Writing Assistants Present at Salt Lake City Conference

by Mark Priebe

On November 5, 2015, four Center for Writing Excellence (CWE) writing assistants presented research at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) in Salt Lake City, UT. The conference brought together writing center scholars, researchers, tutors, and directors throughout the country focusing upon “testing” common assumptions of peer tutoring. David Kocik, Jake Worley, and Mark Priebe collectively presented research on tutors with disabilities and how this intersects with writing center sessions and pedagogy. Brenna Daley presented on prewriting and developing new strategies for the brainstorming process. Mark shares his thoughts on the conference:

As novices to writing center conferences, the four of us were excited to experience a new professional setting—one that allowed us to compare and contrast our own writing center to others throughout the country. Our curiosity was satisfied. Attending sessions about the intersection of peer tutoring with Mormonism, social justice, and online tutoring, to name a few, we experienced an array of different identities that present themselves in centers.

From my own experience, I found particular interest in attending a session on race in the writing center. Coming from a university with a low percentage of people of color, it was useful to engage in a dialogue that analyzes the limits of racial homogeneity in our writing center. Specifically, Brenna and I had the chance to interact with tutors from a writing center in the Los Angeles area. In their center, nearly half of the tutors are people of color. We discussed our role as white students in opening up a

Continued on page 2
In Celebration of the National Day on Writing
by Becca Anderson

On Tuesday, October 20, the Center for Writing Excellence held our annual celebration of the National Day on Writing. Over the course of the day, our writing assistants ran tables across campus, bringing the UWEC community together through writing.

The National Day on Writing is an annual celebration of writing in everyday life. The event—which was created by the National Council of Teachers of English—began in 2009, and the Center for Writing Excellence has participated every year since 2010. This year’s celebration was by far the biggest yet.

One of the most popular National Day on Writing events is our “Haikus for Cookies” table in Davies. This year, more than 130 haikus were written and exchanged for cookies. Students received tasty treats in exchange for the three-line poems, with subjects ranging from the weather to Beyoncé to final exams.

Over in McIntyre Library, we invited passersby to insult us by building their very own Shakespearean Insult. We were called artless base-court baggages, mangled earth- vexing flap-dragons, and rank knotty-pated louts, and we loved every minute of it. In our space on the second floor of McIntyre, we invited students to contribute to our collaborative story written on the glass walls of the CWE. This year’s story involved everything from squirrels to a dragon named Stan. Visit our website to read the whole tale.

Across campus in Hibbard Hall, we were terrified by tales of Voldemort, essays, and knocks at the door at the Two Sentence Horror Story table.

The event concluded with an open read at The Cabin, co-sponsored with campus literary magazine NOTA and hosted by writing assistant Danielle Rockwell. The night began with faculty readers Katie Vagnino and BJ Hollars. Writers from UWEC’s student body then took the stage, with writings from earlier events in the day spread throughout. Audience favorites received prizes from the campus bookstore, a longtime supporter of both the National Day on Writing and the CWE.

Look out for next year’s National Day on Writing celebration!

In 2016, NCPTW will be held at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, WA. I encourage writing assistants to check out the call for papers at http://v.gd/nd8YEr and to consider submitting. It’s a great experience!
The Center has a staff as excellent as its name, including its newest Assistant Director, Andrew Suralski. Andrew is a familiar face in the CWE, having joined us in Fall 2013 as a Graduate Assistant Director. In that position, he gained valuable experience in administration and teaching, which prepared him to step in as AD.

When he first joined the CWE, Andrew admits he came in with a “finishing touches” perspective, believing the common stigma about writing centers that they are a last-minute “fix-it shop.” After a short while of hands-on experience in the CWE, though, that perspective corrected itself and Andrew hasn’t looked back. He sees now how holistically the CWE works to help its students. “It’s not about the paper, it’s about the process,” Andrew explains, defining the CWE as “a community, not a service.”

His time at the center has not only improved his perspective, but also his capabilities as an educator and a writer. Collaborating with writing assistants and students has allowed him to look objectively at his own work and come to understand that becoming a better writer means growing over time.

Andrew completed his Master’s degree in 2015 and is now considering a PhD, in the hopes of someday teaching first-year composition and rhetoric at a two-year college. Andrew has kept an open mind about his future at the CWE and as an educator as he continues to follow new opportunities for experience.

---

CWE Welcomes New Graduate Assistants Kelsey and Sam

The Center for Writing Excellence (CWE) is happy to introduce one of our newest Graduate Assistant Directors: Kelsey Gierach! Kelsey did her undergraduate schooling at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, and she loves our campus and the CWE. In her undergraduate experience, she double majored in English and Italian and then came here originally to join the MA - Literature and Textual Interpretation program, but switched to the Writing of Composition and Rhetoric. She hopes to be a technical writer or a professor at a tech school/two-year college after her time at UWEC.

A native of Wisconsin, Kelsey was born in West Bend, but grew up in Mount Cavalry, where, she claims, there are more cows than people. At home, Kelsey is the oldest of four girls, has many animals including dogs and various farm animals, and learned to play the piano at six years old. While she doesn’t take lessons anymore, she still plays for fun or if someone needs an accompanying pianist.

When Kelsey isn’t in class or the CWE helping students and having animated discussions with fellow Writing Assistants and staff members, she loves exploring the many things Eau Claire has to offer. This includes a diverse music scene, the many rivers (regardless of inconvenient bridge construction), and especially the antique shop in downtown Eau Claire.

Kelsey’s infectious smile and warm personality make her a wonderful addition to the CWE. She loves working in the CWE because she gets to work hands-on with students and their writing and put what she is learning into practice. When asked what advice she would give to other college students, Kelsey says to “not just go to classes, but also to do other things and make connections. I think that’s where you learn the most, not just in classes.”

---

Sam Hovda

The CWE is excited to welcome Graduate Assistant Director Sam Hovda. Sam received his B.A. in English Literature and Language from Winona State University. He is pursuing his M.A. in Creative Writing here at UWEC. Sam was originally supposed to be a research assistant in the English department, but he decided to work at the CWE instead when a spot opened up. Having a conversation with Sam is sure to be interesting since he often speaks poetically about things like cats. He also enjoys meaningful discussions about intersectional feminism and queer theory. He spent a few months in Paris drinking wine and meeting interesting people, and he hopes to return there someday. Sam’s main hobbies include playing basketball, listening to alternative rock music (like My Chemical Romance and Broken Bells), playing video games (such as Super Mario 64), and writing/reading poetry. We are glad to have you, Sam!
The Center for Writing Excellence is working with Eau Claire Memorial High School to develop a high school writing center. Two graduate students and two undergraduate students, under the direction of the CWE director Alan Benson, are providing direction and support. I am one of the graduate students, and I’m also an English teacher at Memorial. I have collaborated with Alan on researching the topic and building relationships with departments at Memorial; at the same time, I have been gathering feedback from teachers and administration regarding the prospective writing center. Feedback has been very positive and other teachers have expressed interest in helping facilitate the writing center’s creation.

While the full center is still under development, the CWE and Memorial have begun collaborating on projects to support college-bound seniors. Earlier this semester, the CWE tutors held ACT writing test workshops at Memorial. In one afternoon and one evening session, CWE writing assistants helped 15 Memorial students understand recent changes in the ACT writing test, including the new test format. The high school students learned strategies to approach the new writing portion and workshoped a sample question. The plan is for more workshops to be held in the spring.

I recently attended the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention in Minneapolis and discussed the project with other high school writing center directors in New Jersey, Virginia, Minnesota, Illinois, and Michigan. I am also working on becoming part of a regional group of high school writing center directors from Minnesota and Wisconsin. These are the first steps of many that will hopefully help the CWE deepen our collaboration with Memorial and lead to the creation of a peer writing center at the high school. Look for more news, including info about how writing assistants can get involved, soon.