

Position Statement on Two-Year College Writing Centers

> Jill Pennington and Clint Gardner

This position statement was inspired by the "Position Statement on Graduate Students in Writing Center Administration" (endorsed by the International Writing Center Association on November 17, 2001). A purpose of the document, to borrow language from the graduate student position statement, is to "[suggest] an ideal set of conditions," and it is written with the "intention of improving working conditions" within the two-year college writing center. Ultimately, though, its main purpose is to help community college writing centers establish a collective argument in defense of what we do.

This position statement was originally drafted at the Twenty-fifth East Central Writing Centers Association conference in Marietta, Ohio, on March 28, 2003. Substantial revisions were made on October 25, 2003, at the combined National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing and International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) conference in Hershey, Pennsylvania, and on July 14, 2004, at that year's Summer Institute for Writing Center Directors and Professionals at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. It represents a collaborative effort among twenty-two community college writing centers throughout the United States.

The idea for this document was broached quite some time before it was drafted. The professionals who collaborated on it perceived a need among community college writing centers to have something we all could point to in our professional contacts that would endorse practices and philosophies we collectively struggle to defend. Though four-year institutions struggle with defending these same things, we thought they were even more difficult to defend in community college writing centers. For example, the statement about using peers as writing center tutors is one that many community colleges seem to find difficulty "selling" to administrators within their institutions. Though we've had successful peer-tutoring programs in many of our writing centers, our department chairs and other administrators often tell us that they have mixed feelings about peer tutoring. We wish to have a statement we can show such administrators that would enable us to say, "This is commonly accepted practice at other community colleges."

Many of our community college colleagues who did not collaborate on the development of the document but who have seen it in various stages of develop-

ment express a sense of urgency to publish it for their own use. Ultimately, its main purpose is to help us establish a collective argument in defense of what we do. We seek to endorse a core set of principles for community college writing centers. We don't intend to imply that practices not articulated here shouldn't be considered appropriate and acceptable within a given institutional context. Rather, we seek to articulate those practices that often meet with more skepticism, that is, are not as easily accepted by administrators.

To ensure that this document become a *de facto* policy of community college writing centers, the authors have submitted it to the IWCA (an NCTE affiliate) for full endorsement. The IWCA endorsed it in November 2005.

For the sake of clarity, writing center directors, assistant directors, associate directors, and coordinators will be referred to as "administrators"; those who provide writing support, i.e., consultants, fellows, and assistants, will be referred to as "tutors." To borrow language from the "Position Statement on Graduate Students in Writing Center Administration" (endorsed by the IWCA on November 17, 2001), this position statement "suggests an ideal set of conditions" and is written with the "intention of improving working conditions" for the two-year college writing center.



We, the undersigned two-year college writing center professionals, hold that

- > The writing center should be as autonomous as possible within the institutional structure. (For example, depending on local context, it should have its own budget, its own space, and its own support staff, and should not be part of a larger conglomeration of learning support services.) Many writing centers in two-year colleges, rather than being tied to specific areas of the curriculum, serve writers at all levels and in any area of the curriculum across the entire institution. In addition to serving students, many writing centers also serve faculty and the community.
- > The writing center should be provided a physical space appropriate and conducive to the variety of services provided. An autonomous space is recommended wherever possible. Computer technology should be available in the writing center and should support the work of the center. Although the writing center might contain a computer lab, it is not, in itself, a computer lab, and should not be thought of as such.
- > The writing center should not be an editing or proofreading service.
- > The writing center should be given the opportunity, when appropriate, to participate in college program review processes within its own institution.
- > Writing center administrators should be tenure-stream or continuing contract salaried employees, depending on local context. It is preferable that they have faculty status with a minimum of a 50-percent release from their teaching responsibilities per semester to oversee the writing center.

- > Those hired as writing center administrators should have a background in writing center work and/or supporting student writers outside the traditional classroom.
- > Tutors within the writing center should reflect the demographic, ethnic, and disciplinary diversity of the student body to whatever extent possible.
- > Peer tutoring should be an acceptable model in community college writing centers. Although a variety of tutoring models might be appropriate given institutional context, a peer-tutoring model is fully embraced by the International Writing Centers Association.
- > Peer tutors should be selected to work in a writing center based on performance in courses that require writing and should be endorsed by instructors.
- > All tutors hired to work in a writing center should hold appropriate credentials.
- > Tutors should receive appropriate, comprehensive, ongoing training via methods suitable to local context (for example, a course, a practicum, or a paid training period).
- > Tutor training should be based on writing center and rhetoric/composition pedagogy.
- > Tutors should be compensated for their work at a rate that reflects the expertise necessary to perform their duties. This rate should be, whenever possible, higher than minimum wage for hourly work and should be based on ability, expertise, and length of service.
- > Tutors should be evaluated by administrators and should receive feedback about the effectiveness of their work.
- > Writing center staff should be compensated for and supported in professional development and ongoing training and expected to participate in such training whenever and however possible (for example, attending local, regional, and national conferences and submitting items for publication).

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