Centering Myself: Discovering UWEC and the Writing Center

By Brooke Rastenis

"Why did you choose to come to UW-Eau Claire?" I can’t count the number of times I’ve been asked that question. This usually comes after an icebreaker activity where I reveal I’m from Crystal Lake, Illinois, some four hours south of Eau Claire. I usually dodge answering the question fully because, truthfully, I came here because of a flash video game, folk music, and a beautiful view.

Flash back to 2014, when I was playing a popular online game in my free time with some high school friends. I ended up looking up a tutorial video on YouTube on how to beat the final boss. I took note of one of the songs from the video that I really liked: “Bon Iver – Towers (Remix)”. I did some searching online and learned more about Bon Iver from a Wikipedia page. The page mentioned that the band was from this town called Eau Claire, so I searched that next. It seemed like a quaint little town with a developing folk music scene. With my initial curiosity satisfied, I quickly moved on.

Two years later, amid taking a handful of AP exams my Senior year, I start panicking. My school would mail test
scores to three universities of my choice for free. I had my heart set on the local community college or Northern Illinois University. But, not wanting to waste a free slot and essentially free money, I wanted to put down a third college. My mind was racing thinking of places to put down. I randomly remembered the video game, “Towers”, and the city of Eau Claire, so I wrote it down. Well, I ended up visiting, loving the campus, and enrolling.

During my sophomore year, I discovered the Center for Writing Excellence while attending English 381, “Critical Studies in Film” with Dr. Blake Westerlund. He brought up the Center while he was running through the weekly calendar of events for the English Department. Blake mentioned English 397 was an upper-division English class that not only satisfied the service-learning credits, but could also be a potential on-campus job. There was an open house going on later in the week on the second floor of the library, so I decided to check it out.

During this interview with Dr. Jonathan Rylander, in barely more than a whisper, I mentioned my interests in English Critical Studies and Writing. Jonathan may have misheard me because of how quiet I was talking and, seemingly impressed, asked what drew me to English and Queer Studies. I quickly spoke up and said that it was Critical Studies. Although, in an ironic twist, later that year I’d come out as transgender and roll call in English 397 would be the first time I’d speak up, say my name is Brooke, and use she/her/hers pronouns. My interest in Queer Studies would come later.

Perhaps it’s my graduation that’s putting me in a mood to reminisce. I never expected this “cool class to take on a whim” to change my undergraduate experience so drastically. The friends I’ve made at the CWE, the progress I’ve made on my own writing, and the Center’s conversational approach to tutoring are things I want to keep with me as I take a gap year to center myself in the “real world” and then, hopefully, attend graduate school for my Master’s in Library Science.
The Art Of Saying An Essay
By Meghan Neu

Hey there!

I’m Meghan Neu. It’s my third year into the English Ed program here at Eau Claire, and this semester, I joined the writing center.

“Why did you join the writing center crew, Megh?”

Why, thank you for asking, reader! I’ve been a regular at the CWE since my Freshman year, thanks to a good buddy I made on the forensics team.

Now, I’m not a mind reader, but I bet you just pictured a group of college students investigating a murder scene. CSI style.

And to that, I will tell you this forensics team does something much more scary: public speaking.

Yup, we spend our spare time writing and memorizing a handful of ten-minute speeches.

And here’s the kicker... we enjoy it!

Okay, close your eyes ... Wait! Don’t do that, you’re reading right now- imagine having a platform where you get to talk about advocacy, innovation, and promoting change!

Wait, you’re still not intrigued? Then take a seat, friend, because it’s story time. I came into college as an awkward, frizzy-haired eighteen-year-old with no sense of what I wanted to do with my life.

Those first two things didn’t change, and I guess the world has revolved around the sun a few times, but that last part got the real reformation.

I had zero confidence. None. I would raise my hand in class and be physically shaking.

Put me on a stage, and the train wreck that followed gave everyone in the audience second-hand embarrassment.

However, after becoming comfortable speaking in front of others, I found myself engaging in more classroom discussions, which led to small talk after classes, which led to countless amazing conversations where I was able to grow and transform through other people’s opinions and experiences.

Now, I don’t want to get too into existentialism, but isn’t that the point of it all?

Look and be seen. Listen and be heard.

You’re still not interested, huh?

Well, guess what- you’re going to have to take a public speaking course at some point. And we’re looking into incorporating speeches into the writing center resources.

So when the pre-presentation-jitters hit, you may be able to mosey on over to the CWE and present your speech to someone who has been in your shoes.

Maybe we’ll gas you up. Maybe we’ll drop some advice. And hey! You practiced your speech!

Now get out there and prove to your class your voice deserves to be heard.
CWE Seminars
By Colleen McCluskey

Over the past semester, the CWE has been pleased to offer various trainings to assist both incoming and veteran Writing Assistants in expanding their practice to become more inclusive of diverse students. These short seminars were integrated into the CWE’s monthly all-staff meetings. The first of the trainings was delivered by Ami Christensen, Intensive English Program (IEP) Program Coordinator. This training assisted tutors in expanding the inclusivity of their practice for international students and other multilingual tutees who speak English as a second language. A second training was offered through UWEC’s Suicide Prevention and Research Collaborative (SPARC). This presentation offered critical information on how to assist students experiencing mental health issues. The training was focused primarily on suicide prevention, although the lessons shared were also applicable to individuals experiencing various forms of stress. Future trainings are planned for the upcoming spring semester and include a seminar hosted by the Safe Spaces Coalition of the Chippewa Valley (SSCCV) about how the writing center can function as a space for inclusion of LGBT+ students.

The CWE is pleased to assist its Writing Assistants in creating a more diverse and positive climate.
the Assistant Director, Andrew Suralski, are available to address questions.

In addition to supporting faculty writing, the CWE is invested in supporting the long-term growth of Writing-Across-the-Curriculum at UW-Eau Claire. Last year, Andrew Suralski and I worked with faculty fellows—Ami Christenson and Kaishan Kong—to discuss ways to more meaningfully implement writing instruction in their courses. Ultimately, we presented our findings at the OPID Wisconsin system Spring 2019 Conference.

In continuing this work, we are still in the beginning stages of developing a more coordinated and sustainable approach to WAC. Mark your calendars for Friday, February 28th, 11am-12noon, for an all-campus conversation regarding the future of WAC at UW-Eau Claire. The goal of this workshop is to learn more regarding current trends in WAC and what the nature of a future community of practice, committed to WAC, could be like at UW-Eau Claire.

We encourage all faculty to reach out, on an individual basis, to either myself or Assistant Director Andrew Suralski, regarding your writing or teaching. We are delighted to consult with you on personal writing projects or questions related to the teaching of writing in your courses.

Additionally, The CWE offers in-class workshops—from an introduction to the CWE to class visits on topics such as peer review, citation, and the writing process. More information can be found under the “Faculty” tab on our website.

CWE Celebrates National Day on Writing
By Stephanie Nesja

Remember the children’s book, Everybody Poops? Well, another true statement is: “Everybody writes”, even those who don’t think they can write.

National Day on Writing, celebrated each year on October 20, is a day in which the United States celebrates writing and free speech.

Hayley Jacobson, editor of the university’s non-profit publication The FlipSide, said...

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There have been a lot of misconceptions about free speech lately. Freedom of speech stems from the idea that the government cannot punish you for what you say. It was created to keep debate going, and to prevent the silencing of voices. It does not, however, cover everything. I am free to talk about whatever I want as long as I don’t slander someone, call for violence against a person or group of people, or try to instigate a fight in any way. Those things and a few others have serious consequences and are the only things that are not protected by the First Amendment, and things The FlipSide will not print. Everything else, however, is free reign.

In support of freedom of speech and writing, the CWE partnered with student organizations: The Flipside, The Spectator, NOTA, and Out Magazine. Booths were set up around campus with activities to promote writing.

The Spectator and the CWE set up a booth in Hibbard, inviting visitors to create their own Shakespearean insult or create their own newspaper headline.

In Centennial, The FlipSide and the CWE prompted students to fill in the blank by answering the question, “Why I Write?” Participants of the Haiku for a Cookie—or Haiku for a Rainbow Cookie, as part of Out’s collaborative effort—earned a sugary treat by writing a short poem.

Across campus in McIntyre, writers could participate by writing a one-sentence horror story in CWE’s partnership with NOTA.

On the second floor, plastered on the glass of the CWE was a large collaborative story.

The event took place just before Halloween, and each participant received a treat, ranging from candy, to cookies, to CWE pens, as a small token of the CWE’s appreciation for promoting writing and freedom of speech.
Alumni Spotlight: Thomas Kauer & Thad Logan

Each semester, we reach out to CWE Alumni. In this issue, Thomas Kauer and Thad Logan tell us what they've been working on since their time at UWEC.

Thomas Kauer

While being a tutor at the CWE, I engaged with a meaningful community (the kind rife with nerdy, English types) and developed a rich understanding of how people actually learn. Tackle all the dangling modifiers and voice issues you like, if the tutee is not developing a sense of independence, you are by default creating learned helplessness. This was obviously a potent lesson during my 7 years as an English teacher, from my time abroad in Tunisia and Libya working with highly resourced international students, to my time in urban education in Tucson and Milwaukee.

Now in my second career, these lessons still carry forward quite broadly. After getting a Master's of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Technology, Innovation, and Education (a mouthful, I know), I landed a position at the Stanford Graduate School of Business as an Online Learning Manager. When I train people, when I interview people, or when I act as a learning designer, I am still constantly thinking about how to help others own and apply information versus simply conveying information. Of course, teaching, tutoring, and training properly will always take time, and time is precious.

I don't want to make an outlandish claim that the CWE wholly changed me; however, it was part of many journeys I took (that I still am taking, and that you are taking, too) that I have tried to use to chip away at squandering my own time. Time, might I add, that I would otherwise use to binge "The Walking Dead" on Netflix...true story.

I have a wife, two kids, an evening, two-hour commute to travel 13 miles (oh Bay Area life), and less time than ever. Learn to give now, to teach well now, because if you "can’t" do it now, you won’t do it later. Good luck. Time flies.

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The writing center’s material wasn’t just writing, it was people. And I wasn’t just tutoring, I was learning.

Thad Logan

My time at the writing center was as much about learning as it was about tutoring. I learned not only how to carefully read others’ essays and stories, but how to read people; I learned how to deliver feedback productively, communicate to different audiences, and how to guide rather than merely edit.

After my college career, I interned as a copywriter and customer support person for *The Intelligent Optimist* magazine (now *Optimist Daily*), then leveraged that into a paid position as community coordinator. My familiarity with different styles of writing from the writing center honed my skills related to copywriting and editing, and my time working with people prepared me for cooperation with coworkers and clients.

From there, I worked as a technical writer and documentation coordinator for Epic Systems, a large healthcare software company based out of Verona, WI. In that role, I edited others’ work and used my Writing Center experiences to cater my feedback to each person’s personality and strengths, calling out sentence-level mishaps and also giving advice on larger things, like tone, structure, and flow. The most consistent feedback others gave to me related to my positive attitude and ability to collaborate, which the writing center helped engender. In addition, I was required to write and edit pieces about a variety of topics about which I knew very little. Tutoring at the writing center and engaging with different styles, disciplines, and subjects made me ready for that constant learning and research.

Most recently, I completed my first novel, a sci-fi Western adventure, which I will be self-publishing online! That project was the culmination of a number of experiences and skills – little seeds planted back in UWEC’s writing center that, with a little water of determination, grew into one of my life-long dreams. I believe everything from an understanding of writing form and convention, to planning and organization, to just spending so much time contemplating writing helped guide me from prologue to epilogue. Perhaps most important, helping others succeed and improve at the writing center required me to continue improving, to emphasize learning and proficiency.

You can’t tutor unless you have a strong grasp of the material. The writing center’s material wasn’t just writing, it was people. And I wasn’t just tutoring, I was learning. Something I hope to continue to do wherever I end up.

Thad Logan

Thad Logan and Blu, his dog.
Conferences Take Tutors To Columbus, OH, For IWCA

By Maria Lynch

The CWE was honored to present at the 2019 International Writing Center Association Conference (IWCA) in Columbus, Ohio! Presenters were graduate students, Colleen McCluskey and Logan Frodl, and undergraduate, Maria Lynch, who are all Writing Assistants (WAs).

Colleen’s presentation, “Mind Blindness: Autistic Spectrum Disorders & The Need to Reevaluate Communicative Practices in The Writing Center,” discussed working with tutees who have Autism or other Communicative Disorders. Colleen gave an overview of how Autism and different assistance levels arise in writing center (WC) work. Colleen described how working with a student with Autism doesn’t make the tutee an expert. She offered information on communicative practices, socio-communicative disorders, and sensory and processing issues while relating these to her tutoring experience. A powerful aspect of Colleen’s presentation was how she related her academic research to her personal experience as a mental health advocate, as well as her own Autism diagnosis.

Logan and Maria conducted a discussion titled “Listen Up!: Rhetorical Listening & The Emergence of Student Identity.” Next, Maria explained a conversation model, which includes the personal, academic, and professional knowledge spheres in order to cultivate student identity and build a greater sense of belonging in WCs. She also added how this model shapes WC sessions. Identity is chaotic, as Maria argues. Therefore, WAs must take on the responsibility of building a path for student identity to emerge in their academic writing. Logan then applied Maria’s framework with Critical Race Theory to speak to intersections of identity, rhetorical listening, and how to take direct action within attendees’ own WCs. Logan spoke to the importance of WAs performing activism and how we, as WAs, can enact everyday activism to dismantle inherently racist institutions. Logan used Krista Ratcliffe’s work on Rhetorical Listening to present different strategies to execute antiracist pedagogy in each session.

Each Writing Assistant was proud to be accepted to present their work and attend an international conference. IWCA offers those in writing center work to connect with one another and build upon each other’s work. In writing centers, we practice conversational pedagogy. Conferences, such as this, are rare opportunities to contribute to the greater conversation of “What does it mean to participate in WC work? And how can we, as WAs, better our spaces for all students?”
The most splendid achievement of all is the constant striving to surpass yourself and to be worthy of your own approval.

Denis Waitley

Campus Leadership

Shay Mattiuz is the treasurer of the Club Volleyball team; Laura Wilson is the co-president of the Honors Student Steering Committee; Rachel Davies is a leader on the Ministry Team as well as the Outreach Team for Cru; Rebecca Mennecke is the Editor-in-Chief of NOTA, Managing Editor at The Spectator, and a Lead Student Assistant at McIntyre Library, and also received the McIntyre Library Student Scholarship; Colleen McCluskey is a Copy Editor for the FlipSide, participated in NOTA’s Poetry and Prose Submission Committee, and became a member of The Connection (a campus autism advocacy and support group); Charlotte Biwer is the Secretary for Delta Zeta Epsilon Omega as well as the Academics Chair; Emily Cramlet is the Vice-President of the Aspiring Educators of Wisconsin and the Co-President of UWEC Aspiring Educators; and Meghan Neu is the Forensics Administrative Assistant and the Women’s Lacrosse team Treasurer.

Other

Congratulations to Spencer Heeren who was accepted to the UWEC Nursing Program and good luck to Makena Easker and Andrea Wendt, who are applying to grad programs!

Study Abroad

Alyssa Huelsbeck is travelling to Valladolid, Spain; Charlotte Read is studying abroad this spring in Chile; Rachel Davies is going abroad to Valladolid, Spain; Laura Wilson is travelling to Costa Rica during winterim to hike and learn about local sustainable NGOs; Cassie Hampshire is participating in an immersion program to Jamaica over winterim; Emma Truitt is participating in the “Water Protectors of Wisconsin” cultural immersion experience over Spring Break 2020; and Mikayla Soltis is travelling to Australia and New Zealand with the BMB.

Internships & Volunteering

Erica Nerbonne is developing an introductory Spanish curriculum for the Nature Academy to introduce children ages 2-6 to Spanish; Rebecca Mennecke is a Writing Intern at the Chippewa Valley Writers Guild; and Charlotte Biwer is interning at the District Attorney’s office in Eau Claire.

Conferences

Logan Frodl and Maria Lynch are presenting at the Midwest Writing Center Association...
Congratulations on your graduation and best wishes for your next adventure!

Makena Easker
Psychology Major

Andrea Wendt
Psychology Major
French Minor

Brooke Rastenis
English Critical Studies Major

Thank You!
We are grateful for our colleagues in our shared space, Services for Students with Disabilities, Math Lab, and Academic Skills Center!

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conference in March; Maria Lynch is presenting at the Sigma Tau Delta 2020 International Convention in Las Vegas, NV; and Colleen McCluskey had the opportunity to present a video training entitled “Autism 101: Autism Friendly Communities Initiative” for the Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin.
HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Winter is the time for comfort, for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand and for a talk beside the fire; it is the time for home.

Edith Sitwell

The Center for Writing Excellence wishes you a fun filled and restful winter break! See you next semester!

CENTER FOR WRITING EXCELLENCE
WINTER BREAK HOURS
Monday–Thursday 9-4, Friday 9-12

NEED HELP WITH A PROJECT OR PAPER? MEET WITH A WRITING ASSISTANT TODAY!

TUTORING SESSIONS BY APPOINTMENT!

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT AT ... UWEC.EDU/WRITING-CENTER/

PLEASE ALLOW 24 HOURS NOTICE FOR CONFIRMATION OF APPOINTMENT!