the one hand, writing centers are required to provide a supplemental educational service to students beyond the professor and the classroom – extending knowledge and continuing the education from the instructor. Improving writing skills, improving GPAs, and understanding assignments are just a small part of what writing centers are expected to do for students across a university. Writing centers are also operating within a larger system of consumerism and higher education. Students
are perceived as consumers of the product of higher education. At the same time, writing centers are forced into the retail service industry through expectations of students and their satisfaction of the service and progressing the business model universities are engaged in. While this satisfaction is ultimately hinged on the students’ success at the assignment, the approach and expectation is much more geared toward a retail service like business where in both students and administrators are expecting a certain level of satisfaction with the services. First, students come to a writing center expecting a certain amount of assistance. The writing center offers this service to students willing to participate. In most centers, services are provided free of charge to students and they are therefore encouraged to partake in the assistance as frequently as possible. At the same time, faculty and administration have the same expectation of the center assisting students (and sometimes them) as a service overall to the university. In that, the university is expecting the writing center to be a support to the overall mission and goals in producing students who graduate on time. Herein lies the problem with positioning the writing center both as a place where students can receive expert guidance and support for their writing, as well as maintaining the university’s mission and goals. Writing centers are therefore stuck between two seemingly competing notions of how a writing center should operate: service to the consumerist model of higher education and the students who pay for their education or the more traditional model of teaching and creating critical thinkers. This dichotomy makes the need for accurate assessment and reporting even more important.

**Closing the Assessment Gap**

To mitigate these two sides, writing centers need to know the needs and priorities of upper administration and faculty while at the same time be able to keep the students satisfied
with the service. Gofine points out that the need to keep these, amongst other, audiences informed and happy is the central problem writing centers face. Often, writing centers are only able to collect and communicate on a few aspects of their service to the institution, relying on basic data and usage profiles. Jean Kiedaisch and Sue Dinitz conducted one such study in 1991 that focused solely on the tutor/client interaction and the satisfaction of both the client and tutor with the tutoring session. While Kiedaisch and Dinitz’s system was used only for the purposes of understanding their own writing center aspects, their approach is useful in understanding how complicated the aspects of writing center assessment is. The initial approach Kiedaisch and Dinitz used were surveys for both the tutor and client. These surveys were meant to gauge the satisfaction of both the client and tutor at the effectiveness of the session and Kiedaisch and Dinitz (1991) used this information to demonstrate and improve the services their writing center offered (p. 90). What Kiedaisch and Dinitz essentially created was a clearinghouse for writing center information, which is an important step in writing centers being able to understand what students and tutors deal with on a daily basis. Knowing this information armed their writing center with tools to be more prepared for what was coming to the center throughout the semester. Yet, this information still lacked the ability to communicate to stakeholders outside of the writing center the work the center was doing. It contained very specialized language, as well as data that was really only relevant to those in-the-know for writing centers.

Harvey Kail and Lisa Ede, separately, saw the need to show those outside of the writing center the value that the center could provide to the institution. Both Kail and Ede saw the coming changes in university structures and the shifting landscape of the enrollment of students within those universities. Ede saw the coming shift in writing centers’ roles as a cautionary one; she recognized how important it will be for writing centers to keep pace with the changing
educational landscape to consumerism if they were to remain viable resources to their institutions. She points out that “[writing center] work is difficult or impossible to do within traditional disciplinary frameworks… centers allow for inter or cross-disciplinary research and scholarship, and at their best they encourage highly productive forms of collaboration” (p. 33). However, this is not always taken advantage of. Because most writing centers are closely associated with the English Department, it is difficult for administrators and faculty outside of these areas to see the value in what writing centers have to offer. This makes the balance between providing a consumer service and the traditional pedagogical approach of a writing center that much more important. Writing centers have to position themselves within this balance of pedagogy and consumerism to remain viable within an institution.

Similarly, Harvey Kail (2000) saw the changing landscape of writing centers in providing both and educational service and a consumer service within institutions, writing that “What distinguishes writing centers in academe is their willingness and ability to engage student writers sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase, word by word, comma by comma, one to one, face to face. No one else in the academy can or wants to do this work, but everyone wants it done – now” (p. 25). From the students to faculty to administration, this urgency in a need for improved writing skills is an ongoing challenge that writing centers must face from multiple angles. Yet, most writing centers are ill-equipped to prove their viability in being able to provide an educational service as well as a consumer service to their institution in meaningful ways to prove their value amongst the institution, let alone being able to report to different audiences within the institution.

Thus Gofine’s (2012) examination of assessment models that are currently in practice echoes the fears and perceptions of the future from almost 20 years ago: writing centers must be
able to coexist amongst disciplines to provide educational as well as consumer value within an institution. With this need becoming more apparent, there has been attempts at defining certain aspects of what Lisa Ede and Harvey Kail point to as being assessment points to prove viability of a writing center within the institution. Several scholars have looked at assessment, its importance in an institution, as the way to create viability – but only facing one audience at a time. This creates a dissonance between writing center and audience. When the writing center is only able to speak to itself, for example, they might be operative in creating an effective pedagogy for students, but might be failing to understand their place and influence on the institution as a whole. There are a myriad of stakeholders within an institution for the writing center, and being able to speak to each of them effectively changes the outcomes a writing center can have. There is no question that writing centers have this effect on the institution, so the question writing centers must ask is: Are the right people getting the relevant information? Outside audiences from the typical writing center community have a skewed view of the writing center and what its functions are (as seen in the previous sections of this chapter), so, writing centers, as experts in understanding audience, should be able to effectively communicate the influence writing centers have on the institution.

In order to effectively communicate to an outside audience the success and failures of the writing center, directors must first understand the center’s own usage profile. In understanding the general student demographics, number of users, and usage trends, writing centers can begin to develop a picture of the typical user of the writing center. In 2012, Li-Shih Huang addressed this issue in her own writing center assessment model which has “proven to be beneficial for both evaluating the effectiveness of the services in order to plan and improve and answering the age-old question: does what we do matter” (202)? Through this model, Huang has collected data
to better understand the writing center’s profile in terms of student demographics: gender, degree level, classification, language background, and types of visits, all of which point to an overall picture of the center’s usage profile and how the writing center is being utilized over a period of time. This assessment model has given Huang a clearer idea of the writing center’s usage, and can then use this information to improve the writing center’s services and student support.

However, as Huang (2012) also points out, there are still limitations to only assessing this aspect of the writing center and the challenges writing center directors face in accurately measuring a center’s success: “The field of writing-centre research has developed a rich body of qualitative work, and, in recent years, the field has also witnessed efforts to utilize quantitative methodologies, but to-date, such evaluation studies are still lacking” (p. 202). What is missing, according to Huang, is “the need for expertise in assessment research methods” as well as a better understanding of assessment purposes, and the difficulties in finding the link between the writing center’s support and student success (p. 202). By putting together a usage profile, a writing center is able to move beyond the hunches and suspicions of a writing center’s effectiveness in assisting students. Yet, it is only the start of painting a complete picture. While Huang (2012) argues that this model moves the field forward in being able to communicate writing center effectiveness, it is still incomplete. She recognizes that “usage-profile data alone cannot address the efficacy of a program or unit, or measure its impact fully” and to understand the full impact of a writing center “deeper measures must be taken at a well-integrated level, using multiple sources of data… in which usage-profile analysis is one of the components” (p. 218). Being able to report on efficacy on multiple levels is just one aspect that Huang sees as being integral to completing this picture of a writing center. This in turn would allow the writing
center to speak to many different audiences on campus as to the impact the writing center had on students educational experience.

Once a usage profile is determined, writing centers can then begin to adapt their services to the contextual aspects of their institution. Specifically, writing centers can put into practice specific theories and pedagogical approaches that would be serve the student population. While serving students is always the focus and mission of the writing center, the need to prove a center’s effectiveness still remains a major obstacle. In understanding a center’s usage profile, writing centers are able to begin the complicated process of analyzing the effectiveness of the center’s impact within the institution. Yet, there are aspects of fully understanding a writing center’s impact beyond the center’s usage profile. The need to report effectiveness to faculty and upper administration also becomes a vital part of a writing center’s analysis.

Bell and Frost (2012) have addressed the need to convince an institution’s upper administration of a writing center’s effectiveness. They recognized that “institution administrators often require directors to provide assessment data to justify – usually in quantitative terms – the existence of the writing center for reasons of funding, space, and allocation of intellectual capital resources” (p. 15). Yet, as a community that often operates with qualitative data, reporting to upper administration on quantitative aspects is a language that most writing centers are unfamiliar with. Bell and Frost point out that writing centers are often “speaking as a community of liberation to a system of regulation,” making it difficult to communicate success and validity to upper administration (p. 16). This then, according to Gardner and Ramsey (2005), “leaves us with no effective language for sitting down with deans, vice-presidents, or boards of trustees and describing in a discourse they can understand our contributions to the mission of the university” (p. 26). These contributions come largely in the
form of student success, of which Bell and Frost offer two examples of how to assess writing center impact on student success. They also show clear methods for reporting that success to upper administration in a language upper administration can understand. This is also where this project offers a possible solution. In being able to quantify many aspects of what writing centers have to contribute to the mission of the university, writing centers can become better equipped to move from the margins of the university into a more cross-disciplinary and involved service. However, upper administration is only one aspect that requires apt assessment of student success for the institutional system to operate. Writing center inhabit such liminal spaces within institutions that they become difficult to define, and even more difficult to quantify. Because their pedagogy is cross-disciplinary, their approach is often seen as unorthodox, as they operate along the margins of a university, the communication of writing center effectiveness rarely reaches outside of the writing center.

Yet, assessment and reporting are not the easiest of tasks for writing centers. The material to analyze is often limited and difficult to get at with standard assessment tools. And often, directors and other members of writing centers are not always well versed in collecting and studying this type of data. I will admit, that even my knowledge at the outset of this project was less than limited, and that data collection was something I felt was out of reach for the scope of analysis I wanted to complete. Indeed, it is difficult to assess writing outcomes in a place where there are no grades, no standardization for outcomes, no authority, and no expected curriculum when students arrive. Aspects of student expectations and abilities are so amorphous when they arrive at the writing center that it is difficult to determine their reason for even visiting the writing center let alone whether or not they write better after visiting with the center (Spears, 1982). Yet, writing centers continue, in essence, the mantra of “Better writers, not better
writing” (North, 1984). It is now time to prove that writing centers do make better writers, that their focus and attention on student identity and voice gives them a larger skill set to take away from the center and apply it to all the other aspects of their academic and professional work, and to show the institution, which is there to serve the students, that the center is an integral and effective aspect of the entire machine; that without the writing center there would be aspects of student life and engagement that would suffer, leading to consequences throughout the entire establishment. Those might be lofty expectations to go into a project with, but centers would settle for knowing that their work is important just for one student, and that putting their pedagogy into practice had an effect that made the student’s experience better all the way through graduation. However, this is no easy task. Being able to determine the effectiveness of the writing center, and its effects on student success, requires a broad approach that relies on the input of several different players within the writing center from students, to tutors, and administration, as well as assistance from outside the writing center often from faculty in non-traditional writing classes, or even offices on campus that store particular data on students at the institution. Getting participation from everyone can be difficult, and sometimes tedious. At my writing center we have over 13,000 student visits each academic year, and attempt to collect the same data set from each student. This makes for a large and cumbersome system, but one that is necessary to gather the relevant data to make broad arguments regarding the writing center. What is described here is such a system, one that should answer many questions posed by scholars throughout the years directed at determining effectiveness of writing center sessions. However, instead of focusing the data analysis for writing centers, this system looks to determine effectiveness of writing center sessions for an audience outside of writing centers while still acting as a clearinghouse of data for writing center improvement. This is something that the data
collection system can assist writing center directors with as the data collection system creates information for writing centers can use to speak to those outside of the writing center. In doing so, writing centers will be able to communicate their effectiveness to an audience on terms that they would find relevant.
Chapter 3

Building a Survey System

While communication to outside audiences is the final goal of the system described throughout the project, the setup and management of such a system is what I will focus on in this section. Overall this project is framed as a tool for writing center directors to empower themselves within the community of their institution, giving them data which can be translated into relevant information appropriate for different audiences. The system is the first step in giving writing center directors the information they need to show that their center is an effective and essential portion of the institution as a whole, and maybe even give directors the much needed information to help defend themselves when the time comes.

The system described here was designed to collect data in such a way that it can be configured to speak to multiple audiences. It has the ability to collect both quantitative and qualitative data relating to the experience of students at the writing center and their success throughout the university. In this way, the system is able to show how the writing center can approach its work with students to study effectiveness in several key aspects: writing ability, satisfaction, student success, etc., and then communicate that success to a wide audience: students, faculty, upper administration, and the writing center. Each group has a different vested interest in student success at the institution for its own goals. This system provides a collection method for writing centers to use and adapt to their own institutional context in order to communicate effectively to stakeholders that may not fully understand the mission and effectiveness of a writing center. The notion of “effectiveness” will be described throughout this chapter as it relates to the institutional context of this particular writing center. However, it is important to note, as I mentioned early in chapter 2, that there is an incredible variety of
institutional contexts that need to be taken into consideration when using a system described here. I am only using my writing center as the example for the survey model; the methods and analysis of the data depends largely on the institutional context and need provided by the different audiences.

Being able to delineate subjective matters such as satisfaction with services provided, improvement in writing skills knowledge, and writing skills ability, is valuable information to provide students and faculty in quantitative form. Knowing that students see improvement in their writing abilities and knowledge provides insight into how a writing center can approach its work with students as a support service and can adapt to students’ abilities and skills appropriately. Additionally, this information needs to be readily quantifiable. Students may feel like they will get a better grade on the assignment they took to the writing center, but did they? This also bleeds into knowing how the writing center affected the student as she moved through the university towards graduation: did the writing center have an effect on retention rates? Graduation rates? Being able to transfer the qualitative subjective material into a quantifiable report provides the writing center an avenue through which to talk to multiple audiences about specific concerns: students – knowing that students received a service that, if properly employed, benefited them; faculty – seeing how students progressed and collaborated with the writing center, as well as developing improved classroom pedagogies; and administration – seeing that funding for a student support service had an effect on student success at the institution. All of these capabilities are built into the system described here. The writing center is able to speak to multiple audiences, from the same data, in both subjective and objective ways. It shows students that their experience with the writing center benefited them in ways they are interested in hearing
about, and shows faculty and administration that students’ experiences with the writing center benefited them as well as the university as a whole.

The writing center where this system was developed has a large second language learner population, with many first generation college students who are unfamiliar with the academic writing process and the pedagogy found in the first-year writing courses. While the effectiveness of this model is largely dependent on the context of the writing center described at this institution, the model is flexible enough to accommodate all writing center contexts. I mention the particular student demographic of the survey site because it is unique, as all institutional demographics will be. It is also important to point to specific areas of concern that the different audiences might have in needing data. I will describe how data was collected and reported to the three audiences mentioned earlier. This information is intended to be used by other writing centers with modifications to the models presented here for their own use for collecting data and reporting to their different entities. Although this model was developed with a specific site in mind, the reporting methods described here can be changed to suit the specific audience expectations of an institution.

**DEVELOPING THE SURVEY SYSTEM**

During the summer of 2014, the director of the writing center and I, the associate director at the time, developed a survey system to collect data from students visiting the university writing center. I was interested in creating a system that was able to speak to multiple audiences in a way that was non-intrusive to the writing center process, as well as able to collect both quantitative and qualitative data that would correlate to provide relevant data to multiple audiences around the campus (Gofine, 2012; Huang, 2012; LaClare & Franz 2013). Since I were
unable to find a complete system, I began by trying to imagine what information and areas of learning that upper administration, faculty, and students would be interested in, such as the effectiveness of the writing center in improving the student experience at the university, as well as knowing how students who visited the writing center were impacted by their session in a variety of areas. However, most writing center scholarship regarding data collection and analysis only focuses on one of these aspects at a time and does not have a cohesive system for communicating with outside audiences (Gofine, 2012). I therefore set out to determine how the writing center could collect data to show impact in all areas. I brainstormed ideas for what the upper administration would be interested in: determining retention rates among students who visit the writing center versus those who do not, the GPAs of students who visit the writing center versus those that do not, and how students identified as being “at risk,” either through GPA or graduate rates, were affected by visiting the writing center. Having looked at several different aspects of the university’s mission as well as expected goals and outcomes for students, I made the determination that these were areas of success that the upper administration would be interested in knowing how the writing center impacted these areas.

In addition to these correlations, and being a faculty member, I wanted to see if the writing center had an impact directly in the classroom through areas such as course grades, how students perceived their writing ability before and after a writing center session, and immediate improvement in the students’ ability to write for the specific class. I knew that GPA in the classroom and writing improvement were of concern for faculty, not just in our discipline, but throughout the entire university. Working in a writing center, the common mantra from faculty

6 “At risk” is defined in-depth in chapter 4, but basically refers to a variety of factors that could possibly contribute to a student’s success or failure at the institution. Some of these factors include first generation students, lower SAT scores, or lower High School GPAs.
is typically “my students can’t write,” and I wanted to determine if the writing center was able to change that perception in faculty in any way. Student knowledge in regards to writing skills and vocabulary, as well as time management, were determined to be important faculty concerns.

Finally, I wanted to see how the students felt about their experience at the writing center and see if the students felt they were impacted by their session at the writing center. This included looking at the students’ level of satisfaction with their session as well as their own perceived improvement in writing ability and knowledge through a series of questions. Did students see the writing center as a place that was going to genuinely assist them, not just with a class assignment but also with their ability to write overall? I was interested in seeing if students saw an overall improvement with their writing skills and abilities, not just with the specific class assignment they visited with (although, that aspect is important as well).

In looking at all the aspects that I thought would be important to the institution as a whole, I started seeing that all the aspects I wanted to study would provide important information to the writing center as well. By asking certain questions, or studying certain trends in the data, I started to see that the writing center could adapt its own pedagogy and mission to fit the needs found within the data. I found that overall, the data collected through this system would be most important for the writing center, not just to be able to communicate to an outside audience, but in becoming more effective as providing assistance to students.

The following sections will describe the surveys as they are encountered by students when visiting the writing center. The surveys are also described in order of questions that are asked as well as the justifications for asking the questions. How the data from the surveys were analyzed will be described in chapter 4.
These surveys (see Appendix A,B,C) were created using Qualtrics survey software, part of a larger software suite that provides data collection software customizable to specific situations. The software is provided free to staff and faculty of the university to conduct studies such as this, as well as a variety of other polling and survey activities. The difficulty in studying writing center impact often comes through a lack of access to relevant student data and software to collect the data, not to mention the subjective aspect of understanding students’ knowledge, skills, and improvement in writing. Subjective data often comes in the form of students’ understanding writing skills, but students often do not have adequate vocabulary to express their need for assistance when it comes to writing. The survey designed for this study specifically targeted data that attempts to determine students’ knowledge, skills, and vocabulary when it comes to writing by asking the student multiple questions regarding their writing vocabulary knowledge from a variety of perspectives.

I decided to identify typically collected data points from other institutional writing center data collection methods in an attempt to determine the extent and nature of any association to positive impact on the institution (Bell & Frost 2012; Burns & Wilson 2009; Gardner & Ramsey 2005; Huang, 2012; Hasiam & McGarthy 2014; LaClare & Franz 2011). For the most part, previous data collection methods study only one or two aspects of the larger analysis taken on in this project and choose to focus on aspects such as student grades, or students’ satisfaction with the services. Other writing centers I examined also created systems that studied a student’s graduation rate, or retention semester to semester, but not both of these aspects combined. The correlation method used here allows me to show an observed relationship between the services of the writing center and its effects on the student body at the university. This data is then used to
create targeted reports for different audiences throughout the university as I will explain in later chapters.

In addition, these questions were designed to try to understand students’ perceived abilities and skills in writing, progress on the assignment, success of improving writing skills during the session with a consultant, and perceived acquisition of new skills. Through a comparative analysis of these data points, I could find important information regarding how students perceive their own writing skills and knowledge. This information also helped the writing center understand students’ needs when visiting the writing center so it could adapt pedagogy and provide assistance in actionable ways, since most students are not well versed in the vocabulary of writing skills and abilities.

**Creating Survey Questions**

The purpose of the surveys designed for this study were to collect a variety of data on students visiting the writing center for assistance with their writing. Data that is reported on here was collected longitudinally over the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 semesters at the writing center. The survey design primarily used questionnaires with Likert scale questions to gauge students’ opinions regarding their own self-identified knowledge and notions of the writing process, grades, level of completion, prior writing assistance, and writing ability. Likert scales were used to measure factors such as “agreement,” “frequency,” and “importance” based on the above mentioned factors.

These surveys were first piloted during the Spring 2013 semester and implemented at the beginning of the Fall 2013 semester: “Student Demographic Information” survey (see appendix A); “Consultant Session Information” survey (see appendix B); and “Student Exit” survey (see
appendix C). These three surveys were used in combination to collect data in an attempt to examine the correlation of student usage at the writing center with student success within the institution. Questions from each survey serve as multiple points of data to attempt to arrive at an understanding of how students’ use of the writing center affects their performance within the institution. In doing so, the three surveys were created with specific questions that attempt to collect data from different perspectives. Many of the survey questions are described in detail below, but in brief, the “Student Demographic Information” survey attempts to understand what writing skills, needs, and approaches students initially bring with them to the Writing Center, along with demographic information regarding writing center usage, classification, class assignment, and time frames (see appendix A). The “Consultant Session Information” survey asks several of the same questions, but from the consultant’s perspective after assisting the student (see appendix B) in an attempt to see what type of assistance the student received when visiting the Writing Center. Lastly, the “Student Exit Survey” asks students about their satisfaction with the service at the Writing Center, along with their own perception regarding the improvement of writing skills and knowledge, and perceptions about grade improvement after receiving assistance (see appendix C).

**SURVEY #1**

**Student visit information**

Students arriving at the Writing Center begin by filling out the “Student visit information” survey before sitting down with a consultant for assistance. The “Student visit information” survey asks the student several demographic questions, along with basic information regarding number of times they have visited the Writing Center, class assignment,
course numbers, and instructor information. Much of this basic information is used to track the student usage of the center, as well as understanding from where within the university students are visiting the writing center. With over 24,000 students on campus, and 7 different colleges, being able to understand what classes, and which professors, are sending the most students to the writing center becomes useful information. In addition, this information can be passed on to the university’s Center for Institutional Evaluation Research and Planning (CIERP) for several reasons; they have data markers on students that can only be accessed through their analysis, as well as professional statisticians who can complete the analysis.

The remainder of the questions in this survey are aimed at gaining insight into the student’s understanding of writing knowledge, skills, and abilities with which they come to the writing center. For these questions, the notion of “knowledge” refers to the students’ comprehension of the writing process and skills that might be involved in the practice of writing. The knowing of vocabulary terms such as “organization,” “outlining,” “flow,” or “transition” is important to understanding what students come to the writing center knowing about the writing process. “Skills” refers to the students’ ability to participate in the writing process with practices such as outlining, formatting, and organizing their essays. Additionally, questions are asked to attempt to understand how students feel they are a using these skills in the practical application of them. Finally, “ability” is understood as the students’ self-identified ability to implement the skills in the actual practice of writing. Some students might classify this as “good” or “bad” writing.
**Writing ability**

Students are asked to self-identify their perception of their own writing ability before the assignment or before their visit to the writing center (see appendix A/Q19). This question is used to gauge how students perceive an improvement with their writing ability over time. Also, by asking students about their self-identified writing ability, I can assess our own pedagogy for knowledge sharing and adapt our services to provide students with the better assistance. With this information I can share with instructors and upper administration the perceived level of writing skills the students who visit the writing center have so that they might also adapt their pedagogies to better assist students with retention and GPAs. An additional aspect of this question is that students often lack the vocabulary to communicate information about their writing and are therefore unsure of how to adequately self-assess their own writing skills and knowledge. I attempt to clarify this limitation through comparisons of multiple student visits over time, and through a comparison of student self-assessed writing skills and knowledge compared with the actual service and assistance the student received.

**Time frame - How soon the assignment is due.**

This question is asked and shared with the writing consultant to help determine the most important aspects of assistance to give during the session. Based on how much time the student has to integrate the suggestions from the session, consultants will decide which aspects of the paper to work on. A longer turnaround provides the consultants an opportunity to work on larger global issues with the paper, while a shorter turnaround time may not provide the student with enough time to integrate the session suggestions. This question is also used to help the writing center understand student practices when it comes to the writing process (drafting and revision)
as well as how the writing center might better situate itself to assist students with the writing process.

**Writing process**

In an attempt to have students provide as much information regarding their own writing process, and where they are in that process, several questions are asked regarding typical writing aspects that could be encountered throughout the writing process (see appendix A/Q21-25). Questions regarding pre-writing (appendix A/Q21) and development concerns (appendix A/Q24) seek to determine students’ practice in seeking assistance during different stages of the writing process. It is also part of this question to provide students with a better understanding of what the writing process entails. Many students arrive at the writing center without knowledge of what the writing process even means. Asking these questions gives the students a very basic introduction to the writing process. Questions regarding mechanics (see appendix A/Q22) are used to determine students’ need for assistance, if any, after the development/drafting process and into the final stages of the writing process. Finally, a question regarding final formatting and citation concerns (see appendix A/Q23) are used to determine students’ perceived need before a final submission review. This question is also shared with the consultant so that they are ready with knowledge regarding the specific formatting a student needs for their paper.

In addition to these specific questions, there are several sub-questions for each category. These questions are additional information/data points for later analysis. For the most part these questions are used to create a more complete picture of what the student perceives they need in regards to assistance. Aside from the basic demographic information, these questions shed light
on a variety of aspects that students bring to the writing center regarding their writing and allows us to understand where students begin with their expectations of the writing center.

**Survey #2**

Session information survey

The second survey in the process is conducted by the consultant with the student and provides an alternative perspective to the student’s request for assistance. Writing center consultants have a larger vocabulary of writing terms, and a stronger foundation in writing pedagogy. There is more specific terminology used in the second survey and a few demographic questions for the consultant to ask. In addition, the consultant will provide as much assistance as they can dependent upon the amount of assistance needed, turnaround time for when the assignment is due, and current workload at the writing center (if the writing center is busy, consultants try to keep sessions to 30 minutes in length. If the writing center is not busy, i.e. there are no students waiting to see a consultant, then sessions may take longer). Once the session is complete, the consultant will fill out the “Session Information” survey (see appendix B). This survey collects additional data regarding the student’s understanding of the assignment, what the consultant actually worked on during the session with the student, the time it took to work with the student, and some additional demographic information. Likert scales were again employed for consultants to provide their perspective on sliding scales of agreement describing a student’s knowledge and skill regarding writing.
**Student’s level of understanding the assignment**

This question asks the consultant to describe the student’s understanding of the assignment on a scale of 1 = “Poor” to 5 = “Excellent” (see appendix B/Q8). Often, students arrive at the writing center before any actual writing has taken place or, students have not understood the writing assignment and have produced a text that is not aligned with the expectations of the assignment. This question allows us to see where students are in the writing process after receiving assistance with their assignment (see “Student Exit” section below). It also provides us with information to approach faculty with offers to assist with creating better writing assignments. I frequently tell instructors that better writing assignments frequently produce better writing, and therefore make grading easier.

**Percentage of assignment completion**

This question of assignment completion is asked on a scale of percentage to determine at what point during the writing process the student sought assistance from the writing center (see appendix B/Q9). The scale runs from 0% complete (typically students who have questions regarding brainstorming and developmental questions fall into this end of the scale) to 100% complete (this end of the scale would be used if a student was working on final citations and formatting questions). The percentage of completion question is correlated with the student’s turnaround time and developmental questions from the “Student Demographic Information” survey to see what type of assistance the writing center can provide students given the timeframe the student has to complete the assignment. This question also gives the writing center a picture of when students come to the writing center for assistance.
Effectiveness of session

This question was designed to gauge the consultant’s perception of effectiveness during the session in improving writing ability, the student’s effectiveness in addressing the assignment, and the student’s ability in learning new, or improving upon, writing skills (see appendix B/Q10). This question is correlated by CIERP against the student’s perception of writing skills and knowledge improvement asked during the “Student Exit” survey (see “Student Exit” survey section below). This question is also asked in order to determine other aspects of writing that students might need help with. It is almost always expected that a consultant will suggest an additional session with the student no matter the effectiveness of the session.

SURVEY #3

Student exit survey.

In addition to the “Student Demographic Information” survey and the “Session Information” survey, the writing center asks that all students who visit the writing center complete a short exit “satisfaction” survey after the session is complete and before they leave the writing center (see appendix C). The exit survey asks many of the same questions as found in the “Session Information” survey, but asks students to reflect on the session they just participated in and rate the knowledge and skills they gained from the session. There is some limitation to having the student participate in the exit survey immediately after their session. The terms and process that was taught during the session would be fresh in the minds of the student when they leave and it does not measure the student’s ability to retain, or even implement the new knowledge once they leave the center. Following up with the students at a later date would partially solve this limitation to the exit survey. Nonetheless, this survey also attempts to gauge
the students’ satisfaction with the services at the writing center they just received. The student exit survey also collects information on student satisfaction with the writing center and the consultant they visited with. This survey is anonymous and is copied to the consultant who assisted the student 24 hours after the session takes place. The writing center does this to keep the anonymity of the student safe while still providing feedback to the consultant. Consultants are encouraged to read all session feedback results they receive and reflect on their performance during the day to continue to develop their own skills in assisting students. The results of the survey are also used by writing center administration to identify issues with consultant sessions through the rating system described below (consultants with lower ratings can be identified as ones needing more development with their consultation skills).

Students are again asked a version of the Likert Scale agreement question regarding their immediate perception of writing ability, knowledge, and potential grade on the assignment. By correlating similar questions from both the “Student Demographic Information” survey and the “Session Information” survey, I attempt to better understand how students think they have improved their writing skills, abilities, and knowledge from visiting the writing center. The writing center is able to produce correlative data that shows self-perceived improvement in writing skills from the session with a consultant at the writing center.

The exit survey also serves as method for reporting directly to students on the success that their peers are having by visiting the writing center. This satisfaction data is often used in marketing materials or other advertisement to tout the value a writing center has towards individual students and their success within the institution and encourage students to visit the writing center.
Writing skills, knowledge, and grade improvement

Students are asked to rate the level of improvement they have gained from visiting the writing center (see appendix C/Q7). The scale runs from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” with a “Don’t Know” choice included. This question is correlated with the consultant’s perspective regarding the session that just occurred. No two sessions are directly correlated, as the student exit survey is anonymous. However, I can look at students’ understanding of writing skills, knowledge, and ability before their visit with a writing center consultant and after the session to determine if students perceive an improvement in their skills, knowledge, and ability. The three aspects of the writing skills, knowledge, and grade improvement question are as follows: (a) Improved Writing Ability - This question is asked to determine how effectively students were able to understand the knowledge shared with them by writing center consultants and later incorporate it into their own writing process and assignments they have to create. However, students may not have an immediate realization of their improvement until they get a grade back on the assignment, or they have the opportunity to actually practice the skills in revising the paper. This question is also used as a writing center self-assessment to determine the level of professional development needed to give to writing center consultants to assist students in an appropriate manner. (b) Grade Improvement on Assignment- This question is asked to determine if the student felt that the help they received from the writing center might guide them to a better grade on the assignment even though the student will not know the grade on the paper till later. While our writing center does not speculate on students’ grades when providing assistance, this question is important to see if the prior assistance was effective in providing the student with enough knowledge and skill to improve their paper for a better grade. (c) Grade Improvement in the Class – this question is
asked to determine if the student feels that the assistance given by the writing center would improve their overall grade in the class. Students will not know if there is an improvement in the grade until later in the semester. However, in terms of students being satisfied with the service in the writing center, understanding their perceived improvement in writing skills is important to understand. This question is correlated with the actual GPA data determined from the CIERP Data points section below.

In addition to the questions asked above, a student’s unique university assigned identification number is collected. The student identification number is used as a tracking method for several different aspects of the students’ life on campus. This number is associated with previously obtained demographic information such as gender, financial status, and age, as well as other student information such as SAT scores, high school GPA, financial aid status, major and minors, and any transfer student status, as well as other information the university uses to track students. As part of this study I am not allowed to view the student information for confidentiality reasons, and the IRB I obtained for this project only allows the data to be viewed as archival data, but the Center for Institutional Engagement Research and Planning keeps the information and will provide additional analysis per requested correlations.

The survey system described above is used each time a student visits with the writing center and is designed to walk students through a small portion of the writing process. One of the big correlations this survey allows us to look at is how students view the writing center and the work the center does versus the way they use the writing center. These two aspects are different in that many times, students come to the writing center with a limited vocabulary of what they need assistance with. After a visit, or maybe even just speaking with the consultant while completing the survey, the student will have a new set of vocabulary terms to help them
through the writing process. This is just one aspect of the data that this survey system generates. What I do with the data in terms of correlations and discussions for different audiences will be discussed in chapter 4 as the system is designed to collect data in such a way that it can be analyzed for different audiences based on that audience’s need.

There are additional, unexpected benefits from this survey system. These surveys are a good method for breaking the ice between consultant and student. A consultant can use the surveys as their initial point of contact to gain insight into what the student needs assistance with and how far along the student is as well as make it a personable connection between them. The survey questions might seem cold and bland at first, but a consultant who can see that the information is going to benefit them during the session, can turn the survey into a conversation about the student’s paper, collect the data, and create a connection with the student. At the same time, students who become familiar with the routine of filling out the surveys and answering the questions for the consultant begin to use the language of writing and the writing process to start describing their needs to the consultant. Not only does this help the student improve their own writing, but it allows the consultant to delve deeper into the writing process to expand the student’s knowledge about writing.

As I have discussed throughout this paper, writing centers often find themselves in perilous positions within their institution, which is in part why this survey system was created. The danger may be due to budget cuts, or misunderstandings about what writing centers do for students. No matter the situation, the writing center’s mission is solely focused on the student: making better writers, giving students the tools they need to succeed in academia, and providing a safe space for students to practice their writing. Because of this writing centers work for the general benefit of the institution at large. Student success directly affects the institution through
funding and its ability to recruit more students; in this way the writing center serves students of a university as a “literacy sponsor.” Lori Salem (2014) speaks of literacy sponsors as units within a university which provide effective learning services to the student body and can effect positive change in the student body. There is great benefit to the university as a whole when literacy sponsors, such as a writing center, unite. Here, the writing center not only affects the student body, but rather has the ability to affect the entire institution. There is value and responsibility, from the writing center’s perspective, to affect all aspects of the institution in positive ways; writing centers only need to find ways to communicate how they affect the institution to the proper audience. Again, this survey is a tool for writing center administrators to do this type of outreach. In the following chapters, I will discuss the needs of four different audiences at my institution, and how this survey can speak to the needs of those four audiences. The way in which writing centers are able to collect and report on their effectiveness within the institution becomes a lifeblood for a writing center. This survey system and the data it produces has saved me on a large scale numerous occasions when perceptions of the writing center were not entirely complete. It is also helps on the small scale. Often, instructors email the writing center wondering about a student’s visit – whether or not they truthfully visited the writing center, or what kind of assistance the consultant provided to the student – and I am able to quickly refer to and explain to the instructor what the writing center did for the student. Frequently, the information the writing center provides to the instructor does not match with the information provided to the instructor by the student. This is just another side benefit to the survey system. But aside from being a defensive operation, the survey system allows writing centers to collect data in a way that provides proactive information. By examining several aspects from the surveys, writing centers can use the information to better prepare themselves for student visits. I
have, on several occasions, noticed upticks in students visiting from certain large classrooms, and rather than struggle through hundreds of students giving their own perspective on the assignment, I reached out to the professor for an explanation of the assignment. The writing center staff was then better equipped to assist students from these classes. Lastly, the survey system provides information in enough aspects that the writing center can be proactive within the institutional community and create an argument for a variety of situations. The next chapters will discuss the different audiences that are commonly communicated with via this survey system. These are not definitive audiences and expectations, rather, they are common situations I have found myself in running a writing center for several years. Based on experience and knowledge of how my institution works, I created these audience expectations. However, the survey system is built in such a way that will provide data for other institutional contexts, and readers should feel that changing questions, or what order they appear in, should occur to fit those contexts. In addition, readers should expect to adapt any of the materials in the survey design and questions to fit their institutional context. However, the main correlation and audience awareness should remain. The survey is designed to collect data from student experiences and should translate into any institutional context needed.
Chapter 4

Persuasive Strategies for Reporting to Stakeholders

While a writing center’s focus is directed mostly at the student, the effect the center can have reach beyond the student. As students do better in their classes, GPAs will increase, and as GPAs increase, students stay in classes, taking new classes each semester, and as student are retained in classes, graduation rates go up. It is a continually cascading event – success begets more success. This is just one aspect of a writing center’s impact on the institution at large. Writing centers touch almost every aspect of student experiences throughout the institution, so it is therefore important to understand how and through which means the writing center will impact students and eventually the institution. By understanding the far reaching implications of the writing center on the institution, writing centers can become more effective communicators with the institution they serve.

Writing centers affect the larger aspect of the institution through the direct sponsorship of students and their writing. Lori Salem (2014) notes that while students can have several different aspects of student support to assist them through their academic career, writing is one of the more interdisciplinary skills that each student needs. Salem (2014) also points out that many institutions have disciplinary support for students for specific classes (sometimes these take the form of students who have taken the class previously, or are graduate students majoring in the discipline of the class) that are often housed alongside writing centers. However, when writing centers are created as their own individual unit, students see the aspect of writing as a more widely needed skill that needs to be practiced. This allows writing centers to create and respond to more aspects of the student body’s needs and provide appropriate service, as well as serve the faculty and upper administration needs.
In my study, I am able to examine a writing center that operates within the institution as its own individualized unit. This gives the aspects of data reporting more credibility in terms of how the writing center is able to affect change in the student body, and provide relevant data on the writing center’s effects within the institution. One of the major aspects of this study is understanding the different needs of audiences within the institution. There are four main categories, or audiences that a writing center needs to keep in mind when they report on data: students, faculty, upper administration, and the writing center.

While this dissertation does not dive too deeply into the analysis of the data, it is important to mention how the data is created for the audiences that need it. I have spent a lot of time going back and forth with my committee about what all should be included here: was the project focused on the system that was created, or the data and analysis the survey system produced? In the end, it was the survey system that I decided to focus on. There is still a lot to be said about the data analysis that occurs to create the persuasive arguments to stakeholders, and while I will provide some of the data that was produced to create the arguments, it will not be the primary focus. I will also give some context to the scale and amount of data that is collected in a typical year at the UTEP writing center. The project does share some of the methods I engaged with to create the persuasive arguments, and there is still much to be said in that regard. Future projects will include sharing these data analysis methods, and how I have come to the persuasive arguments that are being presented to stakeholders. Further discussion can be had in regards to the dissection of data for persuasion.
The correlational method of survey design was used to create the majority of the questions in an attempt to correlate enough data to show the writing center’s impact on several aspects of students’ overall experience within the university (Hasiam & McGarthy, 2014; Warwick & Lininger, 1975). Through the survey system, the writing center collected 5,499 surveys from students visiting the writing center, 4,511 surveys completed by writing center consultants, and 4,040 evaluations of the writing center and its staff during the 2013-14 academic year. Though the total number of surveys filled out in all three areas was similar, some discrepancies occurred, possibly because of the consultants lack of training regarding the surveys, students filling out multiple entrance surveys for only one visit, and consultants not ensuring that students fill out the exit survey before leaving the center. All of these discrepancies offer potential insight into the improvement of the system. The university’s research office, the Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research and Planning (CIERP), assisted with quantitative data collection and analysis so that I could better understand relationships between visits to the writing center and success among undergraduate students. Particular data points from these surveys were analyzed and correlated specifically to create relevant reports to the different audiences. The analysis focused on understanding factors such as retention, GPA, majors, risk factor scores, and student classification. Risk factor scores are a unique set of criteria created by the university which classifies a student “at risk” based on several factors, including SAT scores, high school GPA, financial status, first generation college student status, transfer student status, and previous pass/fail rates.

CIERP compared undergraduate students who visited the writing center in Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 to undergraduates who did not visit the writing center during this period in terms of
percent who visited, differences in semester and cumulative GPA, differences in an internally calculated risk of attrition (risk score), and rates of retention from term to term.

Student records included 21,762 first-time and transfer students who were enrolled either part- or full-time in the Fall 2013 or Spring 2014 semesters. The writing center provided data on 3,163 undergraduate students who visited the writing center during the selected time period, which included students’ identification number, dates for each visit, and major. CIERP supplemented writing center data with institutional records available through internal databases. These data included a comparison group of all other undergraduate students at the university who were enrolled in Fall 2013 or Spring 2014, as well as semester GPA, cumulative GPA, risk score\(^7\), entry status and enrollment status. Student records in the writing center database that had no valid ID number were discarded. This has created a discrepancy between the total numbers of surveys filled out at the writing center versus the number valid ID numbers found in the database. The results mentioned here are based only on those surveys with a valid ID number. The majority of data that was collected was linked to the students’ identification numbers in order to provide demographic information such as grades, classifications, risk factors, and majors. In addition, the survey asks students to self-identify specific data points such as their perceived GPA, how well they think they are writing, and the aspects they want assistance with before they visit with a consultant at the writing center.

CIERP used institutional data to compare the mean GPA of students who visited the writing center to those of students who did not visit the writing center in Fall 2013 or Spring 2014. Students who were not in the immediately previous semester (Spring 2013 or Fall 2013)

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\(^7\)“Risk Score” is a category that CIERP has been using to classify students who have unique combinations of factors that identify them as being at a higher risk of dropping out. These factors include: SAT scores, if they are receiving financial aid, if they are first generation students, etc. These scores are a unique identifier developed by CIERP.
were excluded from this comparison. In a simple t-test, CIERP found that students who visited the writing center had significantly higher GPAs than students who did not visit, both in the semester prior to their visits (cumulative GPA) and in the semester of their visit. Risk scores are internally calculated at CIERP at students’ time of entry to ensure that high- and middle-risk students are provided additional levels of advising and support; as students progress, CIERP later tracks factors that affect risk (e.g., financial need), as well as changes in risk from term to term. The risk score analysis showed that students who visit the UWC have risk scores that are generally higher than the risk-score distribution of all enrolled undergraduates.

Finally, CIERP analyzed whether the rate of term-to-term retention among students who visited the writing center was different than students who did not visit the writing center but were enrolled in Fall 2013 or Spring 2014. Previous research at CIERP, supported by Lumina, showed that retention is highly correlated with the number of semester credit hours, and so student records included in this analysis were restricted to first-term students and first-term first-time students. This analysis showed that first-term students who visit the writing center in their first semester return to UTEP in the following semester at significantly higher rates than students who do not visit the writing center in their first semester.

No personal information from the student ID# is being shared here (names or identifiable demographic information), only general information regarding statistical groups found within the data. Also, data from the intake, exit, and consultant survey is non-identifiable to students or their ID#. This data is only being used as statistical comparison by group. IRB approval to study the student data as archival data was granted by the institution (Appendix D). A detailed description of some of the most important categories are below. These are categories of
questions that when correlated provide relevant data to several of the groups the data can speak to.

**At risk students**

Students classified “At Risk” include those with specific SAT scores, high school GPAs, entrance exam scores, first generation college students, and financial aid recipients. By combining several of these aspects, the university identifies students as “At Risk” as possibly needing additional resources to progress towards graduation. Students with a higher risk factor score are more likely to drop out, or fail to graduate in the four to six year timeframe set by the state. By knowing the number of writing center visitors who are classified as “at risk” the center can adapt pedagogies to assist these students.

**Number of visitors/repeat visitors**

By looking at the frequency of student identification numbers, I determined the number of students that visited the writing center in the academic year, as well as the number of times each student visited the writing center. Within this data set, I can determine the retention of students from semester to semester, as well as the increase/decrease of “at risk” scores semester to semester correlated with the number of times a student visited the writing center in the academic year.

**Class grades and GPA**
This category was used to determine the overall GPA of student visitors to the writing center. It is also used to compare visitors v. non-visitors GPA and the change over time (semester to semester) to determine a change in GPA from visits to the writing center.

**Majors**

As a sub-dataset, the same correlations mentioned above were made to determine specific movements of visitors versus non-visitors to the writing center within a specific discipline.

**Classification**

As an additional sub-dataset, the same correlations mentioned above were made to determine how efficiently visitors (students) versus non-visitors to the writing center move on to specific classification levels (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, masters, doctoral).

As noted above, this is only a small portion of the data analysis as the results of the analysis is not the main focus of this project. Instead, I will describe the different audience needs throughout the institution and how this system creates the relevant data to speak to those audiences. I will describe in detail how each audience is unique in its data needs, and how this survey system delivers relevant information to each of the four audiences mentioned earlier (students, faculty, upper administration, and the writing center).

**REPORTING TO STUDENTS**

Students have vested interest in the services that a writing center provides. The data I use to report to students serves several different functions including recruiting students to visit the writing center, showing them that the writing center can have an impact on their success at the
university, as well as showing them that the skills they gain at the writing center will benefit them after they graduate in whatever profession they choose. So, it is important that the writing center is able to communicate to students that the improvement of writing skills will help them get better grades in classes and make them more desirable as professionals once they leave the academy. This all has to be done in a language that will reach students on their level and engage their interest. There is no doubt that good writing skills will improve students’ classroom grades and move closer to their graduation date as well as give them an advantage when it comes time to apply for jobs. In this is included aspects such as GPA, retention from semester to semester, and graduation rates as they are compared to general graduation rates of the institution. However, GPA, retention, and graduation rates are not necessarily aspects of the institution that the majority of students are keenly interested in. Instead, students are looking for the resources and an environment that speaks to them and can provide the assistance they are seeking to complete their assignments successfully. It is at this level that all the pieces of institutional success starts. While students may not be directly aware of their institution’s graduation rate, or the expected attrition rates of students at the university, their immediate focus is the paper in front of them and the grade they will get on the assignment, along with their overall grade in the class. Yet, when the writing center focuses on improving the student’s paper, it has an effect on the entire institution. The student is at the center of everything the writing center focuses, and therefore the primary audience that needs to be addressed.

In order to address the students in a productive manner, I spend much of my time throughout every semester visiting classrooms and new student orientations touting the benefits of the writing center for students. But, I am only able to communicate those benefits directly to the students, in the students’ language, by gathering information from the Exit Survey part of this
system. This includes using anecdotes to describe what the writing center does, sharing single page infographics (see Appendix D) with basic information about the writing center, and relying heavily on social media as a means of communication. Through spaces like Facebook and Twitter, the writing center reaches students in a medium they are already engaged with. The writing center can share with students workshop dates, business hours, and most importantly, student success stories. This outreach creates a connection with students in a way that is both informative and relatable.

As described in the previous chapter, the Exit Survey gathers information regarding the students’ satisfaction with the service they received at the writing center and that is then translated into aspects that students will want to know about. It is also through this survey that I am able to see students’ perception of their writing skills and knowledge improvement. I also use information from the other surveys in this project, as well as the students’ identification number, to create arguments with which students are concerned. The majority of information used to communicate with students comes from the Exit Survey. Probably the most persuasive and easy aspect to communicate is the satisfaction rate the writing center has with students. To do this, I have the students rate the service they received on a scale from 1 to 5 (5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest). My writing center boasts a 98% satisfaction rate with students, with 98% of the students who visit the writing center rating the service either a 4 or a 5. In addition, students say that they feel that both their writing skills and knowledge have improved. This is a useful stat to share with students that shows them the basic benefits of using

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<td>1.25% 15</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>7.92% 95</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 (High)</td>
<td>90.42% 1085</td>
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Figure 4.1. Satisfaction rates of student visitors to the writing center.
the writing center. It is also useful to show students that their peers, students who have for years before them, come to the writing center and been happy with the assistance they received. While it doesn’t show a direct impact on the student’s progress through the institution, it does prove that what the writing center does is at least relevant to the students who use it.

The next most significant piece of information that students like to hear about the writing center’s service is the grade they will get on their paper. It is a pedagogical imperative that writing center consultants never comment on the possibility of a grade on the paper with the student. The writing center consultants have no power over the grade, nor do they have any input with the faculty member, so it would be a great disservice to the student if a consultant were to make a grade-related comment and have the student receive a different grade from the instructor. Instead, the survey asks the student if they feel as though they would get a better grade on the assignment after they visited with the writing center. Even though they don’t yet know the answer, 98% of students say they feel as though their grade will be better on the paper. While this question is a bit limiting in what it can communicate, it is important to show students that going to the writing center at least makes them feel better about their writing and their ability to get a good grade in the class. There is a comment section for the students to fill out at the bottom of the survey that asks “If you rate us lower than a 3, please tell us why.” For the most part, the 2% of students who rate the writing center lower than a “3” do not comment in the box. Instead, I get many positive comments about the consultants and how much the student appreciates the work the writing center does for them. In other words, I get the majority of written comments from the students praising the consultant and the writing center when the student rates their session a “5” (Most positive experience).
Since the student’s grade on the paper is not measurable from the student’s perspective with this survey, I was able to use some information from other parts of the Initiation Survey and Consultant Survey to find enough students from classes and compare their class grades, and grades from papers, to see if the writing center did have an impact on the student’s ability to perform better in the class on the writing assignments. By collecting the name and email address of the instructor, I was able to reach out to those instructors who had a high number of students visit the writing center. Whether the instructor requires the students to visit the writing center or gives extra credit for visiting the writing center, I was able to find several instructors who had a high enrollment class, along with a high percentage of visits with the writing center. With the instructor’s permission to view their grade book, I was able to compare the grades of students who visited the writing center with those who did not visit. What I discovered was that students who visit the writing center received, on average, a letter grade higher on their class papers than their peers who did not visit the writing center. In addition, students who visited the writing center more than two times for the same class and paper, received two letter grades higher on the paper, and a letter grade higher in the class overall than their peers who did not visit the writing center. Now this is a statistic that the writing center can tout and communicate with the student body showing a valuable aspect for using the resource.

Finally, for the students, the Exit Survey measures their knowledge and skill growth after visiting the writing center. The survey asks the students if their knowledge of writing has increased because of their visit as well as if they feel they are better writers after visiting the writing center. Again, this is mostly anecdotal questioning of the students as there is really no

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8 These statistics came from 3 sections of an Introduction to History class with 200 students enrolled in each section, as well as 3 sections of a Global Business class with 90 students enrolled in each. 60% of students in all 6 sections attended sessions at the writing center for assignments in the classes.
follow up on the measurement to gauge improvement. However, to continue to recruit students to the writing center, and communicate with them that their peers feel as though their knowledge and skills with writing have improved after visiting the writing center, is something that I do frequently when talking with students about why they should visit the writing center. It might seem strange that the majority of the information shared with students is mostly anecdotal without much correlative data to back it up. However, this system is designed to collect information in a way that is relevant to the different audiences. It is the student who is at the crux of this system for all the other audiences, yet it is the student that receives the least amount of focus when it comes to the analysis of the data. The majority of what is communicated to the students is “feel good” information in an attempt to get more students to visit the writing center. However, this would be a futile attempt if there were not actual correlative data to back up these claims. It is just that the students are not interested in the types of claims that Faculty and Administration are interested in.

**REPORTING TO FACULTY**

I don’t feel the need to argue for faculties’ desire for students to succeed in their classroom, as I don’t feel that any one teaching at an institution of higher education is not vested in student success. Faculty are concerned, however, with their students’ ability to perform adequately in their classroom. Part of faculty performance reviews are based on teaching, and knowing that students who visit the writing center get better grades on papers, and will ultimately do better in the class and move on to other classes towards their graduation, is important for faculty to know. Showing that students’ success in the classroom is directly linked to their ability to use and implement resources found throughout campus (i.e. the writing center,
or other types of disciplinary assistance) is something faculty can use to their advantage in the classroom. In whatever way a faculty member decides to spin the effects of visiting the writing center to their students, the truth is that improved writing skills will give students more opportunity at better grades in the classroom, a higher average classroom GPA (which could potentially look better on performance reviews), and something I say quite frequently to instructors – better written papers are easier to grade, and make the faculty member’s job of grading easier. In addition, at my institution, there is an aspect of the classroom called a “D/F/W Rate” which stands for “Grade of ‘D’,” “[F]ail,” and “[W]ithdraw,” measuring the rate that students in particular classrooms receive a grade of “D” for the class, fail the class with a grade of “F,” or withdraw from the class (withdraw might also be recognized as “drop”). Classes with particularly high D/F/W rates are typically the larger classrooms that teach the core curriculum. It is for these reasons that the survey system continues to collect data from the students to communicate information to the faculty. By showing faculty that visits to the writing center can improve student success on papers and ultimately grades in the class, faculty can use the information to help improve their classroom outcomes and prevent high D/F/W rates in the classroom. This analysis goes back to some of the information used to create an argument for the students – students who visit the writing center get on average a letter grade better on the paper than their peers who do not visit the writing center. In addition, students who visit the writing center multiple times for the same class get on average a letter grade better in the class than their peers who do not visit the writing center at all.9

Student grades in the class translates into other important pieces of information for faculty. Some of the results from better grades include lower D/F/W rates which can be part of a

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9 This statistic is based on the three Introduction to History classes and three Global Business classes that were mentioned earlier in the chapter.
faculty’s report to their department chair on the success of the class. Faculty do not have to deal with just D/F/W rates, but overall student experiences with the class and themselves, as well as a myriad of other aspects of teaching that are constantly measured by other entities at the institution. This information arms the faculty just as much as it arms the writing center. Being able to show that the faculty member had an impact on student success in the classroom is just as important as showing that the writing center had an impact. In this case, the survey system can share the average of students visiting the writing center from their class with faculty members. Faculty can then use that information to look at grades on assignments, as well as overall class GPAs, for students in their class. This provides the faculty member further insight into the performance of their students, and potential areas of improvement. I have in the past worked with a faculty member to analyze this data and show that students who visited the writing center once for the paper in the class received a letter grade higher on their essay (avg. grade “C” vs. avg. “B”) than students in the class who did not visit the writing center. In addition, I found that students who visited the writing center more than once for their assignments in the class received a letter grade higher in the class than their peers who did not visit the writing center at all (avg. grade “C” vs. avg. grade “B”). This information not only helps promote the writing center through the faculty member in future classes, but gives the faculty member insight into how to coordinate the writing center as a resource for their students.

Many faculty members are also curious about the type of assistance the writing center provides to their students. I have on occasion spoken with faculty members at departmental meetings, or specific meetings focused on writing, about the writing center. These wider conversations typically come about after a single faculty member reaches out to the writing center about something they need, or their students need, assistance with. There are also times
faculty email me directly about specific issues they have with their students’ writing. I use these occasions to share with faculty the statistics and impact the writing center has on students. If needed, I can also pull up information regarding the faculty member’s class and the students who visit the writing center from that class. Often, faculty ask about the main issues or topics that consultants assist students with and use that information to adjust their classroom materials. Some of the main aspects that I share with faculty is students’ understanding of assignment guidelines. Often, students arrive at the writing center with an assignment that is either overly complicated, or so barren of information that they have difficulty starting the assignment. I have even seen assignment guidelines that I couldn’t translate for the student and help them get a sense of where to begin. Based on the survey data, students come to the writing center only understanding about 70% of the assignment. When I see issues like this arise, I like to reach out to the faculty member and offer assistance creating a writing assignment for their students. This doesn’t always go over well as faculty often feel that I am challenging the faculty member’s classroom authority, but most of the time faculty are glad to see that a better written assignments usually returns better written papers. To that note, it is also a feature of this system to be able to send reports of student visits to the faculty member directly. By setting up email triggers on the Consultant Initiation survey, when a specific instructor’s email address is entered, the instructor will get a summary of the session the student had with the consultant. In this way, the instructor can see what are the main areas students from their class are visiting the writing center for assistance. Instructors can again use this information to adjust their classroom materials to better suit the students’ needs.

One semester, I had noticed students coming to the writing center for a particular music class that had a writing component. The consultants were commenting on the fact that students
were seeking assistance for the writing assignment with less than two hours before the assignment was due. Of course, the consultants still assisted the students to the best of their ability, while I reached out to the instructor to see why students were arriving with such little time to complete their project. I found that the instructor had just implemented the writing assignment for the first time that semester, and she was still working out the problems with the assignment. The papers that the writing center was assisting students with was the second writing assignment of the semester. The professor commented that the first writing assignment came back from students with such poor results that she required her students to visit the writing center for the second assignment. I worked with the instructor to both improve the writing assignment that gave the students more time to complete, as well as build in a drafting stage of the writing that students received a grade on. This not only gave the students more time to work on the assignment, but a reason to draft and visit the writing center before the final due date. In the subsequent semesters the instructor commented on the improvement of the writing students were turning in. Without tracking these types of visits to the writing center, I would not be able to have this type of direct impact on the classroom.
One of my favorite pieces of data to share with faculty members is how soon before the assignment is due that students visit the writing center. The data shows that students often visit the writing center with less than a day to finish their project before the due date – 41.6% of students. This often correlates with grades students receive on their paper. When students visit the writing center with less time to complete revisions, or even have another session with the writing center, their grade on the assignment is typically lower. I use this information to encourage faculty members to add some sort of incentive for visiting the writing center early and often as multiple visits to the writing center can drastically affect the grades students get on papers.

This survey system can also communicate to faculty that students are learning the vocabulary of writing and are able to apply the skills they learn in the writing center to other assignments. By comparing two questions from the surveys on assistance that students are seeking from the writing center, I can inform the instructor of new knowledge students gain by visiting with a writing center consultant. I do this by comparing questions 16 and 19 from the Student Demographic Survey (See Appendix A) over multiple visits from the same student which asks students about their prior visits to the writing center. Question 16 asks if students feel their prior visit improved their knowledge about writing, and Question 19 asks students about their perceived writing ability. There is a limitation here because the student self identifies information such as their own perceived writing ability. Many times students arrive at the writing center...
center with limited vocabulary when it comes to writing skills and knowledge. I see students asking for assistance with grammar when actually they need help with brainstorming. By looking at aspects of what students ask for and what assistance is actually delivered, I can show to faculty that not only are students gaining knowledge about writing, which includes aspects of critical thinking, but I can also show that their skills in that area have improved as well. By tracking student visits over time, whether they visit the writing center for the same assignment more than once, or visit the writing center for different assignments throughout the semester, I can track their improvement in writing skills and knowledge by comparing Questions 8, 9 & 10 of the Consultant Initiation Survey. These questions measure a student’s understanding of the assignment prior to the tutoring session, the percentage of the assignment the student completed before visiting the writing center, and how effective the tutoring session was respectively (see Appendix B).

The last aspect of how faculty can use this survey is as a liaison between faculty and students. The survey system provides enough information about the student’s visit to the writing center that I continually have faculty calling to check up on students. Often, it is a he-said-she-said situation between the student and the faculty member where a student claims to have visited the writing center, or that the writing center gave them specific instructions that were contrary to the faculty’s instructions. I can look back at the survey results and inform the faculty member exactly what the consultant worked on with the student, or even if the student attended a session at the writing center. Faculty know that they can call on the writing center to check the story of students who claim to have visited the writing center at one time or another. I can even provide the faculty member a summary of the assistance the writing center provided to the student. This becomes vitally important when students claim to have visited the writing center,
but then seem to turn in an unimproved draft to the instructor. I can go into the survey, find the student’s session, and see just what assistance they asked for, what assistance the writing center gave them, and what the consultant suggested the student do to improve the paper. Once a paper leaves the writing center, it is really up to the student to make the changes that we suggest. It is part of the writing center’s pedagogy to not write student papers for them, to help retain their voice. Changes that the writing center gives students are merely suggestions, it is completely up to the student to accept or reject those changes. Sometimes this doesn’t happen, and students turn in the same draft they brought to the writing center and claim that the writing center helped them.

REPORTING TO UPPER ADMINISTRATION

The data is also relevant to upper administration, such as department Chairs, Deans, and Provosts, and communicates how the writing center can have an effect on the institution as a whole. Often this information is shared through annual reports. There have been a few instances where I directly reached out to an administrator with this information with the purpose of opening a dialogue regarding how we could collaborate to assist the students. As students do better in classes, fewer students drop or fail classes, and as a result students begin to progress towards graduation and stay in the university. At my institution, upper administration measures graduation rates of students in a 4-6 year model. Students are expected to enroll in fulltime credit classes (at least 12 per semester) and accumulate enough credits to graduate after 8 consecutive semesters (120 credit hours). At my institution the general demographic of students is significantly different from most 4 year institutions (something I will speak about later and how the writing center affects this demographic), but is still held accountable to the 4 year
graduation model. Having students get better grades in classes, pass classes with higher frequency, leads students to graduation, on time. Similar research has been done in determining the impact writing centers have on student grades and show that students visiting the writing center do indeed improved their grades in the class (Beilinska-Kwapisz, 2015; Brown, 2015; Rafoth, 2010). In addition, because we are a public university, funded largely on state appropriations, this 4-6 year graduation model is of utmost importance to upper administration as the graduation rate can affect institutional funding for years to come. In essence, a higher graduation rate equates to more money for the university, and has proved effective over the last decade (Shulock & Snyder, 2013). Because the writing center has a direct impact on student success, these graduation rates increase and are a point of significance to upper administration.

As I have mentioned in chapter 1, UTEP has a significantly different population compared to most of the other doctoral granting institutions across the country. It is one of the largest HIS in the country, with over 80% of students identifying as “Hispanic,” and the majority of students commute to campus each day. The university also has a lower graduation rate – 40.3% locally vs. 47% nationally for a 6 year graduation rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning at UTEP, 2018). UTEP also has a high percentage of first-generation freshman students of 20%. All of these demographics are important aspects to keep in mind when looking at how the writing center can have an impact on students’ ability to be successful at the university and graduate.

Graduation rates are complicated even more by the aspect of college life for first generation students at the university. Taking into consideration the population of first generation students at UTEP, these students, as well as others, are commonly unfamiliar with the resources available. First-generation students are at higher risk for attrition than any other demographic on
campus (Tyson, 2014). It then becomes important for the university to step up and have a multitude of literacy sponsors for these students. This takes the form of academic success centers, disciplinary tutoring, and academic outreach programs (Salem, 2014). Being able to communicate from the writing center to upper administration, whose focus is on the graduation rate of students, particularly first-generation students, about how the writing center impacts students towards graduation rates is important. This communication often takes the form of statistical reports and white papers. I have also used the information to communicate writing center impact in meetings with Deans and Provosts. Like I mentioned before, many aspects of the institution are predicated on the graduation rate of students at the institution. If the writing center is able to impact the student body in such a way that the graduation rate changes for the better, it would be important for the writing center to communicate that to those in upper administration. Much of the work described here can be spun in two different ways – each particular set of data to its respective audience. The data can be used to essentially brag about the writing center and how they are able to assist students be better academic performers. For the most part the data is set up to be just that.

However, this data can also be used to defend. It has been my experience, as well as many colleagues nationally, that we often have to justify what we do at the writing center and why it is important (Barnett, 1997; Harris, 2000; McKinney, 2013; Salem, 2014). With funding being cut to institutions it becomes more and more likely that the writing center is one of the campus entities that faces lower budgets to serve students. There is no doubt or questioning when we speak about the work we do in writing centers within our own circles, but, as North pointed out over 30 years ago, it’s not about communicating within our own circles, but being able to show those outside of writing centers and unfamiliar with the discipline, what we do. In
is in that notion that this data can be used to defend what goes on in writing centers. Information regarding the impact the writing center has on student graduation rates (as discussed previously in this chapter), as well as the impact the writing center has on student retention rates is important information to have ready for upper administration. I take much of this information and condense it down into an annual report for the Provost. I also include the impact the writing center has on student GPAs and D/F/W rates to show upper administration that students successfully use the resource at the institution.

Another aspect relevant to upper administration, particularly at the Dean level, is the rate of students coming off of probation and suspension after visiting the writing center. By tracking the student ID number throughout a student’s time at the institution, the writing center can show an impact on students who are on academic probation--whether or not they get off of probation--after visiting the writing center. At the time of writing about this project, I am still working with the UTEP’s Center for Institutional Evaluation Research and Planning (CIERP) to correlate this data. This can be compared with the rate of students who are on probation, but do not visit the writing center, and remain in poor academic standing after a semester on probation. This is important for the Deans who deal with the students on academic probation and suspension and offering the writing center as a resource that can assist them with improving their GPAs and eventually getting off of academic probation.

**REPORTING TO WRITING CENTERS**

Often, administrators, faculty, and even students, look at the writing center as an enigma – unsure of what we do, or how we do what we claim to do. We are expected to do several things for students: make them better writers, improve their grades on assignments, and improve
their GPA at the institution. Most writing center professionals know that this comes with the practice of writing (drafting, revising, etc.), knowledge sharing, and collaboration, but it still remains confusing to many outside the discipline. It is a weekly occurrence for me, as a director of a writing center, to hear from students, faculty, and upper administration alike – that the writing center will edit your paper for you – drop your paper off at the writing center and they will correct it for you – you need tutoring, go to the writing center. All of these things we have never claimed to do, and state quite blatantly on our website that we will not do. So why do these communities still need guidance about what a writing center does and how they do it? For many, it goes back to the idea of Brandt’s (2002) literacy sponsor, that many of these people have not had the literacy sponsor as a resource, or the drive to use such a resource to improve their writing. Nonetheless, the writing center does not need to fly blind through the institution with unsubstantiated claims that the writing center is an important resource for students on the campus.

Instead, the writing center can use the data found in this survey system and the arguments they make to the stakeholders at the institution to improve their own service to the student. As stakeholders see the impact the writing center can have on the institution, stakeholders have a clearer picture of how they can request the writing center to improve services to students. From that information, writing centers can begin to implement new pedagogy and practices to assist the students. Several semesters ago, I worked with the Chair of the History department to see how the writing center could have an impact on the large sections of an Introduction to History class. These classes typically have 200+ students in them, and have a high D/F/W rate. Working with the Chair and the instructor of the class, we designed and implemented a writing center led peer-review session. The success of the peer-review sessions decreased the D/F/W rather by
22% and increased the average GPA of all three sections by 13%. By knowing what upper administration, faculty, and students at the institution need/want to be successful, the writing center can adapt to the need and provide even better assistance.

The writing center consultants also get valuable feedback from this survey system. Part of the Exit Survey questions how the students feel about the consultant that assisted them during the session. The satisfaction score, and any comments the student would like to give the consultant are included in the survey. The survey is emailed to the consultant at the end of the day anonymously. Consultants get a batch email of all their feedback once the day is finished so they do not know which student gave them which feedback. However, as part of training and development, I use these pieces of feedback to improve consultant training, and the consultants use the feedback as a reflective practice on their own work at the writing center. Because the feedback is almost always good, most of the consultants receive complimentary comments in their emails, which is a boost to moral, and a nice refresher for consultants to continue doing the hard work. When there is negative feedback, consultants are asked to consider why that negative feedback might be generated, and what they can do to prevent that type of experience from the student in the future. Again, the negative feedback is quite rare, but when it does occur, consultants are also glad to hear it because it gives them a chance to continually improve.

This survey system and project was designed to describe a specific site and system used to collect and analyze data. The system is designed so that the results can be analyzed in a multitude of ways so that it may speak to multiple audiences. The design is meant to be shared and adapted to other specific sites adapted to the context of the institution. Granted that each university or site will be different in its student demographics, technology ability, and need for analysis, the system described here should be adaptable in such a way to be able to gather the
appropriate information. The project outlined here should also continue to grow from its original form to include new technology, reporting needs, student and consultant concerns, as well as writing center adaptation for providing services to students.

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Chapter 5
Conclusions

Let me start my conclusion by saying this data collection system and its analysis is in no way complete. It has, even at the time of writing this dissertation, evolved tremendously. In many ways I look to update this system as often as I can, revise many of the survey questions, find new technology that can assist me in analyzing the data, and create new pedagogy for consultants to use in their work assisting students. It has become important that this system stay in a state of evolution. It is important that the system is adaptable to the climate of the institution and be ready to grab relevant pieces of data for an argument on validity. I have on occasion even used the system to support a consultant because an instructor has accused us of not assisting a student. This often happens when a student gets suggestions from the writing center on how to revise their paper, yet does not complete the revisions before submitting the assignment. Yet, the student will claim that they visited the writing center anyway. This system is designed to be a cornerstone of writing center administration, to have at hand information regarding the impact the writing center has on the institution. With that in mind, I would like to share some of the ways that the system has evolved since I created it, how it has helped me, as well as my consultants, in turbulent times, and where I think the system should go in the future. By keeping the system, relevant the current climate of the institution I am able to quickly adapt and argue for many different aspects of my writing center’s validity. This system should also help close the gap of writing center assessment as Gofine (2012) had identified and create a system “flexible enough to accommodate individual adaptations to suit unique needs” (p. 47).

One big aspect of this type of system is that is that it takes some research on the part of the writing center to figure out what aspects of institutional advancement is being required.
Thinking about how the writing center fits in with the institution is a large part of this. For my writing center, the research goes all the way up to the state level, and the expectations of funding and support given by the Regents and the UT System board of directors. I began much of this analysis thinking about things like the Texas 60x30 plan and how the state wide initiative will affect the UT System, UTEP, and eventually the writing center. The Texas 60x30 is a state wide initiative to improve education throughout Texas and aims to have 60% of the Texas population between the ages of 25 and 34 to have a higher education degree or certificate by the year 2030. It is these guidelines that create the foundation of much of the assessment these surveys do. From there the universities’ own mission and procedures to try and meet the state wide goals begin to form much of the analysis and audience awareness the system has. Lastly, speaking with Deans, Provosts, Faculty members, and students determines the last bits of figuring out what data needs to be collected. Ironically, this could all be boiled down to a simple audience awareness exercise. Yet it is something that writing centers have had difficulty doing over the last years (Gofine, 2012).

**Changes**

Some of the biggest changes that have been made to the survey system since its inception is the length of the surveys. I have received numerous pieces of feedback from both students and consultants that some of the surveys were long and tedious to complete at time, especially when students feel that they are in a rush, or have a deadline to meet. The surveys were just one more hurdle for them to jump through to get assistance. With that in mind, I found a way to combine the sign-in survey with the consultant survey so that students would spend less time filling out information by themselves, and more time speaking with a consultant. Instead of the initiation
survey that students would normally fill out before entering the writing center, students only need to fill in their ID number, email address, and a very brief description of the assistance they are looking for from the writing center. This provides the students more time in the physical space of the writing center, more time with the consultant, and still provides the relevant data that the system needs to create arguments to stakeholders. The change was welcomed by students enormously, but received a little push back from consultants as their survey got just a little bit longer. Consultants felt that the new survey for them to fill out was taking up too much time before they were able to start assisting students. To alleviate the length of the consultant survey, I split it up into two parts. The first part contains most of the information originally contained in the student survey—the consultant can gather information about the student, the class they are visiting for, and the assistance the student needs. From there consultants have a break in the survey where they can stop asking students questions about the survey and start assisting them with their writing. Once the consultant has completed the session, the student can leave, and the consultant can finish the second part of the survey which asks questions about the type of assistance the student actually received and the information shared with the student at the time.

AUDIENCE AWARENESS

For the most part, I do not direct my analysis of the data to any one audience specifically. There are parts that are dedicated to answering questions that frequently occur from a particular set of audiences, but the data is reliably created so that anyone from any audience could be informed by it. Nonetheless, it is important that writing centers have this data available. Without it, they are unable to articulate the effect writing centers have on the institution. Writing
centers cannot rely on the good feeling of better writing alone. They must be proactive in their approach to data collection and analysis to be considered viable aspects of a university, and to be considered an important resource for students. As I have said multiple times throughout this project, the main focus of the writing center remains on assisting the student. It is at the student level that a writing center does all of its work, and it is through the student that a writing center can legitimatize its place within the institution by being the literacy sponsor. Most importantly, this information can be used as a defense from uninformed stakeholders at the institution. I recently faced such an issue at my own writing center. The university I work at has done a great job in increasing student retention and enrollment, but it has faced troubles with graduation rates. And while the overall population of the university has grown significantly over the last few years, new and more efficient spaces on the campus have not. With that, the university has been looking to expand growing departments and combine smaller departments into less space. The writing center was recently the focus of one such attempt as space combining. At the time, the university sent people from the Department of Facilities and Planning over to the writing center to examine our space and how it is being used to assist students. At no time did they speak with me, any of my staff, or my supervisors regarding the observations. This became a problem later during meetings with the facilities and space administrators when they explained their observations to me as: “Students appear to come to the writing center for thirty minutes to an hour just to hang out and use the Wi-Fi. They then leave.” This was a clear instance of an uninformed observer misunderstanding the way the space is used, how students are using the space, and what is actually taking place in the space, the facilities managers automatically assumed the space was not being used to its capacity. On top of this, these observations took place during the summer semesters, when traffic in the writing center is down significantly. My
personal feelings about this comment on what we do in the writing center aside, the meeting continued with the Facilities Director marking off one quarter of the current writing center on the blueprints with the idea that this, based on his people’s observations, was the amount of space that we could effectively use. However, this turned out to be the perfect opportunity to use the data that I had been collecting over the last several years to show the facilities and space usage team exactly how the writing center is used on a constant basis, how the center functions with students and writing consultants, and that good methodologies and implementation are fundamental to conducting a study. Having the statistics from this survey system readily at hand, I was able to communicate to the director of facilities exactly how many students visited the writing center in a given semester, the total number of hours students spend in the writing center getting assistance on their writing assignments, how I have spent my budget on hiring employees to assist these students, and the impact this assistance had on students and the university overall in terms of retention and GPAs. With this information in hand, the facilities director backed off. I had the opportunity to prove the validity of my writing center when it mattered most. I was able to prove that the writing center has an impact on the university and students in a positive way. If I did not have this ability, there is no doubt that they would have cut the space of the writing center down significantly and possibly removed us from the space altogether.

With the data analysis the survey provides, and the methods described here, I have found that much of what happens during this data collection is even an integral part of everyday consulting with students. Consultants at my writing center have embraced the system. It has become an icebreaker and guide for them when they are faced with difficult decisions. Instead of wondering where to start with a student during a session, consultants are able to gather information about the student, find common ground with the student, and create the peer-to-peer
relationship that is so important when working in a writing center. The surveys are also a way for consultant to determine a students’ level of willingness to participate, and would give the consultant an idea of which method they should use in assisting the student – most of the time this takes the form of either directive or non-directive methods while assisting the student. The consultant’s survey serves as an exploratory conversation between the student and the consultant to start the session off on the right foot.

The surveys are also a great initial crutch for new consultants. At my writing center, we use a flowchart of priorities to assist students with that begins with global issues of writing, such as responding to the assignment or organization and flows down to the more local aspects of writing, which include grammar and formatting. After practice, this prioritization of writing elements becomes rote for many of the consultants. The survey helps consultants find the right place in the flowchart to begin assisting the student. But new consultants, unfamiliar with our practice, can use the survey to determine where they need to be within that flowchart and begin assisting the student. Many of the consultants at my institution’s writing center feel that this opens doors for students. The data collection methods are used as a way for consultants to get closer to the students and breakdown any trepidation students often have when visiting the writing center. I have found that consultants enjoy using the data collection surveys because it gives them a “script” to follow, asking students about their class, their instructor, what they are working on, that gets the student talking and makes the student feel like their work and their visit to the writing center important. Many consultants have internalized the survey in such a way that they can work with the survey conversationally, typing in the information as they speak with the student and gathering information to find the best way to assist the student.
ADAPTABILITY

The system and analysis described here should be both usable and adaptable for any institution to implement. While the software and systems used in this project were unique to the site, and not every institution will have access to the same software and system, the ability to collect the data using similar software should still be attainable. If institutions do not have access to Qualtrics or similarly licensed software, free web based software such as SurveyMonkey will perform admirably in its place. SurveyMonkey may not have as many options for cross tabulating data, or generating reports, but much of the ability to survey students, and have consultants use the system to gather information and data, will remain. Additionally, information about students such as their ID numbers, risk factor scores, and general student demographics are unique to this institution but should not deter other institutions from using this system to compile relevant data and reports on their own student population and writing center usage. Much of my data analysis goes through our Center for Institutional Evaluation Research and Planning (CIERP). They are the keepers of the data on our campus and can work magic when it comes to numbers. It has helped to build a relationship with this office over the years so that when I have a large data request, they are happy to fill it for me. The CIERP office at my institution has been integral in compiling many of the reports I later send to faculty and upper administration. Nonetheless, the purpose of this survey system is to create a method for data collection that could be adapted in a variety of ways to fit the needs and questions that are relevant to the site of collection. I strongly recommend that other institutions wanting to create a large-scale data collection system start by doing an institutional evaluation – speaking with the stakeholders at the institution to see what concerns they have about student success and how the institution is addressing those concerns. This will provide a better understanding of how the
system should be developed to collect the relevant data from the students to communicate effectiveness. It is also a good practice to understand the institution’s demographic. Looking at the “culture” of the institution can help tremendously in deciding where a writing center’s impact should be aimed, and will give a better picture of how the writing center can achieve that through these surveys. However, the core tenements remain the same: multiple perspectives on a variety of questions are needed to be able to report effectively on the site and its usage profile. While it could be argued that most universities are interested in knowing what effect centers have on retention rates and GPAs, the effectiveness of the particular questions asked here may not be effective in gathering that relevant data. That being said, the system that is built here, its concepts and implementation, should be readily adaptable to any university for being able to collect the relevant data for the university.

It is my hope that what I am able to show through this data collection, analysis, and reporting is something that the other writing centers will be able to implement at their own institution in a way that benefits the students, the institution, and the writing center to become a more central aspect of the institution. While I use this information mostly for bragging and confidence building at my institution, I have had to use it to defend the writing center and what we do. One particular story stands out: there was a computer science professor who was adamant about his students using the writing center only for editing. Students would come in to the center with essays from this professor’s class with no guidance and no assignment sheet with the expectation that their paper would be edited for grammar only. Consultants at the center would try to assist the students to the best of their ability, but were falling short of the professor’s expectations. After several months of these students coming to the writing center and leaving with unsatisfactory service, I reached out to the professor. I called and asked if there were
assignment guidelines we could keep on file at the writing center for when students from their class visited the center. The professor flatly refused to provide any guidelines and asked why his students were not having their papers edited when they did go to the writing center. I felt, at that point, that it was my place to explain to the professor why good guidelines and expectations of writing produced better writers, and that if the professor had something like this, not only would grading be easier, but students would be more confident about their writing in the class and beyond. Again, the professor refused to provide me with the information. So, I asked the professor if there were any guidelines for the assignment at all. Sadly, at that point the professor hung up the phone. About a week later I received a call for a meeting with the Dean of Sciences regarding the writing center and how we were assisting students at my university. Luckily, I was armed already with a bank of data and was able to quickly break out sections directly related to students from the College of Science. I had information that included how many students come from classes in the college for writing assignments, how many students have assignment guidelines when they visit the writing center, and how many times each student from the College of Science visited the writing center. I had comparison data from other colleges to show the Dean, as well as some reports indicating the success students have when they arrive at the center with guidelines. I also wanted to show the Dean some of the aspects of writing students from the College of Science worked on when visiting the writing center (see survey question #12 Appendix A).

I showed the Dean that we were working on much more complicated issues than just editing for students from the College of Science. Being armed with this information quieted the Dean’s trepidation with the writing center and actually built a new relationship with the writing center and the College of Science that allowed the writing center to become embedded with
several classes of disciplinarily non-traditional writing (Virology, Computer Science). After this meeting the writing center was able to meaningfully impact a wider audience of students, faculty, and upper administration about the benefits of students visiting the writing center. While this is just one anecdote of my experience with “outsiders” being brought to the writing center, the notion remains the same. The idea of having the writing center as a literacy sponsor, for any student in any discipline on campus, comes as a surprise for many members of the institution. Yet, being able to effectively communicate with these members, in a meaningful and audience appropriate way, writing centers are able to extend the reach they have to include more parts of the institution, and provide assistance to more members of the campus community. While those who are deeply engrained with writing center practices and pedagogy know that the writing center is an effective learning resource for students, not everyone at an institution knows, or even believes, that the writing center can have such an impact on students and the institution as a whole. This survey system provides a big picture to everyone at the institution about the impact a writing center has and can clearly communicate that effectiveness in language that is understood by those stakeholders.
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6474
### University Writing Center Sign-In Form

#### Student Demographic Information

**Q1** Please provide your name.
- First Name
- Last Name

**Q2** Please fill in your UTEP So ID number.

**Q3** Please provide your preferred email address.

**Q4** Please select your major from the list below.
- Major

**Q5** Please select your current student classification.
- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Master's
- Doctoral

**Q6** Please estimate your overall GPA.
- 3.5 - 4.0
- 3.0 - 3.5
- 2.5 - 3.0
- 2.0 - 2.5
- 2.0 or Below
- Don't Know

**Q7** Are you seeking assistance for a specific course?
- Yes
Specific Course Information

Please provide the course number (for example if you are taking ENGL 1311 the course number is 1311). Please use the following link to Goldmine to look up course information.

Q8

What is the subject code for the course?

Subject Code: ▼

Please provide your instructor’s name.

Q10

First Name

Last Name

Please provide your instructor’s email. (Look up instructor’s email address in Goldmine or my.utep.edu)

Q11

Instructor’s Email

What is your motivation for your visit today? (Please select the main reason.)

Q12

- My instructor required me to visit the University Writing Center
- My instructor suggested that I visit the University Writing Center
- My Instructor is providing extra-credit for visiting the University Writing Center
- I’ve decided to visit the University Writing Center on my own
- Other

Is this your first time using the University Writing Center?

Q13

- Yes
- No

Please tell us about your previous experiences with the UWC.

How many times have you previously visited the University Writing Center?

Q14

- 1 time
- 2-3 times
- 4-5 times
- Other
Q15
To what degree do you think that your prior visit(s) to the University Writing Center improved your writing ability? (Please make your selection using the slider bar on the scale below.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Greatly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improved Writing

Q16
To what degree do you think that your prior visit(s) to the University Writing Center improved your knowledge about writing? (Please make your selection using the slider bar on the scale below.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Greatly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improved Writing

Q17
To what degree do you feel your prior visit(s) to the University Writing Center improved your grade on previous assignments? (Please make your selection using the slider bar on the scale below.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Greatly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improved Grade

Q18
If you prefer to see a specific tutor, please select his or her name below. If you have no preference, please select "Any".

Tutor: [Name]

Q19
Please indicate your writing ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Below average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Above Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I would rate my writing [ ]
Q20
When is the assignment you are seeking assistance for due?
- In 1 hour or less
- Today
- Tomorrow
- 3 - 5 days
- 6 - 13 days
- 2 weeks
- 3 weeks
- 1 - 2 months
- 2 months or more

Q21
What pre-writing concerns are you seeking help with today? (Please select all options that apply.)
- Brainstorming
- Outlining
- Organization/Layout
- Narrowing Topic
- Does Not Apply

Q22
What grammatical and mechanical concerns are you seeking help with today? (Please select all options that apply.)
- Paragraph
- Sentence Structure
- Parallel Structure
- Subject/Verb Agreement
- Word Choice
- Verb Tense
- Articles and Prepositions
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Does Not Apply

Q23
What are the research format and citation concerns you are seeking help with today? (Please select all options that apply.)
- Format
- APA
- MLA
- Chicago Style
- Using Sources
- Citing Sources
- Avoiding Plagiarism
- Other format
- Does not apply

Q24
What writing development concerns are you seeking help with today? (Please select all options that apply.)
- Responding to Assignment
- Thesis Statement
- Development of Ideas
- Topic Sentences
- Transitions/Flow
- Continuing to work on prior draft
- Does Not Apply

Q25
Please briefly describe the writing project you would like to work on today with our tutors.
Q26

**How did you hear about the University Writing Center?**

- UTEP Instructor
- UTEP Staff
- Advisor
- Website
- Classmates/Friends
- Other

Q27

**Please indicate if you are here for any of the following services or select "None" if they do not apply.**

- Peer Tutor Program
- Group Tutoring
- Class Workshops
- Office Hours
- None

Q28

**Date**

5/18/2015

Q29

**Time**

20:00
## Appendix B

### Tutor Session Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Tutor’s Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Tutor’s Email:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>Student Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please provide the student’s name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>Please provide the student’s email address.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email Address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>Session Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please provide the start and end times, as well as the total time of the tutoring session. Start and end times should be provided in hours and minutes with am or pm indicated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>End Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Time in Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>Please provide the course number. Please use the following link to Goldmine to look up course information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>Did the student bring the guidelines for the assignment to the tutoring session?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q8
Please indicate the student's level of understanding of the assignment prior to the tutoring session.

- Yes
- No

Q9
What percentage of the assignment was completed by the student prior to the tutoring session?

Q10
How effective was this tutoring session for the student on the following:

- Not effective at all
- Somewhat effective
- Very effective

Q11
Did you provide next steps for the student to work on?

- Yes
- No

Q12
Did you arrange to meet with the student again?

- Yes
- No
Q13
Do you feel this student needs an additional writing session/meeting at this time?
- Yes
- No

Q14
Description of Tutor Session:
Appendix C

Student Exit Survey

Please take a minute to rate your tutor.

Date
5/18/2015

Time
20:08

Tutor's Name

Tutor evaluation

Yes | No
---|---
Tutor was professional. | ○ | ○
Tutor was knowledgeable. | ○ | ○
Tutor helped me understand assignment. | ○ | ○
Will you return to the Writing Center? | ○ | ○

Please rate your tutor.

1 (Low) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 (High)
---|---|---|---|---
○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○

If tutor's ranking is lower than a 5, please tell us why.


Please rate the following questions regarding your tutoring session:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel your writing on this assignment is better from the assistance you received?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel you will earn a better grade on this assignment from the assistance you received?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel you will earn a higher grade in the class you wrote the assignment for because of the assistance you received?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER
Helping students from all disciplines to be effective communicators and writers.

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EVERYBODY WRITES...

In 2016 - 2017, the UWC served students from Freshmen to PhD in every subject and every college at UTEP.

- Liberal Arts 33.6%
- Business 13.5%
- Nursing 11.7%
- Engineering 10.8%
- Science 10.5%
- Health Sciences 9%
- Education 4.5%

STUDENT SATISFACTION

- 99% rated the UWC 4 or 5 out of 5 for overall experience
- 95% felt their writing improved as a result of their visit to the UWC
- 99% felt they would earn a better assignment grade
- 99% felt they would earn a better grade in the class

In ’16 - ’17: The UWC conducted 79 online sessions for students and facilitated 53 workshops for faculty.
Vita

Louis Herman received his Bachelor of Arts in English and American Literature from New Mexico State University in 2005. He later received a Masters of Arts in English and American Literature in 2010 from The University of Texas at El Paso where he was awarded the “Outstanding Graduate Student in English and American Literature” award. Louis has worked at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) since arriving in El Paso in 2008 in various capacities. Louis has taught several different classes including First Year Composition 1 & 2, Business Writing, Technical Writing, and several co-designed courses on 3-D rendering and Business Practices. Louis started working at the University Writing Center (UWC) in 2009 as a Writing Center Consultant. He began his PhD course work in 2011 and began a position as Assistant Director with the UWC. In 2012 he received a grant from the Technology Support Center for new technology and software in the UWC. In 2012 Louis began as Associate Director in the UWC. During that time he initiated a satellite Digital Archives of Literacy Narratives (DALN) program from The Ohio State University. Louis has a co-authored article on the DALN entitled “On Creating a Satellite Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives: The Stories We Tell,” published in Computers and Composition Online. In 2014 Louis became the Director of the UWC. Louis has two forthcoming articles on Writing Center Pedagogy, one on the topic of Writing Center Dress Codes entitled “Diminishing Power and Authority Through Modes of Dress: Toward a More Equitable Writing Center” to be published in a special edition of The Peer Review in 2018, and “Large Class Peer-Review: Logistics, Procedures, and Results” to be published in The WAC Journal in 2018. Louis has presented at numerous national and international conferences. In 2017 he presented his paper “Writing Center Data Collection” at Writing Across Borders IV in Bogota, Colombia. Louis is also the founder, president, and CEO of the non-profit corporation Write Across Borders which assists local writers publish their work. Louis continues to work as the Director of the UWC at UTEP.

Permanent address: laherman@utep.edu